

Braintree District Cultural Strategy

2010 - 2015



*“Recognising that culture
is the human element of the local landscape”*

May 2010



A Partnership approach to Culture



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Front Cover image: Flying the Flag, George Yard Shopping Centre, Braintree, 24.8.2008

1. Commitment to this Strategy

This document has been prepared by the Cultural Partnership of the Braintree District Local Strategic Partnership on behalf of Braintree District Council.

Braintree District Council and the Cultural Partnership hereby agree to adhere to its principles, aspire to its vision, abide by its content and work together to achieve its objectives.

Our Strategy supports the cultural priorities of the Braintree District Sustainable Communities Strategy "One District - One Vision", June 2009 and Braintree District Council's Corporate Strategy 2008-2012. Other strategies and policy documents that support and link to the Cultural Strategy are listed in Appendix 1: Policy Background.

Through the delivery of the Strategy we will work in partnership with other organisations and groups to achieve the Cultural Strategy priorities.

2. Executive Summary

The vision of the Strategy is:

That Braintree District is a place where people can enjoy and celebrate the rich culture and heritage of its towns and villages and provide inspiration for individuals, communities and organisations to enhance their future through cultural activities.

The Cultural Partnership and Braintree District Council will achieve this vision by identifying, enabling, supporting and promoting the aspirations of our community in diverse cultural activity throughout Braintree District, including the opportunities within the Braintree District Cultural Celebrations 2008 – 2012 as part of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad, in partnership with voluntary and professional groups and organisations, as detailed in the following Strategy and Action Plan.

The Cultural Partnership Board survey in 2009 identified that the key factors preventing people participating in cultural events are venue difficulties, lack of knowledge and transport difficulties including disability transport.

3. Introduction

What is Culture?

Culture is crucial to our way of life. It defines us, where we live and other people's perceptions of us. It provides relief from work, yet generates thousands of jobs. It is important to health and wellbeing, learning and skills, economic development, the environment, community safety, regeneration and individual achievement. There are many definitions of the term culture but this Strategy seeks to support, develop and deliver culture through the following five areas:

1. the performing arts (including theatre, music and dance), visual arts, crafts and design

2. enjoyment of the natural, historic and built environment (including archaeology, historic buildings, ancient monuments, conservation areas and local wildlife sites
3. events and festivals,
4. tourism and attractions
5. libraries, museums, archives and galleries,

Linking these five areas are the opportunities presented by the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games for Braintree District including the Cultural Olympiad. The legacy of the Games should continue beyond 2012 and could include:

- Increasing participation in culture
- Maintaining and developing a cultural infrastructure
- Increasing capacity through workforce development and volunteering
- Creating a sustainable future for cultural organisations through investment, tourism, improved marketing and profile-raising.

What is culture in the Braintree District?

People have lived in the District for thousands of years and have created a sense of place and rich cultural heritage in both the rural and urban landscape. This varies from the great Norman keep at Castle Hedingham to the modernist village of Silver End; the books of the father of natural history, John Ray in the 17th century to the 20th century novels by Dorothy Sayers in Witham. The attractive countryside, historic towns and villages has made the Braintree District a popular place to live and provides the opportunity for realising a high quality of life.

The first *Braintree District Cultural Strategy 2003-2008* was published by Braintree District Council in 2003. Subsequently a series of research projects and questionnaires have been undertaken that inform the development of the current Strategy and allow partners to aspire to achieve the following vision:

That Braintree District is a place where people can enjoy and celebrate the rich culture and heritage of its towns and villages and provide inspiration for individuals, communities and organisations to transform their future through cultural activities.

The responsibility for the delivery of this vision is with a multitude of individuals and organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Crucial to their success is partnership working. This is the essence of the Local Area Agreements and new initiatives such as the new government initiative of Total Place.

Culture can help to address major social issues such as:

- anti-social behaviour, through provision of positive outlets for energies
- social inclusion, by providing a mechanism to integrate people into their local communities
- community cohesion by providing opportunities for people of different backgrounds and circumstances to be appreciated and positively valued;
- health and wellbeing, through experiences that provide opportunities to develop healthy lifestyles, to integrate body, mind and spirit; to help an enriched and independent lifestyle;

- learning and skills – cultural activity can draw people back into learning and skills and the experience gained creates valuable transferable skills.

The cultural strength of the District is the grass root providers and facilities that are the heart of local culture: libraries, museums, parks, clubs, halls, fetes, concerts, gardens and shows. This provision needs to be valued and nurtured, encouraged and supported.

The District is growing and the demand for housing and commercial development must be matched by cultural sustainability to improve the quality of life for local people. There are problems that can not be ignored such as pockets of deprivation; an ageing population and a lack of rural transport.

4. A Cultural Portrait of Braintree District:

Braintree District is at the heart of rural Essex and the following is a flavour of its varied and important cultural activities and heritage. The District has an estimated population of 140,000 with the main urban centres Braintree (population 43,000), Witham (population 28,000) and Halstead (population 11,000).

- There are over 3,000 listed buildings including: Cressing Temple Barns; Paycockes House, Coggeshall; Castle Hedingham and windmills in Bocking and Finchingfield.
- Over 60 churches and chapels including important examples at Little Maplestead and Rivenhall.
- Important District landscapes include the Stour Valley in the north and the Colne Valley in the east, 39 conservation areas, 5 Essex Wildlife Trust Sites and 251 local wildlife sites.
- Notable events include the Witham International Puppet Festival; carnivals in Braintree, Coggeshall and Witham; F7 Arts Festival; Three Towns Art Trail, as part of the Essex Summer of Art
- Tourism contributes almost £40m to the local economy, underpinned by the attraction of the landscape and historic heritage of the District.
- 9 libraries and 3 mobile libraries that aim to deliver a first-class public library service based on reading, access to information and learning, through libraries in the heart of communities
- The Warner Textile Archive, Braintree is a historic collection of furnishing fabrics and designs of national importance and Braintree District Museum interprets the heritage, industry and people of the District. Other museums and heritage centres open to the public can be found at Coggeshall, Earls Colne, Finchingfield, Great Bardfield, Halstead, Kelvedon and Feering and Ridgewell Airfield.
- Famous historic people from the Braintree District include: Edward Bawden, artist who worked in Great Bardfield; John Ray, 'father of natural history' from Black Notley and Dorothy Sayers, an internationally renowned novelist, from Witham.
- A wide variety of community, independent and village halls that provide essential venues to cultural groups throughout the District.
- More than 400 clubs and groups that cover an enormous range of leisure pursuits including, art, dance, choirs, music, amateur radio, flower arranging,

photography, chess and drama with an extensive programme of activities for the entire age range.

- There is a rich archaeological evidence of human life throughout the District including Braintree, the most extensively excavated small Roman town in Essex; remains of a Roman temple at Ivy Chimneys, Witham and over 20 years of excavations at Cressing Temple.
- Over 40 examples of Public Art throughout the District.
- Shopping centres in Braintree, Witham and Halstead continue to service the needs of residents in the District. The Freeport Outlet Village and Braintree Leisure attract both shoppers and those going to the cinema, swimming and bowling.
- The Great Notley Discovery Centre provides leisure facilities including play trails, fishing and cycling and is a developing centre for community activities.

5. Development of the Strategy

This Strategy has been developed from previous surveys and consultations on cultural activities.

Public Consultation

A key finding from the following three surveys identified that the gap in provision of arts is centred on the lack of venues in the District.

- In 2007, Braintree District Council was supported by Braintree District Arts in approaching local voluntary organisations requesting information about venue requirements.
- In 2008, the Council carried out further work with local organisations as part of their Halls Review.
- Again in 2008, the Council's Local Area Committee for Braintree carried out some work intended to identify gaps in the provision of the arts in Braintree.

Whilst it was identified that there are lots of activities at grassroots level, it was also identified that venues have to be suitable in size and amenities to facilitate local voluntary groups staging events and further in attracting outside professional groups into the District (who bring in valuable revenue).

In 2009 the Cultural Partnership carried out a public consultation on "How can we achieve our cultural vision for the District?" A survey was produced that was available via Braintree District Council's website, at meetings, by personal contact and direct to members of the public through an on street survey. 259 results were received. The respondents were both residents and tourists, from all age groups and with a general spread throughout the district.

- This survey identified that the key factors preventing people participating in cultural events are: venue difficulties, lack of knowledge, cost and transport difficulties including disability transport.

Comments included:

- that community spirit is increased with cultural activities
- a proper venue for concerts/ theatre/gallery is needed in the District
- reasonable rental for venues to encourage groups to put on events
- cultural facilities for young people are required
- more crèche facilities to enable adults to participate

Additional consultation included that undertaken by Acrylicize as part of the commissioning of public art works at Braintree Community Hospital; this consultation changed the outcome of the artworks and design to focus on the strength of local heritage.

The findings from these surveys have helped inform the priorities within this Strategy.

6. Strategic Values

The underlying values that support the Strategy and its priorities are:

Stewardship

Including looking after and conserving cultural assets, enhancing investment and exercising a duty of care

Access

Including equality of access, physical and intellectual accessibility and affordability

Increasing participation

Including

- increasing the number of participants
- increasing choice and diversity
- improving the quality of culture
- developing integrated and innovative marketing and delivery

Inclusion

Including stimulating aspirations, combating isolation, developing a sense of belonging, and providing services to the vulnerable and those at risk of being excluded through poverty or discrimination

Sense of place

Including cherishing local distinctiveness and the heritage and valuing individual community identity and emotional attachments

Learning opportunities

Including contributing to skills development, supporting the curriculum, educational attainment, creativity and the enjoyment of culture

Improving Infrastructure

Including providing new and improving existing cultural facilities and supplying the infrastructure to support cultural activity such as improved signage, transport and accommodation.

Economic prosperity

Including recognizing that culture can give the District a competitive edge, contributes to the knowledge economy and economic sustainability and is a vital element in cultural tourism.

The Braintree District Compact

The Compact is an agreement that recognises the value of volunteers and is a basis for interaction between formal bodies and volunteers. www.bdvs.org.uk

7. The Cultural Priorities for the Braintree District

Venues

Priority 1

Aim to provide a cultural venue for the District, which will be a multi-function centre for theatre, concerts, arts, gallery and other events.

The ultimate vision would be a purpose built “multi function“ venue equipped using modern technology to use it to full advantage. Such a venue is at the top of the wish list of all Arts organisations - an Arts venue suitable to hold small art classes, conferences & theatre productions, musical events, soundproofed musical rehearsal space with space for an art gallery and storage for equipment.

Priority 2

To explore alternative options for a multi-function cultural centre in the short and medium term, as whilst such a venue would preferably be a purpose-built building. It is recognised that there are extensive difficulties to overcome in achieving Priority 1.

Priority 3

Aim to support the requirement for buildings that are local to users.

These venues, with a need for provision throughout the District, need to be affordable, efficient and sustainable whilst offering a suitable range of amenities at a cost that can be achieved by local voluntary organisations

Communication & Promotion

Priority 4

To work with partners to identify and offer collective and centralised services e.g.
– Braintree District Arts – information services through a web site, clash diary and ‘What’s on in the Arts’.

Priority 5

Create a cultural awareness campaign to ensure that events are publicised widely throughout the District and beyond.

Priority 6

Recognise that cultural Information needs to be widely disseminated through a number of different channels.

Encourage an understanding that both paper and electronic means of disseminating information is needed.

Priority 7

To continue to support the provision of Welcome Guides to new residents.

Partnerships

Priority 8

To encourage liaison between all providers of cultural activity of whatever nature in Braintree District.

Priority 9

Explore links to the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Cultural Olympiad and Olympic Legacy.

Priority 10

To work with partners to encourage enjoyment of the natural environment.

Access

Priority 11

Work with local transport providers including buses, trains, taxis, partner organisations and the Local Strategic Partnership's Economic Development and Transportation Partnership to develop provision for additional transport in the evenings and weekends to enable events to be attended.

Provision

Priority 12

Encourage awareness and understanding of public art in the Braintree District.

Priority 13

Encourage the retention and development of public art installations in Braintree District.

Priority 14

To support Museum and heritage provision in the Braintree District.

Research and Reviewing

Priority 15

Carry out socio-economic and demographic analysis to assist with understanding current and future audiences for culture and leisure service provision.

Priority 16

Enable an audit of current cultural physical assets and available revenue for cultural activities.

Priority 17

Review equality and diversity issues and how to manage these effectively.

8. Delivery, review and monitoring of the Strategy

The Cultural Partnership and Braintree District Council will monitor, evaluate and review the implementation of the Cultural Strategy through the delivery of the activities in the related Action Plan.

Monitoring

The Cultural Partnership will monitor and report on progress to the Local Strategic Partnership's Steering Group and Braintree District Council. Progress on the activities will be reported on a quarterly basis or as requested by members.

The Strategy and Action Plan are public documents and will be available electronically and in paper copy on request.

Evaluation

The Strategy will be assessed through the evaluation of the individual actions contained in the Action Plan.

Reviewing

The Strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis. The Action Plan is a 'living' document and will be reviewed and refreshed regularly.

Appendix 1: Policy Background

Various national, regional and local policy documents have been reviewed to ensure compatibility and that appropriate links are made, as well as any related evidence base material.

National Policy		
Department of Culture, Media & Sport	A Passion for Excellence: an improvement strategy for culture and sport (March 2008)	Strategy aims to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of culture and sport in the delivery of economic, social and environmental outcomes in local communities • improve the performance of the culture and sport sector and to address under- performance • build capacity and leadership • simplify and coordinate the regional improvement infrastructure.
Department of Culture, Media & Sport	A Passion for Excellence: One Year On (March 2009)	A review of the 2008 Strategy one year after launch.
Department of Culture, Media & Sport	Winning: A Tourism Strategy for 2012 and beyond	National Tourism strategy for London 2012 and the Cultural Olympiad.
Regional Policy		
Living East: The Regional Cultural Consortium for the East of England	A Better Life: the role of culture in the sustainable development of the East of England [2008]	A vision for the East of England by an organisation that was closed by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on 31.3.2009.
County Policy		
Essex County Council	Celebrating Essex: a shared vision for culture, sport & leisure in Essex (draft, April 2009).	Vision document for Essex outlining the values required to deliver culture.
Essex County Council	Essex Legacy from the 2012 Games Action Plan & Annual Delivery Plan	Tourism strategy for London 2012 and the Cultural Olympiad.
Essex County Council	Exceeding Expectations: Tourism Growth Strategy for Essex	The County's Tourism Strategy
Essex County Council	Liberating Potential: Essex Local Area Agreement 08-11	Performance measurement.
District Policy		
Braintree District Local Strategic Partnership & Braintree District Council	One District One Vision: A Strategy for People and Places in the Braintree District (including the Braintree District Sustainable	Key cultural policy references include: Guiding Principle 1 - Promoting And Delivering A Sustainable Future (3.10) Guiding Principle 2 – The Protection and Enhancement of the Environment in the District (3.14)

	Community Strategy)	<p>Priority Theme 4: Enabling everyone in the Braintree District to enjoy a safe and healthy lifestyle. (5.69)</p> <p>Leisure, Sport, Recreation, and the Arts - The Community Priorities (5.111-5.123)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase participation in sport, physical activity and volunteering across the District To enable the provision of accessible high quality green spaces and sport and recreation facilities which meet the recreational needs of all sections of the community To secure the best possible benefits and legacy for the District as a result of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games To promote the availability of recreational and cultural activity wherever possible in addressing all of the Community Priorities for the Braintree District <p>The Proposed Core Planning Policy in relation to Services and Facilities (p.85)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enabling everyone in the District to enjoy a safe and healthy lifestyle (Leisure, Sport, Recreation and the Arts).
Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Board	Crime and Disorder Annual Partnership Plan 2008-2011	Community cultural projects
Local Area Committees	Rural Policy & action Statement 2005	Currently under review.
Essex Children's Trust Board	Children and Young People's Plan 2009 - 2012	Provide all children and young people with opportunities for a fulfilling and enjoyable childhood; we will aim for a sustainable legacy maximising the potential of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. (p.31)
Braintree District Council	Play Strategy Braintree Green Spaces Strategy	Details of opportunities within the natural environment
Economic Development and Transportation Partnership Board and Braintree District Council	Economic Development Strategy	References to transport and tourism issues and opportunities.
Essex County Council	Essex / North Essex Area Local Transport Plans Transport Strategy	Reference to transport issues and opportunities
Health, Housing and Well-Being Partnership	Health, Housing and Well-being Action Plan	Reference to health improvement opportunities
Braintree District Council	Housing Strategy	Reference to housing opportunities.
Braintree District Council's Working Group - London 2012	London 2012 Work Programme	Annual work programme linked to county events.

Appendix 2: Cultural Partnership Membership

Cultural Partnership members include and represent:

- Braintree District Arts which includes representation from a range of voluntary arts groups
- Braintree District Council
- Braintree District Museum Trust Ltd
- Braintree Town Centre Strategy Group
- Braintree Chamber of Trade & Commerce
- Churches Together
- Essex Libraries
- Independent representatives

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