

Report of the Assistant Director (Communities, Culture & Public Realm)

## **Make it York Events Strategy**

### **Summary**

1. This report provides an update on Make it York's events programme. It sets out a direction of travel for future development of that programme and identifies areas where the Council can assist Make it York.

### **Recommendations**

2. The Executive Member is asked to:
  - Note Make it York's progress with its events strategy
  - Comment on areas where the Council can support the community dimensions of Make it York's programme
  - Agree one-off funding support, as set out in paragraph 19, subject to the Arts Council bid being successful.

Reason: To ensure that a future direction of travel is in place for Make it York's events programme.

### **Background**

3. Make it York was set up in April 2015 as the city's business development and city marketing agency. In the areas of culture and events Make it York's responsibilities are to:
  - Take a lead in ensuring cultural and creative sectors are working collaboratively to improve cultural provision in the city, including shaping the strategic direction and priorities for collaborative action by the sector
  - Support increased commercial competitiveness, productivity and innovation in the sector to enable sustainable organisational and financial models
  - Nurture new cultural ideas and initiatives

- Develop an outcomes framework and a baseline measurement to enable future monitoring of performance around cultural development
  - Enable York cultural excellence to be recognised and promoted across the city through an annual awards event (or other suitable means)
  - Support and develop high quality city centre festivals, activities and events
  - Nurture new events and initiatives
  - Engage businesses and visitors in mass participation sporting events already happening or planned in the city
  - Encourage, communicate with and provide all residents with the opportunity to enjoy the tourism and cultural offer of the city
4. The intended outcomes from these activity areas are:
- More jobs and better jobs
  - A higher value visitor and cultural economy
  - Consistently positive visitor experiences
  - A supportive environment for business growth
  - A higher national and international profile

### **Events Strategy**

5. The centre point of Make it York's events strategy remains Illuminate York. This festival has a 10 year record of success attracting around 50k visitors per annum and generating approximately £2m of economic impact into the local economy. In 2015 the quality of the artworks at Illuminating York was rated as 'Excellent', 'Good' or 'Satisfactory' by 85% of respondents. 89% indicated they would be likely to attend in future years whilst 87% said they would recommend the festival to a friend.
6. In addition to Illuminate, Make it York has continued to support the development of the BAFTA qualifying Aesthetica short film festival. The line-up this year featured over 300 short films from the global film community, spanning 11 genres such as drama, documentary, comedy, fashion, artists' film and music video, with the work representing excellence and exciting innovation in filmmaking. Also in 2015, Make it York hosted the first Great Yorkshire Fringe. This aims to become a key summer event in York's entertainment calendar, bringing the best in comedy, cabaret, theatre and music. Building on the success of 2015's festival, and with a programme of

national significance, The Great Yorkshire Fringe will grow to a 17 day festival in 2016, engaging residents and visitors, supporting local businesses and encouraging tourism for the wider area.

### **Future Developments**

7. Future development of Illuminate will grow in part from York's participation in the *Lighting up the North* network which brings together local authorities and other agencies across the north of England involved in lighting festivals. The Arts Council is supporting the network to grow audiences, share commissions, and to improve product through the engagement of artists of international standing. The Arts Council is making available a second year of discretionary funding to enable the investigation of growth opportunities and to visit other festivals to bring back best practice.
8. What we see from participation in the *Lighting up the North* network is that Illuminate is at the lower end in terms of investment of public funding and we are at a point where it is difficult for Illuminate to develop further and to create a more sustainable basis for the future. Clearly, there will not be sustained audience interest in a festival that is repeated on the same basis year after year and it is important to be able to move the festival forwards. Whilst the Arts Council has indicated a willingness to continue to support Illuminate and its development they need to see a compelling case if they are to invest further in the festival including evidence of commitment from other investors. This calls for a more ambitious development plan.
9. Equally, whilst Illuminate has built up a strong reputation for commissioning new work which responds to the fabric of the city, there is now an opportunity to involve local communities more extensively in the process of developing the festival.
10. York's designation as a UNESCO City of Media Arts - the UK's first - provides an excellent platform to address the ambitions set out above. For two millennia York has been the meeting point for the ideas and creativity of the world. It is playing this role once more through digital innovation and media arts and it is important that York confidently tells this story to the world.
11. The motivation to apply for designation was rooted in international ambition. Conceived as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to raise the social, cultural and economic standing of York, it would benefit everybody in the city for decades to come. The bid told the story of York as a place that is culturally-rich and creatively-pioneering, a

place where technology and art is used to breath new life into its heritage, where this strength has been cultivated through a £100m investment in media arts infrastructure and by becoming one of the first UK's first Super-Connected Cities, and described how York was committed to using creativity and culture to develop the city further.

12. Since the official designation on 1 December 2014 these broad ambitions have been refined into three areas for development for the next three years to 2018: an International Digital Media Arts Festival, the Guild of Media Arts, Media Arts Award in Schools.

### **International Digital Festival in 2018**

13. The proposed flagship initiative of York's UNESCO designation is an accessible, international, media arts *biennale*. Aiming to take place in Autumn 2018, and every two years thereafter, the inaugural festival will build on Illuminate including major light commissions alongside interactive pavilions and exhibits that utilise the beautiful backdrop of our city like never before. Its 20-day programme will be underpinned by year-long development activity with schools, communities and businesses.
14. In enabling as many people as possible to experience the transformative power of culture firsthand the aim is to build media arts into everyday life in York and to reposition the profile, ambition, excellence and impact of the UK's programming in media arts. A commitment to the next generation of talent will be at the heart of the festival as they work alongside leading artists and have the opportunity to tour amongst other UNESCO Creative Cities around the globe.
15. A recent meeting with Darren Henley Chief Executive of Arts Council England revealed strong support from Arts Council and a willingness to be involved in the planning and shaping of an International Festival in 2018, building on existing Arts Council funded festivals, principally Illuminate York.
16. Building on the city's proud tradition of social innovation, the International Digital Festival will also be the most accessible festival ever - with access all areas granted to everybody, including technical simultaneous signing, translation, and multi-platform online access.

17. There is potential for the Council to support the community dimensions of the International Festival in order to ensure that it achieves its goal of being the most accessible festival ever assisting in embedding the festival in York's communities and unlocking the value communities can bring as participants and volunteers.

Potential community activity could include on tour elements of the festival in various communities, multiple commissions, e.g. of pods enabling communities to communicate with similar communities in other network cities, opportunities for schools to work with an artist of international calibre to create light-based installations in the school and its immediate community.

18. The Festival will reconnect many of York's world-class arts and creative organisers back to the city's cultural agenda, benefiting other festivals, apprenticeship schemes, networking, ongoing supply chains.
19. It is proposed that the Council contributes a one-off sum of £75k to support the development of the community dimensions of the festival. The Council's funding support will also be critical in unlocking other funding - acting as match for other city partners and leverage for potentially significant Arts Council funding. The funding of £75k will not be incurred without the Arts Council bid being successful.
20. Other partners who have pledged potential funding for the international festival include :

York St John University	£75,000
Science City York	£75,000
University of York	£75,000
Creative Europe	£75,000

Ambitious targets have also been set for sponsorship and further grant funding e.g. from trust funds. It is important for external funding bids that the local authority is seen to be involved if the vision of creating an international Festival here in York is to be realised.

### **Economic Impact:**

21. The International Digital Festival will provide a platform for support for high value sectors - Supporting the City of Media Arts aim of doubling the size of what is one of the fastest growing areas of our regional economy. The value of York's creative, digital and media

output is £120k GVA per employee (Gross Value Added), representing 8% of York's total GVA and the sector is outgrowing the economy as a whole by five times the national average of 3.2%. Nearly 500 jobs were created in York last year

22. Visitors, businesses and residents experience greater cultural engagement and quality of life/visit - Through world-class programming on their doorstep and opportunities to participate.
23. Boosting the local economy - Boosting high-value international, business and cultural tourism. It will take place in November when hotel occupancy rates have been:  
2014 - 81.5%  
2013 - 83.4%
24. The target is to bring in at least an additional 20,000 bed nights (which is what Durham's Lumiere, a festival of similar size, achieves) during the first festival. This will extend the busy Christmas period supporting retail, tourism and service-based sectors. Local businesses will also benefit from the significant supply chain of a major festival and the spill-over benefits from creative and cultural innovation, ensuring a prosperous city for all.
25. The 2020 vision is for York to host the annual meeting of all UNESCO Creative Cities during the festival, attracting 200+ leading cities and their representatives to the region.
26. The festival will generate extensive media coverage as the local area is taken to global audiences (Durham Lumiere generates more than £3m worth of media coverage).
27. Two further developments under the City of Media Arts banner will feed directly into the International Digital Festival: the Guild of Media Arts and the Media Arts Award in Schools:  
**Guild of Media Arts:**
28. York has welcomed a new Guild of Media Arts to recognise York's thriving creative community and those who support them. The Guild already has 125 members and is growing by the day.
29. The Guild of Media Arts joins the seven other ancient guilds in the city and is the first of its kind in the UK. With a mission to unlock the full benefits of UNESCO designation and to champion York's growing creative credentials, the Guild is hoping to inspire a new

generation of creative adventurers in the city and drive continued growth in the sector.

30. The first Guild meeting took place on 11 February 2016. The guild is currently recruiting nominations for Court Members, a Clerk and a Master. The Guild will steer and shape the International Digital Festival in 2018, in consultation with stakeholders and city partners.
31. Fresh ideas are also emerging from the Guild such as the creation of a Media Arts apprentice scheme.

### **Media Arts Award in Schools:**

32. In order to ensure that the designation benefits generations to come, the Guild will turn their attention to developing a strong and coherent educational strand. A new Media Art Award will be developed in partnership with Trinity Guildhall, who manage Arts Award nationally.
33. Local agency Creative Learning Partnerships are developing plans to integrate the Media Arts Award into illuminating York in 2016 and 2017 leading to a larger project in the run up to the International Digital Festival 2018.

### **Options**

34. The principal options open to the Executive Member are to:
  - Support the proposal set out including the funding
  - Suggest alternative means / levels of Council support

### **Analysis**

35. What is clear is that the City of Media Arts Designation is not a starting point but a point on a journey, which has in recent years, seen festivals such as Illuminating York and Aesthetica Short Film Festival develop York's identity as a city celebrating its past and its future with high quality presentations and commissions.
36. The International Digital Festival offers an opportunity for York to develop existing festivals and events beyond their current means and limitations to ensure that local communities are involved on a much deeper and more sustained level. The International Digital Festival will also champion International exchange and support local artists and creative businesses to realise their ambitions.
37. Residents, visitors, businesses, students and stakeholders will all benefit from the development of ambitious and bold programmes of

activity and in developing the International Digital Festival a clear set of measurable objectives will be identified and embedded.

38. Illuminate will continue to be developed through 2017 and discussions will continue and decisions made around how existing Festivals can 'house' International Digital Festival Projects in 2016 and 2017, building audiences, community interest and partners.
39. Once sufficient funding is achieved, a Festival Director will be appointed to develop plans for the International Digital Festival. They will be housed within Make It York but will work to the Guild and a Festival Steering Group. The intention is for this appointment to bring someone with a wealth of experience in staging large, outdoor events; someone with ambition and the skills to bring communities on board to deliver something truly amazing.
40. Very quickly a Festival Business Plan will be developed with a view to ensuring a draft festival budget and programme is in place by the end of this year. A programme director will be appointed to deliver a programme in conjunction with the guild.
41. Another important early step will be the commissioning an evaluation study as part of the festival to quantify the return on investment and make the case for funding to external bodies outside of the city for future festivals

### **Consultation**

42. Consultation has already been undertaken through the guild in February attended by around 80 including a workshop on what an International Digital Festival could look like.





48. There are no Property, Equalities, Human Resources, Crime and Disorder or Information Technology implications arising from this report.

### **Risk Management**

49. In compliance with the Council’s risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified associated with the proposals contained in this report are those which could lead to the inability to meet business objectives and to deliver services, leading to damage to the Council’s reputation and failure to meet stakeholders’ expectations. The level of risk is assessed as “Low”. This is acceptable but means that regular monitoring is required of the operation of the new arrangements.

### **Contact Details**

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	<b>Report Approved</b>	✓	<b>Date</b> 10 March 2016
<b>Specialist Implications Officers:</b> Patrick Looker - Finance Manager			
<b>Wards Affected:</b>			<b>All</b> ✓