

Part A

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** 18 January 2021

**Report author:** Group Head of Community and Environment

**Title:** Cultural Strategy 2018-2025 – Updated Implementation Plan

**1.0 Summary**

1.1 Published in 2018, Watford's Cultural Strategy (2018-2025) described a vision for the future of the Borough's cultural and creative sector "to grow sustainable opportunities for creative enterprise, cultural provision and participation for our local communities, business and visitors which will, in turn, strengthen Watford's appeal as a creative destination." To achieve this ambition, the Council progressed with an action plan centred on four priority areas: local heritage, vibrancy and connectedness, career opportunities, and artistic production.

1.2 In 2020, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council took the decision to reflect on how best to adapt these priorities to the change in circumstances and build upon the success of Watford Together, a joint project with the Council and culture and leisure partners to engage Borough residents in creative activities during lockdown. With a new Council Plan demonstrating the Council's leadership of place the Council also sought to identify opportunities for new collaborations and efficiencies (physical, programmatic, and virtual) across Watford's cultural assets and sector.

1.3 The Council engaged strategic culture consultants AEA Consulting in summer 2020 to review the implementation of the Council's 2018 Cultural Strategy. The AEA Consulting work consisted of engagement with a large number of cultural stakeholders, and a detailed market assessment of the cultural sector in Watford. Their detailed report is attached as an appendix to this Cabinet report (see Appendix A). The report was commissioned following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and also to inform the Town Hall Quarter (THQ) programme, which will revitalise the north end of the High Street by a combination of regeneration schemes (economic, infrastructure and housing), redevelopment of the Town Hall including potential relocation of the Council's museum, and refurbishment and repurposing of the Colosseum. This report influences a number of recommendations to the Town Hall and Colosseum projects of the THQ programme, also to be considered by Cabinet on 18 January 2021.

1.4 The recommendations contained within the report support the new Council Plan and in particular two of its themes, "a healthy, happy town" and "a thriving, diverse and creative town". The recommendations also consolidate the actions from Watford's Cultural Strategy and the actions from the AEA report, to ensure an integrated work programme for the Council and its partners.

1.5 It is important to note that delivery of the consolidated action plan is not one that the Council alone can deliver. Success will be dependent on the engagement, collaboration and commitment of a range of stakeholders from both the Cultural Leaders Group and other key partners.

## 2.0 Risks

2.1 The main risks are identified in the table below.

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer)	Risk Rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Covid 19	Ongoing pandemic puts further pressure on Cultural sector meaning cultural organisations are not able to return to normal	Continue to keep in view. The Action Plan provides an opportunity for the Cultural sector to identify new opportunities to work more efficiently together	Tolerate and keep under review	Likelihood = 3 Severity = 3  Total risk = 9
Lack of collaboration and buy in from cultural organisations	Failure to deliver new efficiencies or new funding sources  Lack of collaboration amongst the cultural organisations in Watford could derail any of the initiatives in the AEA report, specifically the governance arrangements	The Council has commissioned the AEA report to focus on opportunities and is facilitating a workshop for key stakeholders  Ensure proper representation on governance Boards  Communicate clearly and regularly with all impacted cultural organisations	Treat Actively: pursue new funding opportunities from other sources  Treat: Actively manage the risk by involving and communicating with cultural	Likelihood = 3 Severity = 3  Total risk = 9
Delays in the THQ programme	Some AEA recommendations dependent on THQ programme	Robust programme management	Treat: Actively manage the risk via project planning and management	Likelihood = 2 Severity = 3  Total risk = 6
Lack of involvement by cultural organisations in progressing recommendations	Lack of involvement in progressing recommendations by cultural organisations in Watford will mean	Actively manage the action plan via robust governance arrangements	Treat: Actively manage the risk by developing an action plan with	Likelihood = 2 Severity = 3  Total risk = 6

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	the outcomes expected from the recommendations will not be achieved		specific responsibilities	

### 3.0 Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the AEA Consulting report at Appendix A.
2. Approve the consolidated Action Plan 2021 -2022 at pages 84 – 88 of the AEA Consulting report at Appendix A.
3. Authorise the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services, in consultation with the Mayor and Managing Director, to make amendments to the Action Plan 2021 – 2022.
4. Note progress on the delivery of the Action Plan 2021-2022 will form part of the quarterly Road to Renewal update.

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### 4.0 AEA Report

#### Introduction and Background

- 4.1 Published in 2018, Watford’s Cultural Strategy (2018-2025) described a vision for the future of the Borough’s cultural and creative sector “to grow sustainable opportunities for creative enterprise, cultural provision and participation for our local communities, business and visitors which will, in turn, strengthen Watford’s appeal as a creative destination.” To achieve this ambition, the Council progressed with an action plan centred on four priority areas: local heritage, vibrancy and connectedness, career opportunities, and artistic production.
- 4.2 In 2020, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council took the decision to reflect on how best to adapt these priorities to the change in circumstances and build upon the success of Watford Together, a joint project with the Council and culture and leisure partners to engage Borough residents in creative activities during lockdown. With a new Council Plan demonstrating the Council’s leadership of place the Council also sought to identify opportunities for new collaborations and efficiencies (physical, programmatic, and virtual) across Watford’s cultural assets and sector.

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- 4.4 AEA Consulting were commissioned specifically to revisit existing proposals and explore new ideas and lines of enquiry, which included but were not limited to:
- The opportunities associated with the proposed development of a Town Hall Quarter (THQ) in the north of the town centre
  - The proposed refurbishment or relocation of Watford Museum
  - The potential for a unifying brand and communications platform for Watford's cultural sector
  - The potential for shared services for cultural organisations
  - The physical consolidation of cultural assets
  - Demand for increased workspaces for cultural and creative industries
  - The identification of current gaps or over provision in Watford's cultural provision
- 4.5 The intention of this exercise was not to replace the outcomes of the Cultural Strategy but to review and prioritise initiatives given the impacts of COVID-19, the proposed Town Hall Quarter (THQ) programme, and the increasing need for cultural organisations to achieve financial independence.
- 4.6 AEA's approach and methodology included consultation with 39 local cultural sector stakeholders, a review of existing plans and strategies, comparator analysis and desk research, articulating findings and recommendations, and reviewing this analysis and recommendations with the Elected Mayor, Portfolio Holders, senior officers and the Cultural Leaders Group. The AEA analysis is presented in the four sections of their report:
- **Situation Analysis:** analysis of Watford's cultural market, including demographics, the contribution of the creative industries, levels of cultural engagement; and identified gaps in the provision of built infrastructure and the wider needs of the sector;
  - **Case Studies:** a benchmark analysis of six UK municipal cultural initiatives, highlighting key learnings that may be relevant to Watford;
  - **Emerging Options:** an assessment of emerging options for Watford's cultural infrastructure and provision including their merits and limitations;
  - **Recommendations and Next Steps:** recommended course of action for Watford's cultural organisations and long-term sustainability of the local cultural sector

#### **Summary of Main Findings**

- 4.7 The AEA findings confirm the strength of the cultural sector in Watford:
- a close relationship between culture and built heritage in Watford;
  - the presence of three Arts Council England National Portfolio theatre organisations (all of them active touring companies);

- a vibrant community arts scene with regular series of events at the Watford Museum, Pump House Theatre, and independent music and night-time venues;
- high-quality cultural education facilities at the West Herts College;
- well-connected stakeholders through various networks including the Cultural Forum, Watford Area Arts Forum, and Cultural Leaders Group; and popular home-grown cultural events (Imagine Watford, Big Events programme).

4.8 The Council is recognised for championing culture and, despite the preceding decade of austerity, for continuing to support key organisations and programmes including the Watford Museum, Watford Palace Theatre, Pump House Theatre and Arts Centre and Imagine Watford with operating funding and infrastructure. The Council has contributed a significant amount, in the form of both direct subsidy and non-commercial rents, to the sector in 2019-20. The role of the Council in bringing stakeholders together through the Cultural Leaders Group, Cultural Forum and initiatives like Watford Together is also recognised as important in supporting the coordination and communication of cultural activities in Watford.

4.9 The report also highlights that the Town Hall Quarter (THQ) programme creates a new opportunity for cultural activity and infrastructure. The recommendations in the AEA report are accordingly designed to recognise and complement the THQ programme. In projects such as the Town Hall and Colosseum projects, findings from the AEA report are being given due consideration.

4.10 In the analysis of existing gaps and issues in the cultural provision in Watford AEA have identified that the strategic oversight and leadership for Watford's cultural sector could be further developed so as to ensure cohesive development, delivery, and communication of a diverse range of cultural activities. While the Cultural Leaders Group has facilitated improved networking among key stakeholders, there is an opportunity for the model to mature further. For example, in a number of cities and towns across the UK and elsewhere, cultural leadership is often delivered through an umbrella governance structure.

4.11 Similarly, there is an opportunity to strengthen communications by consistent marketing to promote Watford's cultural offer to the town's residents and visitors in a way that is more representative of its full scope. There is an opportunity for such a refreshed approach to promote not just profession and community arts and culture, but also possibly the visitor, night time and retail economy.

4.12 AEA have identified that some of the cultural infrastructure in Watford would benefit from update and modernisation. AEA have also suggested that there is a demand for specific types of spaces currently missing in Watford:

- creative workspace – artist and maker studios and creative co-working;
- rehearsal and performing arts practice studio(s);
- exhibition spaces; and
- some support infrastructure (storage, etc.).

#### **Key Recommendations from the AEA Report**

4.13 The recommendations are grouped in three areas:

***Town Hall Quarter: Cultural infrastructure provision within the proposed development in the north of the town centre***

4.14 The report strongly supports the THQ programme and specifically, it recommends better use of the space in the Colosseum to support cultural organisations' requirements. Suggested potential future uses of the Colosseum are:

- rehearsal space facility for dance and performing arts rehearsals, training, and small-scale events;
- visual arts exhibition space with a programme of rotating exhibitions to showcase work (paintings, sculpture, ceramics, etc.).

4.15 The Colosseum is seen by AEA as a venue with the potential for increased utilisation and animation to create a vibrant cultural centre for Watford. These recommendations have directed the Colosseum project which is part of the THQ programme, which is a separate item on the cabinet agenda.

4.16 The potential relocation of the museum to a location as part of the THQ is also supported as it is felt this could give the museum a facelift and modernisation to bring it up to date and make it "fit for the future". The report states that the programme of events and displays would benefit from updating. This specific recommendation feeds directly into the Museum and Heritage Service project which is also part of the THQ programme.

#### ***Leadership and Governance: coordinated strategy and oversight for the cultural sector***

4.17 The report focuses strongly on the area of governance and draws on experience from other towns which have carried out similar reviews. It is acknowledged that the Cultural Leaders Group has played an important role and that the Watford Together response to the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the power of cultural organisations collaborating to provide cultural activities for Watford. However, in order to move forward and further capitalise on this collaboration, AEA are proposing establishment of a more formalised governance structure.

4.18 Specifically the report recommends the development of a governance structure for coordinated strategic oversight of the cultural sector including planning, programme development and delivery of cultural activities. While the Council could potentially support the establishment of such structure, it would be an independent sector driven entity and which could be incorporated as an independent charity, e.g. a Trust governed by a Board. Jointly with cultural organisations in Watford, we would look to identify potential funding sources for a new governance entity.

4.19 These new governance arrangements could oversee the cultural strategy moving forward and ensure shared ownership of the integrated action plan referred to earlier in this report. This is a key recommendation of the report and is the fundamental building block of the future provision of cultural services in Watford.

4.20 AEA also recommend that these governance arrangements can be used to oversee and manage a consolidation of communications platforms and shared services across the Watford cultural organisations which will allow the cultural experience in Watford to be coordinated and marketed in a consistent way and will support a new branding approach.

#### ***Wider Cultural Infrastructure Support***

4.21 If the new governance arrangements referred to above progress, the new structure will be the platform that will enable access to alternative sources of funding to support the improvement, updating and animation of existing infrastructure including the Pump House Arts Centre and Watford Palace Theatre.

- 4.22 The report also recommends consideration of adaptive re-use of vacant buildings in Watford for creative activities such as galleries and studio space, workspace, rehearsal space, exhibition/bespoke retail, led by private and not-for-profit initiatives (including Watford BID and the Intu shopping centre). This recommendation directly links with the emerging Town Centre Strategy, and is being developed further as part of that work stream.

### **Action Plan**

- 4.23 The report includes a detailed Action Plan (see pages 84 – 88 of the AEA report attached in Appendix A) which, as well as including all the proposed actions from the AEA report, also reviews and updates the action plan from the Cultural strategy (2018-2025) and merges these two sets of actions into one Integrated Action Plan in the report.
- 4.24 The proposal is that the agreed new governance arrangements should oversee and manage the Action Plan from this report. To that end one of the first actions is to agree what the governance model should be and a workshop is being held in late January 2021, with the Cultural Leaders Group, in attendance to agree this.

### **5.0 Implications**

#### **Town Hall Quarter Programme**

- 5.1 The Town Hall Quarter (THQ) programme is the subject of a separate report to Cabinet on 18 January. The THQ programme comprises seven projects:
- **Regeneration project** – will deliver the housing and regeneration aspects of the programme
  - **Town Hall Development project** – will focus on how best to refurbish and use the Town Hall asset
  - **Colosseum project** – will oversee the refurbishment of this historic building and broaden its use for both Watford residents and cultural organisations
  - **Innovation and Incubation Hub project** – will assess how best we can support acceleration of business growth locally.
  - **Museum and Heritage Service project** – will re-imagine the Museum and Heritage service and develop a service fit for the future
  - **Culture project** – will provide an assessment of requirements for Watford’s cultural organisations’ use of the Colosseum and shape the design investment proposals accordingly
  - **Transformational Change project** – will review the way the council works and where it works.
- 5.2 This report both complements and influences the Town Hall Development and Colosseum projects of the THQ programme by providing requirements for those projects. It also supports the review of the Museum and Heritage service project and the Culture project of the THQ programme.

#### **Financial**

- 5.3 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no direct financial implications of this report. The financial implication of the THQ programme are set out in a separate report elsewhere on the agenda. Other projects are expected to bid for external funding to take them forward. Any

additional funding requirements will be brought forward for consideration as part of the normal budget and capital programme process.

#### **Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)**

- 5.4 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that comments have been made separately regarding the legal implications for the THQ programme in that report. Should it be decided following workshops that the Council is to become part of any newly established entity then this will need to come back to cabinet for a formal decision.

#### **Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection**

- 5.5 Under s149 (1) of the Equality Act the council must have due regard, in the exercise of its functions, to the need to –
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them
  - foster good relations between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them.
- 5.6 An Equality Impact Analysis (EIA) was undertaken for the Cultural Strategy 2018-2025. As the review and associated action plan integrated current findings and recommended activities with this Strategy, the original EIA has been reviewed and revised. This is attached at Appendix B.
- 5.7 From the EIA the Cultural Strategy is seen as a positive contribution to the advancement of equalities in Watford, enabling the town to celebrate its diverse community, providing opportunities for people to share positive experiences through culture, arts and creativity and building understanding. The EIA recommends effective engagement with the community throughout the delivery of the action plan, making sure that those with protected characteristics have the opportunity to share their views, feedback and feel involved in the cultural life of the town.
- 5.8 Article 1 of The First Protocol of the Human Rights Act 1998 provides that every person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of their possessions and that no one shall be deprived of their possessions except in the public interest and subject to the conditions provided for by law and by the general principles of international law. These provisions do not impair the rights of the state to enforce such laws as it deems necessary to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest or to secure the payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties.
- 5.9 Having had regard to the Council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

#### **Staffing**

- 5.10 The Council has a team engaged to progress this work. Any staffing impact of the projects which are part of the THQ programme will be addressed in that programme.



## **Accommodation**

- 5.11 A number of recommendations interrelate with the Town Hall Quarter programme and accommodation requirements form part of that programme.

## **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

- 5.12 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires the council to give due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of its functions on crime and disorder in its area and to do all it reasonably can to prevent these. The proposals to regenerate the area around the Town Hall will lead to changes to the public realm. Secured by design principles will need to be actively embraced to ensure that design proposals inhibit crime. Given that there is a high footfall passing through this area on a daily basis, consideration will need to be given during construction works to ensure the public is safe at all times. Overall, providing cultural activities that enhance the look and feel of identified areas will serve to have a positive effect on the people's perceptions of community safety and crime.

## **Sustainability**

- 5.13 This project is linked to the THQ programme which will deliver more activity in a very central, highly accessible location, which will inherently be beneficial from a sustainability perspective in travel and transport terms. There is an opportunity to champion energy efficiency in the building design and the Council will actively seek central government funding to help improve the design performance of the heritage buildings. In addition to this, the Council will explore whether a central heating system for the whole new development would be beneficial in terms of energy delivery.
- 5.14 It is envisaged that the council will work with the town's cultural organisations to identify opportunities for collaboration and funding, ensuring future sustainability. In addition through the Cultural Leaders Group there will be opportunities to share ambition, develop partnership working, share skills knowledge and maximise resource.

## **Appendices**

A - AEA Consulting full report

B – EIA Report