



Hartlepool and prototyping a community of culture and creativity as part of the Arts Council's Creative People and Places Bid

Despite the challenges, our town and many like us, are full of passionate, kind and innovative people. In 2020, as a Town, we submitted a bid to the Arts Council for over one million pounds to become one of the national sites for 'Creative People and Places'. This funding stream is designed to support ...

“parts of the country where involvement in the arts and culture is significantly below the national average“

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/creativepeopleandplaces>.

We are all aware of the positive impact on creativity practices on mental and physical wellbeing, with many organisations leading the way to support wellbeing using creative and cultural [interventions](#) . Ensuring that creativity and culture is embedded in our communities supports this agenda. The recently published [Levelling Up](#) white paper the UK government sets ambitious targets for wellbeing , pride in place and engagement with local cultural activities This underscores the vital role creativity and culture can play in our community and support the wider strategic work undertaken across the town.

Our 2021 application was supported by a partnership group and the bid development was funded locally by [The Wharton Trust](#). Central to the application was the premise that we would build public engagement at the level of all our electoral wards. Recognising the difference in wards across the town it was proposed to undertake high quality work in each local place, understanding the creative and cultural activities already taking place and building upon the aspirations of each place. The application focused on 'place' being central in people's cultural heritage and practices. We view culture and creativity broadly as art, photography, music, dance, crafting, performance and the artistry associated with many activities which take place in our communities such as gardening, sport, our music scene and many other activities. Our bid was ambitious; we sought to base an artist / creative practitioner in each ward to support each local community to work on its aspirations. We envisaged that cross cutting themes would emerge at the level of the Town which also would support putting Hartlepool on the map as a place of culture and creativity.

Sadly, our bid was unsuccessful, but our aspirations remain.

In true Hartlepool fashion '[never say die](#)'. Our Local Authority has recently agreed an updated [cultural strategy](#) and we have agreed to begin a small project as a prototype to demonstrate how to develop a community of culture and creativity, as we had planned in the bid. Of course this is going to be different as we didn't get the large scale funding. However, money should not and will not stop us. Leaders at The Wharton Trust, together with Hartlepool Borough Council and the Love Hartlepool Leaders are beginning the early work to develop a prototype community of culture and creativity in the Dyke House community.

Why The Annexe and Why the community of Dyke House

The Wharton Trust is ideally placed to deliver the prototype of this work. Operating out of The Annexe Community Centre, The Wharton Trust is a small, estate based charity in the Dyke House community of Hartlepool. About a decade ago, in the face of cuts to grants and income due to austerity, we were faced with a stark choice - follow the recommendations of lots of others to increase the size of the area of benefit in the hope of securing new funding or stick to focussing on Dyke House. A strategic decision was rather than scale up across a wider area, we would scale deeper in our place.

This was done primarily by adopting a [community organising](#) approach and, over time, we have become a [Social Action Hub](#) as part of a national network of organisations adopting the same principles and practice in their place. We're also the Locally Trusted Organisation for the [Dyke House Big Local Partnership](#), a Catalyst within the Power to Change [Empowering Places](#) programme and hold a nationally recognised and respected place within our sector - for example spearheading Locality's [Communities in Charge](#) campaign and the [We're Right Here](#) campaign for a Community Power Act.

The Annexe is already a cultural organisation in its own right, it has a long history of enabling local people to play a full and active part in creative endeavours such as our Big Gig music festival, supporting Wintertide, Peaceful Pom Poms, Valentines, Easter, Halloween and Christmas festivals, the #MakeDykeHouseBeautiful Sunflower Campaign and #GetDykeHouseActive, organising exchange trips for our young people to Germany and Romania as well as hosting a book and DVD library within our building.

As part of our Empowering Places work, The Annexe has been able to support [BloomInArt](#), a creative community business in town and commissioned them to run the Silver Lining Project during Covid which culminated in an outdoor art gallery on the North Cemetery walls.

The overarching philosophy is that 'We do not do anything for anyone that they can do for themselves' - this approach means the people of Dyke House aren't just willing participants in activities; they are the instigators, the planners, the organisers, the deliverers and the owners of things to improve their place and their lives.

During the consultative process for CP&P and subsequent HBC Cultural Strategy, we became acutely aware of the lack of leadership in the creative and cultural sector and of the opportunity that we could play in creating the conditions where local people could be part of something creatively extraordinary.

We believe that leadership in the creative and cultural sector should not be left to that sector; that actually it is incumbent on organisations like ours, to lift the sector with them AND whilst doing that, be a bridge to enable people who may not believe that culture and cultural activities are for them, to create and participate in activities which they may not have done before.

The idea of a Community of Culture was born; and it can be born in Dyke House as we have a community, ready, willing and able to do so.

These are the early steps and we begin to gather the leadership group, the political leaders and the Hartlepool creative community around us.

We hope you will join us?

Mr Sacha Bedding (The Annexe)

Francis Cox (Love Hartlepool)

Gemma Ptak (Hartlepool Borough Council)

