

Watchet Community Cultural Strategy

November 2008
Watchet Action Strategic Partnership

Contents

1. The vision	page 3
2. Strategic overview	page 4
3. Meeting the needs of Watchet	page 5
4. Examples of communities using creative approaches	page 5
5. Project ideas	page 6
6. Community collaborations	page 10
7. Achieving the vision	page 11
8. Recommendations	page 12

1. The vision

Through the Watchet Community Strategic Plan (2008), a commitment has been made to embrace low carbon, localised and sustainable ways forward for the future development of the town - its communities, environment and economy. Under the culture and heritage theme, the plan states that “community wellbeing is an outcome of local endeavour to meet local needs in a sustainable way, finding creative solutions to problems.”

To reflect this visionary aspiration, the Community Cultural Strategy for Watchet sets out to be a bridge between culture and environmental responsibility. Rather than merely responding to the challenges of climate change at a local level, being passive and vulnerable to factors beyond their control, people who take an active role in shaping their community, their environment and their economy are contributing to local resilience, the concept that a town, like Watchet, would be able to call on skills and knowledge and a sense of community self-help to adapt to new circumstances.

This strategy seeks to assess the potential for present and future cultural activities based in and around Watchet to provide a focus for community action and to engage with people in creative ways. Participating in cultural activities gives people confidence, skills and a sense of belonging and contribution. It helps people find common ground, a shared identity and to feel collectively responsible for the wellbeing of others. It builds and strengthens the health of the community. Participating in the cultural life of a place helps people feel good about themselves and the place they live in and they learn through cultural activity about influencing and decision-making for the greater good of everyone. Access to a rich cultural life could make the difference as global environmental changes challenge us to change the way we live.

Localisation (of food production, workforce, resources etc) brings with it the opportunity for more locally-made decisions and the chance to create new networks and links (both within and between communities) which become the ground from which exciting new ideas can grow. Through sustainable cultural projects, we can help individuals and communities to take some control of their lives and feel able to respond to change, which in turn will influence and transform the cultural wellbeing of the communities as a whole.

This strategy seeks to show how the creative energy of individuals and the community can be harnessed to bring about long-term changes in lifestyle that promote wellbeing and at the same time address issues of climate change and our over-reliance on fossil-fuels.

“We live at a fascinating point in history. The convergence of challenges, most particularly global warming and peak oil, have brought us to a point where we are profoundly challenged to act. We are communities, a society, a world in transition, and to do that we need a culture of transition, (and) also the tools for manifesting it.”

Rob Hopkins

Designer of Energy Descent Action Planning processes for Kinsale and Totnes, and instigator of transitionculture.org

This strategy aims to encourage the embedding of our individual and collective responsibility to live more sustainably within cultural activities in Watchet. It proposes some creative projects that address **both** local and global concerns, that will raise

awareness, inform, educate and mobilise people to take action for the sake of our environmental futures **and** our human need to be creative.

Eco/environmentalism is often seen as a personal/political standpoint, a choice made based on access to information which is only slowly seeping into mainstream consciousness, rather than the concern of the general public. Gradually, this stance is being confronted, for example, at a strategic level in documents such as The West Somerset Community Climate Change Strategy and in Watchet's Community Strategic Plan. Both Plans are emphatic in their commitment to a low carbon community. Both demonstrate the strategic lead towards communities taking environmental responsibilities more seriously, but how can sustainable living become a cultural right for all members of the community?

The challenge is to map out pathways that enable people to relate their personal choices to their impact on their community, the environment and the local economy. How each of us responds to changes in energy use, waste management and recycling, transport, and a move towards sourcing more sustainable and ethical materials, amongst other things will influence how we create, deliver and receive cultural activity.

As a vibrant and culturally active community, with some high quality, successful events, Watchet is well-placed to really take on the challenge of addressing changing lifestyles with creativity and imagination. Changes in people's travelling habits (already being seen in the impact of petrol prices reducing 'unnecessary' car journeys) may prompt opportunities for more local (home-grown and accessible) cultural experiences, for a 'greener' approach to transport in and out of the town for visitors and audiences, or the use of new media to expand what's on offer in environmentally responsible ways. The challenge of finding creative solutions and new ways of engaging with participants and audiences could become the springboard for exciting and innovative community projects.

Culture is about our way of life. It is an inclusive concept that embraces a wide variety of activities, places, values and beliefs that contribute to a sense of identity and well being for everyone. Culture has a material dimension (e.g. arts, media, play, library, museum, sports participation, archives, parks, the historic and built environment) and a values dimension (e.g. diverse cultural, religious and historic backgrounds).
www.guardian.co.uk

2. Strategic overview

Environmental and sustainable living considerations are noticeably absent from the revised South West Cultural Strategy (A Better Place to Be, 2008) with only a small mention given to the anticipated impact of climate change on cultural heritage assets and visitor numbers. The impact of a changing environment on our cultural habits as a whole is not yet making headlines. Perhaps a ground-swell of action will define how cultural change happens, rather than strategic leadership from above. Watchet could develop the models of good practice to inspire others.

The Somerset Cultural Strategy (2008) is currently in draft form and the final version will hopefully reflect commitments made by individual local authorities to address climate change, including the decision taken by Somerset County Council in July to become the UK's first Transition Local Authority. The Transition Movement encourages communities of all sizes to get together and prepare for a future that is

independent of oil. How local authority cultural services interact with and address these individual commitments will hopefully emerge as the strategic aims filter down to the delivery level.

3. Meeting the needs of Watchet

Following an independent review of current provision in Watchet and consultation already done by the Watchet Action Strategic Partnership, the following key areas of focus have been identified:

- The need for education and awareness-raising about climate change and sustainability issues so that communities and individuals can be empowered to change their behaviour at their own pace (the arts especially can play a role in achieving this)
- The need for better communication between existing community groups
- The need for promotion of existing cultural activity
- The need to coordinate and build the skills and capacity of volunteers/voluntary groups (including their ability to deliver 'greener' activities)
- The need to find creative solutions to a lack of appropriate venues in the town
- The need to better promote and gain value from Watchet's cultural assets – its history, heritage, links to notable people, cultural trails, community events, etc
- The need to recognise existing strengths as well as being open to new ways of working

Opportunities exist to devise new and exciting, environmentally-aware programmes of work to help brand Watchet as a low carbon town and to generate increased levels of participation in cultural activities by residents and visitors.

4. Examples of communities using creative approaches

There are many examples of seaside towns like Watchet using the arts and culture to regenerate economies, attract visitors and strengthen communities and civic pride. Finding comparable case studies that also reflect a low carbon, eco-aware approach to development is a little harder; however some ways forward and possible models of good practice are beginning to emerge.

Many of the Transition Towns have action groups dedicated to communicating their messages through creativity. In Totnes (the UK's first Transition Town) the Arts Group has coordinated workshops and events to generate ideas on how to create change and how art can be a means to undertake and communicate changes.

“The arts... have an extensive role to play in allowing temporary spaces, time and practical projects to explore, engage, experience, enthuse and empower. The arts can allow us all to evolve the new paradigms for thinking, feeling, relating; creating and living as part of a community facing challenges together.”
<http://totnes.transitionnetwork.org/thearts/home>

Glastonbury's Heart and Soul group is concerned with the emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects of Transition Glastonbury. They see the creative arts as an essential ingredient in communicating their message and building community cohesion. An important aspect of their events has to do with nourishing and

resourcing people on the Transition journey through creative outlets, helping to prevent burn-out which is so often a part of community ventures.

Although not aligning itself formally to the 'Transition Towns' movement, Watchet is developing its own response to many of the challenges faced by communities in the current economic conditions and threats associated with high oil prices, high food costs etc. Forum 21 has been managing a number of initiatives, e.g. on energy efficiency, cycleways, recycling, that are helping people to understand and make adjustments.

Cultural activity as both a means to an end (communication, awareness-raising, building community cohesion) and as creative expression for its own sake is a shared feature of those towns and communities looking at ways to manage the challenges of environmental and social change. Whilst each community has developed its own unique creative response to local needs, they appear to have used 'tried and tested' processes to reach out to all sections of the community. Broadly these approaches can be categorised under four themes:

- Celebrating local distinctiveness
- Education and empowerment
- Working towards a low carbon culture
- Community collaborations

It seems both appropriate and timely for Watchet to embrace the opportunities for enhancing and promoting its local culture as part of its aspiration to be a low carbon town, by finding inspiration from other communities and exploring some home-grown ideas. A list of potential projects follows.

5. Project ideas

There are limitless ways in which to engage people in cultural activity that responds to our changing world. These are just some of the varied ideas that have surfaced during the course of creating this strategy, interspersed with other examples from around the country:

Make Do and Mend – originally a pamphlet published in the UK in 1943 by the Ministry of Information at a time when food and clothes were rationed, the concept has become an intergenerational programme of creativity and skills sharing around traditional crafts (linked to local industries, seafaring etc) and encompassing the basic skills we may need to re-learn as we reject our 'throw-away society' and are challenged to be creative in re-using materials, e.g. mending things when they wear out, re-purposing old furniture, textiles etc. A programme could potentially involve education projects, sharing between children and elders, arts projects promoting traditional skills, training as part of local creative industries development, heritage projects, links between Watchet's cultural venues and community groups (Boat Museum, West Somerset Mineral Railway, Phoenix Centre) and a whole range of recycling initiatives.

Common Ground's 'Pathways through the Particular' profiles projects across England that celebrate our footpaths and local routes, our local geography and traditions, food, places and people. Through recording, documenting and making visible through arts projects and festivals, the distinctive and sometimes ignored gems of our localities and everyday lives are made special. The historical or forgotten becomes valued and relevant.
<http://www.England-in-particular.info>

‘Carbon Footprints’ eco-festival – There are already discussions underway to bring together arts and environmental groups to create an event in the town – promoting local activity, getting the messages across about climate change and environmental responsibility, entertaining people with world music and performance, promoting local food, and engaging people of all ages through creative workshops and fun activities.

The Big Green Gathering is a 5 day summer camping event in the Mendip Hills. It grew out of the original Green Gatherings of the 1980's and the Green Fields of Glastonbury Music Festival. It developed organically in response to a desire from people within the green movement for a festival that was focused on Green issues and is for people who care about health, the environment, sustainability, our children's future and life in general. It is a celebration of our natural world and our place within it and as such it is a place for enjoyment, learning and fun. The festival encompasses areas for music and performance, practical green living, alternative media and renewable energies, natural healing, and green enterprise and business.
<http://www.big-green-gathering.com>

New arts programming – Watchet has limited venue space in which to present arts and cultural activities, but what it does have is a wide and interesting range of community and commercial buildings that could, with some creative thinking, be used to put on theatre and music events. From pub skittle alleys, to church halls, railway platforms and quaysides, there are interesting opportunities for collaboration and commissioning of site-appropriate/site-specific work that would entertain residents and visitors alike. Theatre on trains, music on boats and dance along cycle paths could carry multiple messages around sustainable transport, healthy lifestyles, valuing local heritage and generating tourism. Building temporary spaces/buildings made of locally recycled materials in which to create and present cultural works would encompass a whole range of skills and opportunities for collaboration and learning – from design and build, to programming and performing.

Cornish theatre company Kneehigh are raising funds to build and tour ‘Asylum’ – a purpose-designed nomadic performance tent. “Shelter, sanctuary, madhouse! It will be a unique structure, a flexible space that can be configured in 5 ways and pitched in 1 day on any surface. Designed by The Dome Company, The Asylum is truly modern in its conception and yet it is inspired by ancient building methods and rooted in the idea of circus, troubadour and folk traditions.”
<http://www.kneehigh.co.uk/asylum/>

Green tourism celebration – Supporting and promoting Watchet’s emerging green tourism initiatives. Opportunities exist for collaborative working between the various voluntary, community and commercial organisations to promote seasonal activities and longer-term programmes of events to encourage visitors, e.g. a walking festival; a literary festival, festival of the sea. There is also potential for new business and community enterprises e.g. cycle hire. With the focus on greener transport options, Watchet’s intersection of rail, sea, roads, cycle paths and footpaths could inspire a community and visitor experience; linking the Town Museum, the Boat Museum, marina, designated trails (Coleridge Way, West Somerset Coast Path, West Somerset Mineral Railway, Steam Coast Cycle Trail), and West Somerset Railway; celebrating overseas connections – Viking towns in Spain and Denmark; and communicating generic environmental messages through creative activity - the volume of a hot air balloon equates roughly to one tonne of carbon dioxide and in

West Somerset we each create around 11 tonnes of CO₂ per year. Imagine the sky above the marina filled with (miniature) balloons or a 'hot air' storytelling/poetry event.

Community gardens – *A community garden is any space where plants are grown and maintained by a community to meet the needs of that community.*

Community gardens provide opportunities to grow healthy food, to share traditions between cultures and generations, to exercise, to create people-friendly environments, and most importantly to build community.

Combining local food production (reducing 'food miles', promoting seasonality, local vegetable varieties etc) with creativity to make practical and beautiful spaces for the community to use; edible, 'grow-your-own' artworks, living sculptures; recycling local materials to create spaces for education and experimentation; intergenerational opportunities; links to the Farmers' Market; or generating this activity within the context of an existing, established event – e.g. recycled sculptures as part of the Watchet Kids Festival. In Watchet, 2009 will see the start of a 'Grow, cook, eat' campaign, a joint initiative between the Somerset Primary Care Trust and local community groups including Forum 21, to promote vegetable growing.

Ridgeway Street Community Garden in East Manchester (established in 2001 by MERCi, a sustainability charity) is maintained by local people. It aims to create a healthy outdoor community space to promote natural gardening methods, foster communication skills and co-operation with children and young people, and create a focus for the community as a whole, helping to improve community cohesion and the physical environment.
<http://www.merci.org.uk/ridgeway-gardens.php>

Sustainable routes to school (or work) – walking buses; route development and demarcation as a creative project involving school children and parents (along the lines of work already pioneered by Somerset Art Works in other parts of the county where pupils help identify safe walking routes and those routes are then physically marked on footpaths, with safe road crossings etc, or published as leaflets/websites); links to the Steam Coast Trail cycle route and West Somerset Mineral Railway projects – looking at alternatives to car use; literally tracing the impact of our 'carbon footprints' around the town (challenging the number of local car journeys for the school run etc); opportunities for intergenerational education projects, storytelling and 'art on the move' projects, map making and links made to other communities (physically or through virtual exchanges of artworks, ideas, stories, etc).

Eco information hub – a central point for sustainability information for residents; this could take the form of a temporary structure-an information stall or tent- as part of specific community events, or a permanent presence in an existing building or new build, depending on resources; the facility could include a café, demo areas, exhibitions and community arts and education workshops to engage residents and visitors; local products on sale (new technologies, food, crafts/artworks). A permanent building could be an attraction, a meeting place for interested groups and individuals; managed workspace for relevant industries; a model of sustainable design and build; all of which help brand Watchet as a low carbon town.

The Southport Eco Visitor-Centre, cited on a Park and Ride site, is a unique gateway for travel into Southport, offering a practical demonstration of sustainability and inspiring visitors to consider their impact on the environment through stimulating information and displays about energy, transport, climate change and tourism. Built in 2004, this innovative building demonstrates sustainable ways of design, construction and day to day living and aims to show visitors how making small changes in their everyday lives can make all the difference to the future of our environment. The building hosts schools and community education workshops on climate change, sustainable development, green travel and green tourism.

Celebrating local distinctiveness – Watchet is the meeting point of three significant sustainable transport routes – the West Somerset Mineral Railway and the West Somerset Steam Coast Trail shared cycle/walking path, and the Coleridge Way long distance walking route which will have a link into the town hopefully in 2009. With links to the Romantic Poets (Coleridge and Wordsworth) and Yankee Jack and the sea shanty traditions already commemorated by two statues on the Esplanade, there are options for more public art projects along routes into the town. These could be large or small scale, permanent or temporary, tactile pieces of work or less conventional public events/happenings. Community involvement alongside artists' commissions could reflect local distinctiveness and the cultural links to the town, acknowledge environmental concerns (through responsible use of materials and production), raise awareness or provoke discussion around green issues, be educational, celebratory and above all be unique to Watchet.

Travellers discarding apple cores from train windows which self-seeded provided the inspiration for a planting scheme and a series of signs between Frome and Radstock – The Colliers Way, a Sustrans cycle route along a disused railway line. Artists worked with local school children to create etched and enamelled copper plate signs highlighting the names of Old English varieties of apples and pears. The signs, set into boulders, mark apple and pear trees along the route planted to form a linear orchard and three pocket orchards, marking off the distance and in future providing refreshment for the traveller.
<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/art&thetravellinglandscape>

Telling Watchet's story – The town has a vibrant and varied history, both ancient and in living memory, but it is also creating its story moment-by-moment through the people who live here. Creative documentation of the lives of residents of all ages could include sound/video recordings; image archive; celebrating local stories and legends (and creating new ones); soundscape arts project (similar to that run by Take Art in Watchet as part of the Tide & Time initiative in 2005, when Duncan Speakman created a sound-walk around the town); intergenerational opportunities; volunteering opportunities; training in audio/video recording; digital time capsule projects and other ways of archiving contemporary Watchet and the things that are important in the lives of its residents.

The St Ives Memory Bay oral history project is designed to celebrate the heritage of the Cornish town by recording reminiscences, memories and experiences concerning artists who have worked there and their links with the local community. By July 2010 the coordinators and a team of volunteers will have established a permanent audio-visual archive, accessible to all, recording the story of the town and its art colony as told by the local community.
<http://www.stivesmemorybay.org.uk/>

6. Community collaborations

Although not a project as such, a strong message coming out of the consultation has been the need to value what already exists, but also to find new ways of working. Watchet has a strong voluntary and community sector, with individuals with many skills and many years of experience in creating and promoting community events. Keeping longstanding events vibrant and successful is a real challenge, in terms of fundraising, attracting new volunteers (especially younger volunteers), finding new ways to promote and market, and constantly refreshing the skills and confidence of the organisers. Alongside this, local businesses have actively supported community events and it is anticipated that their participation in new cultural programming will be enthusiastic.

Watchet has a very stable population, with people making long-term commitments to running events, so supporting and building on this community resource and training more volunteers would bring real benefits. There is also an opportunity (and a need) to encourage collaborations between existing activities, for mutual benefit, to generate a critical mass of cultural events that are coordinated and not in competition with each other.

Possible initiatives could include an online anti-clash diary/information resource (e.g. through the proposed Watchet Online initiative); shared marketing of cultural events (a seasonal leaflet; website space, etc); skills sharing between groups; training to fill gaps in knowledge and skills; volunteer recruitment drives; help to make links between groups, find commonality and potential for collaboration, and to instigate and support a 'cultural forum' (or similar) that could become self-managing in the long term.

With any new initiatives, there is a need to balance the need for expert help with the long-term self-sufficiency of those involved locally. Simply parachuting in help, even over an extended period of time, would probably not be appropriate or successful in Watchet. Knowledge and skills need to be developed and retained locally, in keeping with the existing culture of the town. However there are opportunities to bring people and groups together that have so far not chosen to do so, and to support and enhance some of the less visible activities in the town. An externally funded community facilitation role (perhaps shared with WASP) would have the independence and objectivity to initiate new collaborations and lead on setting up new projects, alongside other agencies (e.g. West Somerset's Events and Tourism Officer; ARTlife; Engage CVS). But to be sustainable, it should also have the remit of embedding new skills into the community, perhaps through a coordinating group of local representatives of cultural groups that would work alongside but then continue beyond the life of the funded role.

7. Achieving the vision

A sustainable cultural strategy must reflect the energy and capacity of the community to deliver it. Watchet has a vibrant and active voluntary sector that already produces and promotes some quality cultural experiences, both building-based and outreach, through festivals and traditional celebrations. Supporting these existing assets to survive and thrive in a changing world is important, alongside initiating new ways for community involvement. Whatever happens in Watchet needs to be owned by Watchet people and build the capacity and sustainability of the town to meet its own needs in the future. The projects and actions recommended below aim to acknowledge the principles of sustainability in human, environmental and economic terms, and have been selected because they meet the following criteria

- Will enhance cultural experience for residents and/or visitors
- Have potential to contribute to the local economy
- Have potential funding sources identified
- Meet Local Area Agreement targets

The themes and priority projects are proposed as a starting point for discussion and exploration amongst the people of Watchet and those agencies that can support and initiate development work in the town.

8. Recommendations

Initially it is recommended that the project ideas in section three (page 6) and below, are presented to a cross-section of local stakeholders and supporting agencies, to gauge interest levels and generate more ideas, towards agreeing a shortlist or action plan for partners to sign up to.

Theme	Project/initiatives	LAA priority	Potential partners	Timing	Resources
Community collaborations	<p>Help existing cultural groups in Watchet to increase their effectiveness through a programme to improve fundraising, marketing and programming, and by providing a means for information, skills and ideas to be shared.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training and capacity-building, incl new volunteers ▪ Community facilitator role, to make links etc ▪ Local forum/facilitating group to initiate/develop ideas ▪ Explore venue opportunities ▪ Anti-clash diary/joint marketing tools 	14 29 30	WASP, Local groups, V project (youth volunteering), WS Volunteer Centre,	In-line with WASP	Community facilitator role (shared with WASP?) £ LARC Working Neighbourhoods NLDC
Education and empowerment	<p>Raise awareness of environmental and sustainable-living issues, using the arts and cultural activity as a vehicle to educate, empower and mobilise people to action through accessible and enjoyable participatory projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'Carbon Footprints' one-day eco-event to raise awareness, educate and entertain. Esplanade, summer 09 ▪ Bring together partners for a programme of community engagement projects around recycling, climate change, sustainable living 	14 29	Local groups, ARTlife, Forum 21, WS arts groups, WS Events & Festivals officer	Identify 1-2 events to support in 2009	£ Awards for All ARTlife LARC Charitable trusts
Celebrating local distinctiveness	<p>Value and promote Watchet's cultural heritage and assets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Input to phase 2 planning for West Somerset Mineral Railway – participatory projects, cycle festival, public 	14 16 29	West Somerset Mineral Railway,	ongoing	Awards for all Arts Council Charitable trusts

	art opportunities, etc <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coleridge Way link to Watchet – potential to develop similar projects to Porlock (public art, celebrations) ▪ Explore other festival ideas – sea shanties, etc 		SCC Rights of Way, Steam Coast Trail, Local groups and venues, ARTlife		WSC/section 106 planning gain for public art
'Low Carbon' culture	Help to brand Watchet as a low carbon town through devising new and innovative projects that engage residents and visitors, contributing to tourism in the town and providing models of good practice for other communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Help to 'green' existing events/festivals ▪ Explore arts input to community garden/allotments 	14 29 30	Local groups, ARTlife, Forum 21, WS arts groups,	Identify 1-2 festivals to support in 2009	Awards for All Charitable trusts

Local Area Agreement priorities references:

14. Climate change; a protected, conserved and enhanced natural, cultural and historic environment, which helps to improve the social, economic and physical health of the community in a sustainable way

16. Access & Connectivity (access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling)

29. Develop strength and role of community groups and voluntary organisations, including cultural organisations (participation in regular volunteering; engagement in the arts)

30. Community Cohesion

Consultation

This strategy has been compiled by ARTlife as an independent review of the sustainable cultural development opportunities open to the communities of Watchet. It draws on consultation undertaken by the Watchet Action Strategic Partnership in producing the Watchet Community Strategic Plan 2008-2018, and the input of the following people who represent some of the agencies and groups with an interest in the work:

Graham Boswell, West Somerset Steam Coast Trail
Jill Homewood, West Somerset Events and Tourism officer
Sarah Littler, Somerset County Council Rights of Way
Corinne Matthews, Somerset County Council Economic Development (Business Competitiveness - Key Sectors)
Mary Olszewska, West Somerset Mineral Railway project
Nigel and Sue Pike, Watchet Carnival
Ray Tew, Watchet Action Strategic Partnership
Wendy Stephenson, Forum 21

Contact details

This strategy has been prepared for the Watchet Action Strategic Partnership and should be read in conjunction with the Watchet Community Strategic Plan 2008-2018

Prepared by ARTlife, c/o West Somerset Council, Killick Way, Williton, Somerset TA4 4QA. info@artlife-somerset.co.uk 01984 635300

November 2008