

# BRIDPORT 24

## TOWN OF CULTURE EVALUATION



Celebrating people, place and culture

Arts  
Development  
Company



Bridport  
Town Council



Dorset  
Council

# INTRODUCTION



## **Bridport 24 was Dorset's inaugural Town of Culture (ToC) between July and December 2024.**

A celebration of the rich artistic ecology of the town, bringing together communities, artists, festivals, arts organisations, and promoting collaboration and co-production. ToC was a celebration of the idiosyncratic character of Bridport and the unique cultural contribution Bridport brings to the county of Dorset.

The bid from Bridport to pilot the Town of Culture initiative emerged out of the Bridport Investment Plan – which identified the importance of arts and culture to the town's economy and recognised the need to support collaborative approaches to culture and give focus to the next generation of creatives.

Bridport 24 has significantly enhanced the reputation of Bridport as a creative hub - An opportunity to celebrate what happens in and around the town and to push the envelope of what culture means. New collaborations and commissioned events explored what was collectively understood as being 'culture' - Reggae events, visuals and performing arts, sound and light installations, outdoor cinema, quilts and clay all featured as activities in Bridport 24. Most events worked, some didn't or need to be configured differently in the future. Some events will become new additions to the 'eventful town' programme, others will be fond memories.

Culture is both a pretext and a means for bringing communities together to share and explore who they are. Bridport 24 has underlined the value and importance of the town's investment in arts and culture - offering opportunities for skills development as well as the sharing of experiences and engaging positively with a rich diversity of voices.

# ABOUT TOWN OF CULTURE

Town of Culture was established by Arts Development Company to strengthen the excellent cultural activity already happening in Dorset, and to deepen relationships between communities, cultural venues and organisations.

For the next few years, a town, village or hamlet in Dorset will be awarded £30,000 to work together and deliver a year's worth of extraordinary cultural activity, with support and funding from Dorset Council, and match funding from the winning town or parish council.

Bridport piloted Town of Culture for the second half of 2024, and Portland and Weymouth have been awarded joint Towns of Culture for 2025. Ferndown, Swanage, Sherborne and Wimborne have been shortlisted for Town of Culture 2026.

With support from Dorset Council and Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils, Arts Development Company hopes to foster a spirit of collaboration and ensure a legacy of rich and diverse culture across the county.

Find out more at [tinyurl.com/townofculture](https://tinyurl.com/townofculture)



Image: Islands of Imagination, Portland, by Jayne Jackson

# KEY FINDINGS



## PEOPLE

**Around 8,000 – 10,000 people engaged with Bridport 24 events.**

Bridport 24 attracted new audiences, with events such as Echoes and Embers, Quilt Weekend, Small World Festival, Windrose Media (Rope, Hope and Dope) and Wrist (TOCIYA). Town of Culture activity at Bridport Arts Centre (BAC) attracted between 15% and 51% new audience members (median of 43%).

The TOCIYA group of 12 young adults came together and were supported to develop their creative ambitions.

## COLLABORATION

New cultural events were commissioned and ran successfully; Forecourt Portrait Challenge, Swift Town, Small World Festival, Quilt Weekend, Young Adult's Community Play (Wrist) and Echoes and Embers.

Arts Council England provided funding for 4 months of activity that focused on new collaborations and new voices being given a platform in Bridport's cultural calendar. The Bridport Venues Partnership between the Lyric and BAC (initiated in April 2024 with revenue funding from Dorset Council) has been strengthened through Town of Culture collaborations.

An open Advisory Group was set up to engage and build the Bridport 24 programme. These gatherings evolved into monthly Culture Cafe events through Autumn and Winter 2024 that will continue to encourage collaboration and new commissions into 2025.



## **LEGACY**

New cultural events and collaborations have been tested and will lead through to repeat activity that will add resilience and diversity to Bridport's cultural calendar. A new confidence has been encouraged to experiment with locations and programming. Bridport 24 strengthened the partnership working between BAC and the Lyric Theatre. This has resulted in new investment from Arts Council England to support strategic development work between these two organisations; exploring ways to further embed collaborative working.

Despite its challenges, TOCIYA has had an impact on Bridport's creative landscape: Stronger networks and collaborations have been established between young creatives and arts organisations such as Opera Circus, Oops Wow, BAC, Lyric Theatre, Small World Festival, and Ripple Workshop.

Several under-30 creatives beyond the immediate TOCIYA group received support, including Chasing Cow and OffPiste (filmmakers), reinforcing a wider commitment to nurturing emerging talent.

Bridport 24 has highlighted the need for more structured, long-term support for young creatives in Bridport, creating an opportunity for future iterations with a more tailored approach.

## **LEARNING TO SHARE WITH TOWN OF CULTURE APPLICANTS**

The need for sufficient lead-in time to engage with local creatives, build support for the approach to cultural programming and bid for additional funding to support delivery. Adequate time should also be allocated to encourage and support engagement with local businesses and other key community groups and stakeholders; especially young adults. We would suggest at least 9 months, but ideally 1 year is the amount of time to reap the full value of the Town of Culture offer.

Engaging the widest interpretation of local creatives in developing a vision, objectives and event schedule for the Town of Culture certainly pays dividends when it comes to delivery. Employing an experienced Producer role provided invaluable support for Bridport 24 delivery. This should be adequately resourced from the inception stage, moving to a minimum of 3 days, with additional time included for wrap up and evaluation activities. People will always want more done to promote projects like Bridport 24. The mis-match between partners expectations and the publicity budget available for Town of Culture programmes needs to be made clear from the outset. What Bridport 24 could have done better was to resource a centralised point to promote all activities with a cohesive communication plan that all partners could 'buy-in' to.



**WHAT  
HAPPENED**

## **BID DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING**

Meetings with key arts and cultural providers were held during Autumn 2023 to explore objectives for a Town of Culture bid – namely to promote better collaboration in the sector and to build a support structure for young adults looking to develop their creative activities in the town.

Once the offer of piloting the Town of Culture initiative was confirmed in January 2024 – Bridport Town Council (BTC) organised and ran three ‘Advisory Group’ meetings – open meetings for anyone with interest in delivering art and cultural activity in the town. The meetings were well attended (70+ over 3 meetings) exploring the opportunities of Bridport 24 and starting the process of building a programme of events for delivery between July and December 2024.

Bridport Arts Centre (BAC) stepped forward to be the key delivery partners for Bridport 24 and the decision was taken to employ a ToC Producer – the Producer role was part time and initially focused on developing funding bids and engaging with young people to better understand what role they might want to play in Bridport 24 and what support would need to be on offer.

In April Michael Armstrong took over as ToC Producer and provided technical support for programme development and delivery. Employed for 2 days per week, his role was to take forward conversations from the advisory meetings, to then inform the commissioning of new events and collaborations. This included the support for the TOCIYA collective, the development of a ‘brand’ and all public-facing marketing, relationship management across various stakeholders, and event production/ delivery.

The award, confirmed by Arts Council England in late August 2024, provided a modest delivery budget, offering the production team greater leverage to explore new commissions and partnerships. In addition, existing activities and cultural events (e.g. Sladers Yard programme of exhibitions, West Bay Discovery Centre and a programme of differing activities supported by Dorset National Landscape), were included as part of an ‘umbrella’ celebration - signposting and championing existing offers and, where possible, supplementing these with funding (e.g. Asker Meadows events detailed below).

The Quilt Walkabout, Echoes and Embers in late December, and the final ‘handover’ event ‘The Dorset Pavilion’ exhibition in the Allsop Gallery, BAC (Feb 8th - March 15th 2025), were the significant new commissions. Placing central the concept of collaboration and welcoming new work, an alternative perspective and new artists, the emerging narrative and public response was clear - that an appetite exists for the ongoing diversification of Bridport’s cultural offer and that new ideas are welcome, needed, and are in ongoing development, be that through a partnership approach like this project, or an independent venture.



<b>EVENT/ACTIVITY</b>	<b>TOTAL AUDIENCE NUMBER</b>
Greensleeves Reggae Event	151
*Portrait Challenge	75
*Swift Town (11 events June/July)	Approx. 400 attendees plus 68 people recording Swifts
Circus Raj on Millennium Green	200
*Vintage Market Music Event (TOCIYA)	300+
George Biles exhibitions	Approx. 4,000 visits
Piano of Joy Community Jam (TOCIYA)	Approx. 40 participants
Banner/kite-making workshops	85
Pavilion of Regenerative Practice – Design and Build	15 young designers and builders
*England on Sea Photographic Exhibition	estimated @ 1,000-2,000
Youth Democracy Weekend	17
*Quilt Walkabout	150 contributors/500+ guests
*Small World Festival	63 @ BAC, approx. 60 @ Community Orchard
*Uncertain Ground – Outdoor cinema	100
Earthly Encounters – Clay workshop	40
Her Song II	125
West Bay Walks	65
Bridport Literary Festival associated events	approx.400
Wrist Performance (TOCIYA)	120
Heath, (Vita Nova) Bridport Arts Centre	44
Dope, Rope and Hope film event	150
*Echoes and Embers – sound and light installation	300-400 people
Culture Cafe Jan-March	40
*The Dorset Pavilion (Feb - March 25)	165 visitors to preview event, anticipate 700 visits over 6 week exhibition.
Estimated audience for the ToC programme	8,000 - 10,000

\* Due to the nature of this event audience numbers are estimates

# EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

## LAUNCH WEEKEND

Daytime dance performances on Friday featuring No Limits (inclusive dance troupe) and Grace and Growl (a contemporary dance company for mature adults), extending to a mass portrait drawing challenge from the Lyric on the forecourt of Bridport Arts Centre, throughout the day on Saturday. That evening a Greensleeves Records Reggae performance in the Arts Centre was enhanced with a Jerk Chicken vendor in the courtyard.



## SWIFT TOWN

11 Linked Events a great example of the cross-organisation collaboration at the heart of Bridport 24 – Seven art and environmental groups coming together to celebrate this amazing bird and its importance to the Bridport community. The opening talk filled the Town Hall to capacity (100) and was followed by well attended talks, walks and practical art workshops. Launching a citizen science project to record Swift sightings and nesting sites was a popular and potentially valuable part of the project. 68 people took part in citizen science data gathering whilst enjoying a ‘Swift Pint’. Data collected will be analysed and provide the basis for Swift Town events and actions in 2025.

## VINTAGE MARKET MUSIC EVENT

The first TOCIYA event in partnership with St. Michael's Vintage Market involved performances from members of the TOCIYA collective. The platform offered the group the opportunity to curate, promote and produce an event. With guest performers from across the south-west, the event was an important learning opportunity for the collective.

## GEORGE BILES 'KING OF SIGNWRITERS' EXHIBITION

A celebration of one of Bridport's favourite sons, signwriter George Biles. Various spaces around Bridport displayed a range of works produced by George over a 60-year career – from pictorial pub signs, to shopfronts and pantomime screens. Three main venues around Bridport exhibited works by George Biles between the 1st and 29th August 2024. The exhibitions proved extremely popular and attracted around 4,000 visitors. Whilst entry to exhibitions was free, all three venues reported generous donations toward their participation in the project. see: [George Biles Lottery Project Report](#) for more information.



## PIANO OF JOY COMMUNITY

The cohort of Young Creatives, TOCIYA, hosted an all-day Community Jam in July on the forecourt of Bridport Arts Centre. People were invited to sing and perform, share food and stories. The centrepiece of the day was a communal artwork; an old upright piano which was painted white and then given over to the community to decorate with anything that brought them joy. The piano then moved into the foyer of the Arts Centre, where it resided for the rest of the Town of Culture programme; being added to and played by hundreds of visitors.

## BANNER MAKING, COMMUNITY TEXTILE WORKSHOPS

Working with local retailer Becca Doe, Studio One Fabric Larder, a well-established member of the textile, fashion and crafting community, the banner-making workshops took place across July and August, attracting over 80 participants from across the area who contributed to the design and making process. The banners were displayed at the Melplash Show, showcasing a range of individual and local area interests from fossils to food and the events that make the town what it is.



## PAVILION OF REGENERATIVE PRACTICE

Fabricated from materials grown locally, by craftspeople working in the area. The project ran 3 weeks of training in the skills of design and craft for a group of 15 young people in July/August 2024. The Pavilion build was completed in Mid-August and with collaborative design sessions, training throughout the fabrication and a materials reuse programme that will donate materials from the pavilion to sustainable, regenerative creative initiatives after its life.

In September, the Pavilion provided a venue for five Town Council meetings and three Town of Culture events; Uncertain Ground – Outdoor Cinema and Earthen Encounters workshops.



## ENGLAND ON SEA PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION

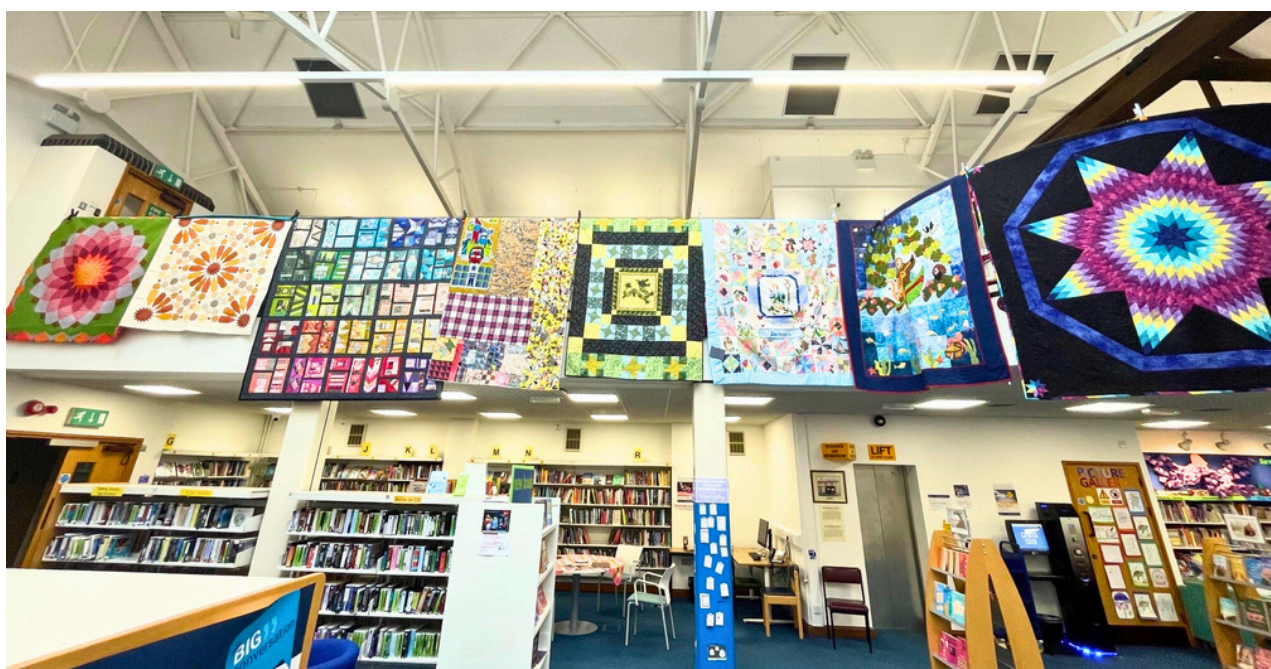
The Dorset National Landscape (DNL) team was delighted to support the England-on-Sea exhibition in West Bay, as a contribution to Bridport 24. 'England-on-Sea' by photographer Brent Jones is drawn from a nationwide tour of the English coast – a series of road trips to all points of the English coast, made over several years. Living and working from the back of a Ford van, Brent set out to explore the coastal landscape and how we interact with it and to each other.

For DNL this was an opportunity to test out the value and impact of outdoor landscape exhibitions. Certainly, in terms of outreach the experiment was successful.

## THE QUILT WALKABOUT

Drawing on the Amish 'airing the quilts', a long-established yearly traditional display across the community that acknowledged the change in season, alongside a celebration of the craft, the inaugural Quilt Walkabout was the idea of local business owner and crafter Becca Doe. To celebrate her 25 years of business, and to shift the focus to the art of needlework and quilting, the week-long exhibition took place across nearly 30 venues, including many businesses, three churches, the library and the museum.

The quilts were contributed by over 150 individuals showcasing a diverse range of styles, many of which also carried personal messages and memories. Town of Culture funding and production support enabled the concept to be realised, attracting hundreds of visitors to the numerous venues and demonstrating a beneficial interface between businesses and local area craft. The intention is that the event will take place again with some additional and potentially national links to explore.



## UNCERTAIN GROUND SCREENING AND TALK

The Pavilion of Regenerative Practice was offered to the community as a new event space during the late summer months. Working within the same commissioning framework (i.e. new work, piloting new collaborations), Common Practice worked with the ToC producer to draw together local creatives Chasing Cow, to curate an evening of film and conversation about the local commons and the ongoing changes to the local landscape. Featuring Bristol-based author Susannah Walker, music from local songwriter Aidan Simpson and culminating in a film from Chasing Cow, the evening succinctly encapsulated the town's diverse multi-arts community through the platform of design, music, and sharing a collective concern of environmental awareness.

## SMALL WORLD FESTIVAL

Small World was a new mini festival from Jurassic Multicultural and DEED Education celebrating the diverse cultures that make the Bridport community so vibrant.

Events and activities ran in Bridport Community Orchard and at Bridport Arts Centre. A fun fuelled day with activities for all ages, delicious free food from around the world, performances, art, storytelling by Raja Jarrah, cooking demonstrations including The Taj Mahal Bridport's Sanjay Choudhury and drumming workshops.

Harriet Morgan-Smith from Jurassic Multicultural underlined the value of being a new commissioned work as part of ToC:

"It was great to be part of ToC as it added gravitas to Small World and gave me access to helpful people such as Michael and Rosie so I could tap into their significant experience. It also meant that I could work closely with the young adults in TOCIYA, who were amazing. Collaboration is incredibly important to me, especially for the purpose of my Community Group; Jurassic Multicultural, as it helped to build connections between the group members and the population of Bridport. I wanted to be able to demonstrate that Bridport welcomes people from other cultures and the collaboration between many groups helped achieved this."



## **EARTHEN ENCOUNTERS WORKSHOP**

Practical workshop sessions were held at the temporary Pavilion on Asker Meadows exploring the history, properties and creative potential of Clay. The workshops were run by Common Practice; Ned Spear and Jack Cardno, with Martin Maudsley leading a session making Boggarts and weaving in stories and songs along the way.

## **HER SONG II PERFORMANCE**

The 2024 iteration of the Lyric Theatre's annual celebration of women's voices was co-produced by two of the members of TOCIYA, who contributed a live art installation as part of the performance. The joyful evening of poetry, song and performance art was performed to a sell-out audience and was the centrepiece of the Lyric's contribution to Bridport 24 events. The model of Hersong is being developed in 2025 into Theirsong, an event celebrating the voices and stories of the LGBTQ+ members of the local community.

## **WEST BAY WALKS**

The Discovery Centre, located in West Bay, supported the ToC development process from inception, attending the Advisory group and working with the producer to explore possible collaborations. Their weekly walks offer both tourists and residents a guided tour of the area: the input and resource from ToC added an additional element, aligning the walk with works of art from a variety of painters who across many years have captured the beauty of the area.

## **WRIST PERFORMANCE**

TOCIYA were allowed to 'take over' the Arts Centre in November: drawing on the differing skills and professional aspirations of the group and, led by writer and musician Theo Sudbury Slight, the collective produced Wrist. Written by Theo, the story follows Ray in the formative years of adulthood, navigating the monotony of his everyday. Wrist tackled subject matters that explored sexuality, existentialism and individual choice from the perspective of a young man struggling to find purpose.

The cast and crew performed to an almost sold-out venue, with an engaging, occasionally absurd take on the challenges of young adulthood. Including many young creative aspirants from outside the ToC programme, and platforming brand-new writing and a production that went from page to stage in less than 3 weeks, the event was a crucial learning element of the TOCIYA project.

## DOPE, ROPE AND HOPE SCREENING

Windrose Rural Media Trust is a local charity that uses media, principally archive film, to educate and to work at local level across Dorset and Somerset, through a series of project-based endeavours that strive to archive and sustain footage. In collaboration with Bridport 24, and specially curated for ToC, assembling films from across 70 years, Dope, Rope and Hope was a sell-out event at Bridport Arts Centre, offering the audience a rare glimpse through rarely seen footage of town centre events across the decades, including the Melplash Show. The event was well received and has led to subsequent discussions on a follow-up event with a focus on Dorset and Bridport's "counter-culture" spanning the last 50 years.

## ECHOES AND EMBERS SOUND AND LIGHT INSTALLATION

Echoes & Embers was an immersive performance using experimental photography, projections, field recordings and improvised musical performance. The piece was a reflection on the human relationship to landscape, allowing the audience to reflect on interpretations of our audible and visual world.

The soundscapes and visuals were gathered from the Dorset landscape and other parts of the UK. The piece used multiple digital and analog projectors and an immersive four channel sound system. The sound was performed live using electronics, field recordings, found materials and traditional instruments.

See: [Echoes & Embers — Ezra Gray Audio - Sound Engineer & Sound Artist in Dorset, UK](#)





Ezra Gray commented:

“The commission from TOC was a very helpful insight about putting on an event in Bridport.

The idea was to collaborate with a visual artist to create an immersive show which used the Dorset landscape as its main medium. The other main point of organising the event was to attempt to put on a show which allowed the audience a different experience from other events currently available in the Bridport area.

We managed to attract a diverse audience, from young children to people over 50. The main group who attended were young adults around 18 - 35. I was quite happy to attract this age group with an event as I feel it's a fairly hard thing to do and encouraging this age group to attend an event locally is tricky.

The commission allowed a “test run” for further events in the town as well as the larger Dorset area. There will certainly be more events in a similar vein with different collaborators and artists involved. The feedback from the event clearly stated a need for interesting and immersive work within the town, something I previously didn't regard as such a highly sought after need.

I feel it is necessary to keep putting on events which encourage the younger generation to think about their own work and ideas and this could be supported by creative workshops and talks. The event managed to financially support two artists, a filmmaker and a photographer. The two bars which were open during the performance reported one of the busiest evenings they have had since opening, so they were also supported by the event. The next stage will be to apply for funding to put on another event. After the Echoes and Embers event I applied to the “Immersive Arts Fund”, which is a national fund to support the creation of immersive artworks in the UK. The TOC event will allow me to use visuals and audio to support applications of this nature.

The event was documented by a local filmmaker and photographer, so we have lots of visuals which will certainly help support future applications.

There is certainly more scope for events in this vein, which allows the Bridport community to experience their town through a different lens. I'd like to do some outdoor work in the future, where people can experience their local landscape through a different perspective”.

## THE DORSET PAVILION EXHIBITION

Attracting almost 200 visitors to its Friday night preview, the final event in Bridport 24 opened on Feb 7th. Curated by local artist Sophie Molins, The Dorset Pavilion celebrates the bounty of Dorset, challenging conventional expectations of regional art by offering a powerful, tactile, and evocative exhibition that speaks to deep time; the land: the political; the literary; and the historical.

Featuring 30 artists including Andy Goldsworthy, Hugh Dunford-Wood, and PJ Harvey, the exhibition was a fitting finale for a project that placed collaboration at its axis. Returning from a triumphant debut at last year's Venice Biennale, this third iteration of the exhibition, now installed in the Allsop Gallery at the Arts Centre, welcomed new voices and includes a series of associated events throughout February and March. Exploring activism and protest, curation, the lesser-heard voice, and a unique approach to art appreciation through story-telling, the Dorset Pavilion gave voice to the rich community of visual artists within the town and across the county.



# EVALUATION



# APPROACH TO EVALUATION

As a pilot for Dorset's Town of Culture initiative, capturing and sharing key learning is especially important. Bridport Town Council agreed to lead on the evaluation process using an established evaluation template. A single evaluation report has been produced for the three funders; Dorset Council, Arts Development Company and Arts Council England.

Evaluation will help inform and guide future arts and cultural activity in Bridport. We hope the experiences of Bridport 24 can also support other small towns and parishes to engage with and promote local arts and cultural activities.

Evaluation evidence was gathered through the following means:

- Use data from BAC on who's benefited and who's 'new' to engaging with Arts and Culture.
- An online questionnaire for Bridport 24 partners and event organisers.
- Face to face interviews with key partners.
- BAC conducted evaluation interviews with a cross section of TOCIYA members using the Most Significant Change evaluation methodology, focusing on the impact of participation on the individual.
- Additional evaluation material and sense checking of learning points was undertaken through open meetings - at the January Culture Café.
- BAC provided an evaluation statement as lead delivery partner, as well as a final financial report. (See Appendix 1)
- Narrative input from both Town of Culture producers, Michael Armstrong and Rosie Russell.

## ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE FEEDBACK

Aspect of Bridport 24	Project Partner Response
Bridport 24 Objectives - Supporting new collaborations and young adults to be active contributors	23% of objectives fully shaped their activities 61% report aligning to 'some extent' 16% not at all
Bridport 24 Advisory Group meetings	25% found meetings extremely useful in building an understanding of Bridport 24 100% of some use
What support were partners looking for?	63% publicity 45% venue 18% equipment
Bridport 24 delivery support	41% felt extremely supported 60% felt they'd had 'useful input'
Bridport 24 events	66% felt their events went extremely well, 33% that they went well
Impact on participants' creative practice	63% reported mainly positive impact 37% reported little or no impact

## SELECTED QUOTES FROM ONLINE COMMENTS

“The ToC team were helpful in giving us the encouragement, funds, and creative freedom to curate the event”.

“I came late to the ToC concept but my planning meetings with Michael Armstrong were invaluable, as was the supportive and friendly input from Dee Fenton and Tristan Allsop at Bridport Arts Centre”.

“Guided collaboration - it was a good exercise in working in genuine partnership with other organisations, particularly BAC. It is not easy for leaders to work together and TOC gave us a very strong focus and motivation to get things happening (partly due to the short time frame - but this did give a dynamism to practical working)”.

“It gave me an opportunity to test out an idea I have been developing for some time. It gave me the opportunity to meet with other creatives in the town, not just the young people. I will feel more confident in approaching other people with ideas and proposals to collaborate in the future.”

“The George Biles project was a particular highlight - it did exactly what is set out to do and resonated across the generations, generating such a strong sense of community. A coming together to celebrate place and craftsmanship”.

See Appendix 3 for more quotes



# TOCIYA SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

One of the most significant yet challenging aspects of the Bridport 24 commission was TOCIYA. This initiative provided a valuable opportunity for BAC and partners to engage younger members of the local creative community in a more meaningful and supportive way, offering hands-on experience and guidance in creative production, event management, and artistic development. (See Appendix 2 for TOCIYA Evaluation Summary.)

However, unlike event production and delivery, for which BAC has an outstanding track record, youth skills development is an area where we had limited contemporary experience. Despite the engagement of a Senior Mentor, and the in-kind support provided from the Lyric, this lack of an established practice in youth engagement meant that BAC had to navigate new challenges. These included:

- Establishing a framework that supported meaningful connections with young and emerging creatives,
- Creating a programme that was accessible and responsive to different needs and skill levels,
- Ensuring adequate support structures for participants, acknowledging the significant economic and mental health challenges many young people currently face.

While the initiative successfully introduced young creatives to new opportunities, its long-term impact is harder to assess. Without dedicated funding, BAC capacity to support the legacy of TOCIYA remains uncertain. While we are committed to providing informal mentoring and guidance, sustaining structured youth skills development would require additional investment.

Despite the challenges, TOCIYA was a valuable pilot, demonstrating the demand for youth-focused creative development opportunities in Bridport. The next step will be identifying ways to build on this foundation and integrate youth skills development more effectively into the long-term programming of the town's cultural organisations.



## FEEDBACK FROM TOCIYA MEMBERS

Highlights	Room for improvement
<p>WRIST brought my work with TOCIYA to a great conclusion, it was so well supported, so nice to get a wider community of young people involved.</p> <p>The fact that the young people were paid for their work on Wrist felt super important and empowering for me. We need to know we can be paid to be creatives.</p> <p>I loved working on Wrist, I think it made lots of people want to do more! It created so many great opportunities.</p>	<p>It was really difficult getting everyone together at the same time and we could've done with getting to know each other informally in the beginning.</p> <p>I think there are key things that were missed in the beginning. Getting to know each other, having specific roles, team building work. This would have given us a better starting point.</p> <p>Some of it was great but everyone was busy and we didn't have commitment from everyone for everything. People mostly wanted to do their own thing and would put effort into their own projects.</p>
<p>I've learnt many skills that will help toward my pursuit of a creative career. I got more out than I expected. It opened up possibilities for different creative careers. e.g. prop making and set painting.</p> <p>Sometimes it was challenging working in the group, as I'm used to working on my own so it was outside my comfort zone, but that was a good thing in the end and gained confidence.</p> <p>I joined because I wanted to help people and it really helped me get out of the house and connect to a different group.</p>	<p>Communication was poor and we often didn't know in advance what was happening and where. Which made the process much more stressful.</p> <p>The organisation and communication could've been better but that comes with time and experience.</p> <p>Miscommunication with venue owners in the town was a struggle. It made me realise that I needed to be more vigilant with my planning. There were lots of issues with the vintage market and lots of learning.</p>
<p>I loved the carnival both the making and performing. The spray-painting session was a highlight. Also, the chance to be involved in HerSong was epic - being a part of something that raised up women's voices in a world that doesn't really do that well.</p>	<p>I felt we were over supervised. We shifted out of this into more agency toward the end of the summer.</p>



## FEEDBACK FROM CULTURE CAFE

Highlights	Room for improvement
Big reggae sound system - shaking the towns art cake to its roots!	Communications - lack of clarity in promoting the objective of Bridport 24.
Echoes and Embers - cool, young and out there.	Lack of time to build awareness.
Screening new stuff that doesn't usually happen in Bridport.	More outreach work to engage 'hard to reach' sectors of the community.
Celebrating local people and stories - George Biles exhibition is such a great partnership event.	Umbrella/ centrally co-ordinated publicity for all creative events. Time Out style listings for Bridport.
<b>What will a positive legacy for Bridport 24 look like?</b>	
Youth festivals and platforms. Longer term mentoring support for young adults. Young people being 'welcomed' for their creative skills and given the chance to show leadership.	
Continued development of good collaborations between arts organisations.	
More experimental and participatory events.	
More "Little bits of Berlin" in Bridport events.	
Ongoing commitments to 'seed fund' and then support new ideas sustained, increased funding for arts and culture in Bridport.	

# CONCLUSION

## **“I genuinely felt that Town of Culture was a triumph - particularly given the timescale and resources available!” Consultation response**

Accepting the offer to pilot Dorset Town of Culture has proved to be positive for the town and for the creative community:

- Bridport 24 has helped drive and demonstrate the value of arts and cultural organisations working together to deliver more content, more effectively. New collaborations as well as funding to continue to develop collaborations form a solid legacy for Bridport 24.
- Bridport 24 has significantly boosted funding for the arts and culture - both in year, to deliver Bridport 24 and into the longer term with new Service Level Agreements being struck with BAC and Lyric and new Arts Council funding coming forward to continue to support ongoing collaborations.
- Bridport 24 has been an accelerated learning process. Everyone involved in Bridport 24 worked hard to make the most of the opportunity of piloting the Town of Culture initiative. Lots of new and exciting activities took place and lots of learning took place.
- Bridport 24 experience will be valuable to other towns considering becoming a Town of Culture. Future programmed initiatives would benefit from:
  - Adequate lead in time to design (through consultation) the necessary structures and frameworks,
  - Dedicated resource and funding (no time limited) to ensure structured, ongoing support,
  - Longer term partnerships with youth-focused organisations to strengthen outreach and delivery,
  - A clearer framework for progression and long-term impact measurement, which also holds participants accountable for their level of engagement.
- Despite challenges, TOCIYA was a vital part of Bridport 24 and a valuable experiment; demonstrating the demand for youth-focused creative development opportunities in Bridport. The next step will be identifying ways to build on this foundation and integrate youth skills development more effectively into the long-term programming of the town's cultural organisations.

- Bridport 24 at its best was about providing a safe test bed for new events and projects. Taking risks and being a test bed for experimentation and supporting 'new' arts and cultural activities in the town shouldn't be restricted to a 6-month period of being in the county spotlight. A strong legacy for Bridport 24 will be evidence by:
  - Young adults having the support and confidence to continue to develop creative endeavours in the town;
  - New collaborations continuing and becoming an accepted part Bridport's cultural offer;
  - Organisations continuing to champion experimentation.
  
- Bridport 24 is not over - now is the time to keep the momentum going. Bridport 24 has supported new commissions and collaborations with many of the events looking to continue into 2025 and beyond:
  - Swift Town is planning a repeat programme of talks, walks and citizen science in May - July 2025.
  - Small World Festival will be return in September 2025.
  - BAC will be running a monthly Culture Cafe to build a community of support for the town's creatives, promoting collaboration and partnership. Already, new work is emerging from this regular gathering.
  - Greensleeves record label is bringing the successful Reggae night back to BAC in 2025, and through a collaboration with Clocktower Records, growing the offer to incorporate an exhibition of photographs from legendary music industry photographer Adrian Boot (a Bridport resident).
  - TOCIYA's community engagement and consultation work is developing into a possible interactive mural, which BAC plan to realise (pending additional funding being sourced).
  - The Quilt walkabout will return.
  - Youth Democracy event with Opera Circus to return.
  - Windrose Media Trust are exploring a 'Bridport Counter Culture' concept for possible delivery later in 2025.

# LEARNING

## Learning points emerging from Bridport 24 evaluation process:

**1. Sufficient lead in time is needed to make the most of the Town of Culture initiative.** With the announcement that Bridport was to be the pilot Dorset Town of Culture coming in January 2024 there was a mere 5 months to engage fully with the creative community and build the Bridport 24 programme. This turned out to be a frantic development phase; recruiting people, submitting funding bids and engaging with the community to build understanding and process new ideas.

Additional project funding from Arts Council England was secured, but not until after the programme delivery had started. The ACE funding was invaluable in supporting young adults and extending the diversity of the Bridport 24 programme. Everything had to be done in a rush and the feeling was that more time would have been beneficial in the longer term, to build collaborations and capacity to engage young adults.

The accelerated timeline shaped both the scope and structure of delivery. More generous time for Town of Culture programme development would have allowed for stronger planning, workflow management, and a more structured and outward looking commissioning framework.

**2. A six-month pilot period was too short to have impact.** Bridport 24 ran for 6 months (July – Dec). Feedback signalled that many felt this was too short a time period to enable the skills development and event experimentation that sat at the heart of Bridport 24 objectives. With additional funding arriving after the programme had started, many respondents report having to work to tight deadlines.

**3. Limited guaranteed funding.** At the outset the funding for Bridport 24 constituted a grant of £15,000 from Arts Development Company, matched with funding from Bridport Town Council. Significant effort was put into researching and submitting funding bids to secure the necessary additional resources to support the ambitions of Bridport 24.

**4. Working with young adults proved more challenging than anticipated.** A

diverse group of young adults were recruited with the intention that through Bridport 24 BAC would be able to offer skills training and mentoring support to help realise individual ambitions and practice. The pressure of time and budget impacted most on the scale and depth of development work that Bridport 24 could offer to young adults. Similarly, the young adults encountered challenges finding the time and the right opportunities for themselves.

**5. Commissioning approach.** A formal commissioning framework was now established due to time constraints and events and activities were allocated funding based on their alignment with Bridport 24 priorities (collaboration, new work, opportunities for young/emerging creatives), as well as feasibility and viability.

While this flexible approach allowed for a nimble and effective response, some less-developed ideas were missed that might have been better supported with a more structured process. This is also likely to have had most impact on young adults and individuals who have additional access needs. With more time, a clearer framework could have fostered an even more diverse and inclusive range of commissions. This approach also meant that some members of the cultural sector felt that they did not benefit – directly or indirectly – from Bridport 24 and resulted in them being disenfranchised from the programme.

**6. Lack of resource to make a ‘big’ splash with Bridport 24 publicity and promotion.**

People always want more promotion of projects. With a limited budget and a priority to support new collaborations and young adult skills and experience, there was little budget for big communication investments!

**7. Bridport was already ‘an eventful town.’** It was a challenge to decide whether to integrate Bridport 24 into the eventful town promotion or see it as a different, stand-alone entity. The lack of publicity budget of any scale plus feedback from the community engagement provided the steer to opt to integrate Bridport 24 into the Town’s existing events programme. This had consequences for the visibility of Bridport 24 as reported by the public.



# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX 1 - BRIDPORT ARTS CENTRE EVALUATION STATEMENT ON BRIDPORT 24

Bridport Arts Centre (BAC) was commissioned by Bridport Town Council to be the principal delivery partner for Bridport 24, the pilot 6 month for Town of Culture - an ambitious programme of events and skills development opportunities running from July to December 2024. While this commission provided a modest project management fee, its true value lay in the opportunities it presented, for BAC, for the local creative sector, and for the wider community.

Delivering Bridport 24 came with both rewards and challenges. This evaluation reflects on the successes, the learning and the legacy of the programme, helping to inform future cultural initiatives in Bridport and beyond.

## COMMISSIONING PROCESS AND SECTOR CAPACITY

The commissioning process for Bridport 24 was non-competitive due to the programme's tight timeline; an open call for delivery partners was not feasible within the available timeframe. BAC was invited to sector roundtable discussions when the pilot year was first proposed, alongside other organisations and individuals from Bridport's creative community. However, no other party put themselves forward to lead the programme, likely reflecting sector-wide capacity constraints. From the outset, BAC recognised the significant potential of Town of Culture -not only for the town and its communities but also as a strategic opportunity for the organisation. Some of the individuals and groups involved in early discussions had to withdraw due to resource limitations, BAC remained committed to ensuring the programme was realised.

Whilst BAC remains proud of all that has been achieved throughout this programme, we acknowledge that, timeline permitting, an open call process might have provided an opportunity to identify the type of challenges that are outlined below and mitigate against them.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND BENEFITS

### 1. Advancing BAC's strategic priorities

Bridport 24 provided a vital platform for BAC to advance two core strategic priorities from our 2024-2027 Business Plan:

- Re-engaging and strengthening community relationships
- Expanding our partnership work in and around the town, taking arts and culture beyond the building.

Through our role in this programme, we made meaningful progress in both areas, building new relationships with artists and community groups while redefining and strengthening existing partnerships. The impact of this work will extend beyond 2024 and into the future.

## **2. Strengthening our partnership with Bridport Town Council**

BAC has long benefited from a strong relationship with Bridport Town Council (BTC), underpinned by an annual Service Level Agreement and revenue funding. Our role in delivering Bridport 24 deepened this partnership, reinforcing our shared commitment to cultural development. The engagement of elected members, present at Bac board meetings throughout 2024, provided critical support throughout the programme, helping to elevate its profile and ensure its success.

## **3. Audience development and visibility**

Bridport 24 brought new audiences to BAC, with events such as Fingerprint Dance and the Portrait Challenge during the launch weekend, Small World Festival, Windrose Media (Rope, Hope and Dope) and Wrist (TOCIYA).

At the same time, BAC's established audience base, extensive mailing list, and events infrastructure provided essential support for Town of Culture events, ensuring strong attendance and engagement. Given the programme's limited marketing budget, this reciprocal benefit was a key strength of the partnership.

## **CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS**

### **1. TOCIYA: skills development programme**

One of the most significant yet challenging aspects of the Bridport 24 commission was TOCIYA. This initiative provided a valuable opportunity for BAC to engage younger members of the local creative community in a more meaningful and supportive way, offering hands-on experience and guidance in creative production, event management, and artistic development.

However, unlike event production and delivery, for which BAC have an outstanding track record, youth skills development is an area where we had limited contemporary experience. Despite the engagement of a Senior Mentor, and the in-kind support provided from the Lyric, this lack of an established practice in youth engagement meant that BAC had to navigate new challenges. These included:

Establishing a framework that supported meaningful connections with young and emerging creatives

Creating a programme that was accessible and responsive to different needs and skill levels.  
Ensuring adequate support structures for participants, acknowledging the significant economic and mental health challenges many young people currently face.



While the initiative successfully introduced young creatives to new opportunities, its long-term impact is harder to assess. Without dedicated funding, BAC capacity to support the legacy of TOCIYA remains uncertain. While we are committed to providing informal mentoring and guidance, sustaining structured youth skills development would require additional investment.

Future initiatives in this area would benefit from:

- A longer lead in time to design (through consultation) the necessary structures and frameworks
- Dedicated resource and funding (no time limited) to ensure structured, ongoing support,
- Partnerships with youth-focused organisations to strengthen outreach and delivery
- A clearer framework for progression and long-term impact measurement, which also holds participants accountable for their level of engagement

Despite the challenges, TOCIYA was a valuable pilot, demonstrating the demand for youth-focused creative development opportunities in Bridport. The next step will be identifying ways to build on this foundation and integrate youth skills development more effectively into BAC's long-term programming.

## **2. Compressed timeline and resource limitations**

The accelerated timeline shaped both the scope and structure of delivery. When BAC accepted the commission, our resources for 2024 were already largely allocated. While we recognised the programme's value and adjusted our capacity to accommodate it, the workload ultimately far exceeded the project management fee, with BAC contributing significant in-kind support.

Despite bringing in a freelance producer, who was an invaluable asset to the programme and the wider creative community, resource constraints meant that some areas of delivery were impacted. More lead-in time would have allowed for stronger planning, workflow management, and a more structured and outward looking commissioning framework (discussed in point 3 and 4).

## **3. Commissioning approach**

A formal commissioning framework was not established due to time constraints and events and activities were allocated funding based on their alignment with Bridport 24 priorities (collaboration, new work, opportunities for young/emerging creatives), as well as feasibility and viability.

While this flexible approach enabled BAC to respond nimbly and effectively, we likely missed some less-developed ideas that might have been better supported with a more structured process. This is also likely to have had most impact on individuals who have additional access needs. With more time, a clearer framework could have fostered an even more diverse and inclusive range of commissions.

This approach also meant that some members of the cultural sector felt that they did not benefit – directly or in-directly – from Bridport 24 and resulted in them being disenfranchised from the programme. This was compounded by the limited resources and capacity available to thoroughly communicate the decisions making process

#### **4. Capacity for outreach**

Given the resource limitations, BAC's ability to actively seek out lesser-known or emerging creative opportunities was limited. While we succeeded in commissioning a strong and varied programme, additional capacity for outreach could have ensured even greater representation and diversity within the programme.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

Bridport 24 was an exciting and ambitious pilot, and BAC is proud to have played a leading role in its delivery. The programme reinforced and publicly demonstrated the potential of cultural activity to have a positive impact on community building, place making and civic pride. The programme also strengthened the town's cultural infrastructure for the future.

Key learnings for BAC from this experience- particularly around comms as a tool for expectation management, commissioning processes, resource planning, and youth engagement - will help shape our approach to future large-scale cultural initiatives. There is strong potential to build on the momentum of Town of Culture, many of the ideas and connections made during this programme are continuing into 2025, ensuring that its legacy continues to benefit Bridport's creative community in the years to come/

## **APPENDIX 2 - TOCIYA EVALUATION SUMMARY**

TOCIYA (Town of Culture Initiative for Young Adults) was a central element of Bridport 24, aimed at providing a skills and leadership programme for the arts and culture focused on young people (18-25). Providing a step change in how young people are engaged, integrated and take a lead in the art and cultural activities in their own place. The programme sought to provide emerging creatives with professional development opportunities, hands-on experience in event production, and connections to established artists and organisations.

### **PROGRAMME OVERVIEW**

Under the initial guidance of the Town of Culture producer, between 10 and 18 members were recruited to TOCIYA (occasionally fluctuating to 20 but stabilising at a core of 10). This diverse group brought a range of creative practices and lived experiences. Participants initially committed to a structured engagement through fortnightly meetings, event planning responsibilities, 1:1 mentorship with experienced artists, and active involvement in budgeting, marketing, and project management. A senior mentor was also appointed to support and coordinate the group.

The overarching goals for TOCIYA participants included:

- Collaborative event production – designing, planning, and delivering creative activities.
- Exploring and activating new spaces for arts events.
- Building professional networks through partnerships with local organizations, community groups, and businesses.
- Being ambassadorial skills for Bridport 2024.
- Undertaking skills-based training in budgeting, risk assessment, and event planning.

Each member signed a participation agreement, ensuring commitment to training and engagement, and received a stipend for their contributions.

## KEY OUTPUTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Despite challenges, TOCIYA participants successfully produced and participated in a range of public events and initiatives. Some of the most impactful projects included:

- Piano of Joy Community Jam.
- WRIST Community Project.
- HERSONG Co-production.
- Youth Democracy Day.
- Puppetry Fish for Carnival.
- Pavilion of Regenerative Practice Workshops.
- Small World Festival Workshops.
- Human Rights Workshop (BAC).
- Creative Round Table with Established Artists

## CHALLENGES AND LEARNING

The programme faced several structural and logistical challenges, highlighting key areas for improvement in future initiatives:

**1. Limited Time for Team Development.** The rapid initiation of the programme meant that participants were expected to begin producing events before fully establishing group cohesion. This led to a sense of chaos (in communications) and uncertainty. A longer preparatory phase for team-building before event production would have been beneficial.

'We didn't have time to build a team, and without that, everything felt chaotic'

**2. Diverse Participation & Commitment Levels.** The group consisted of individuals with varying levels of availability, experience, and expectations, making it difficult to function as a cohesive 'production company.' Future iterations could benefit from a model where each participant works 1:1 with a mentor and is allocated a small budget to test ideas independently, rather than relying on collective production.

**3. Balancing Artistic & Production Roles.** Many participants saw themselves primarily as artists rather than event producers, yet much of the programme's focus was on logistics and management.

**4. Underutilisation of Mentorship Opportunities.** While the opportunity to work with established artists in the town was available, few participants took advantage of it. However, those who engaged found it inspiring and beneficial. Future programmes should find ways to encourage and facilitate stronger mentor-mentee engagement.

“One of the most positive experiences was taking members of TOCIYA to visiting established creatives in the town, it was really helpful and inspiring. But, so few of them took up the opportunity”

**5. Perceptions and Integration within Bridport 24.** Some participants viewed TOCIYA as a separate entity rather than an integral part of the wider Town of Culture programme. Additionally, structural decisions unintentionally created a sense of separation, making participants feel ‘othered’ rather than embedded in the existing arts community. Greater clarity on TOCIYA’s role within the broader project and stronger integration efforts could address this issue.

**6. Need for Clearer Expectations & Guidance.** While TOCIYA were encouraged to self-lead learning and embrace experimentation, clearer boundaries and more directive leadership could have helped participants navigate challenges more effectively.

## **MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE**

Several TOCIYA members participated in an evaluation process using the Most Significant Change methodology, which explored the personal impact of the programme. A common theme emerged: self-awareness. By participating in the programme, aspects of individuals’ characters, their weaknesses and strengths were revealed or reinforced.

“What I learned was that managing people isn’t about control; it’s about compassion. I found myself choosing support over outcomes, realising that being present, guiding, and holding space for young creatives was far more impactful than trying to force a perfect result.”

## **LEGACY AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES**

Despite its challenges, TOCIYA has had an impact on Bridport’s creative landscape:

- Stronger networks and collaborations have been established between young creatives and arts organizations such as Opera Circus, Oops Wow, BAC, Lyric Theatre, Small World Festival, and Ripple Workshop.
- Several under-30 creatives beyond the immediate TOCIYA group received support, including Chasing Cow and OffPiste (filmmakers), reinforcing a wider commitment to nurturing emerging talent.

The programme has highlighted the need for more structured, long-term support for young creatives in Bridport, creating an opportunity for future iterations with a more tailored approach.

## APPENDIX 3 - SELECTED QUOTES FROM ONLINE FEEDBACK

"The ToC team were helpful in giving us the encouragement, funds, and creative freedom to curate the event".

"I came late to the ToC concept but my planning meetings with Michael Armstrong were invaluable, as was the supportive and friendly input from Dee Fenton and Tristan Allsop at Bridport Arts Centre".

"Guided collaboration - it was a good exercise in working in genuine partnership with other organisations, particularly BAC. It is not easy for leaders to work together and TOC gave us a very strong focus and motivation to get things happening (partly due to the short time frame - but this did give a dynamism to practical working)".

"Fantastic - communicative, passionate, lively and realistic. Really pleased with what we achieved and many conversations that lead us forward in collaboration."

"Once I'd established (through a round-about route) who I needed to speak to, I found Michael Armstrong to be brilliantly supportive and helpful."

"Given the short time scale and tiny budget I felt proud of what was achieved and of the profile of it. There was constant problem solving, but everyone worked very flexibly and where things were not working, we were able to tweak or redesign our processes - it felt like a vibrant experiment".

"It gave me an opportunity to test out an idea I have been developing for some time. It gave me the opportunity to meet with other creatives in the town, not just the young people. I will feel more confident in approaching other people with ideas and proposals to collaborate in the future."

"Didn't seem to be a centralised point to promote all activities initially and given the many different ways to promote events - a cohesive plan of how to engage - should be set up early in the process".

"It demonstrated to me how much is happening in such a small town and how coming together can be useful - and use the learning to further our thinking about culture, support and growing our offer."

"It would be ace if the culture cafe sessions or something similar could continue. As I said above, an umbrella publicity channel for all of the cultural events in the town would be brilliant ... this could be an independent thing, or it could come from the Arts Centre, The Lyric or TIC?"

"The George Biles project was a particular highlight - it did exactly what is set out to do and resonated across the generations, generating such a strong sense of community. A coming together to celebrate place and craftsmanship".