

## **The Arts and Tourism in Torrige**

Report of the Executive Director of Environment, Economy and Culture

***Please note that the following recommendation is subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.***

**Recommendation: It is recommended that the Committee considers the report.**

### **1. Summary**

Torrige has a strong arts sector with the potential to engage wider audiences. Arts initiatives in this area could help to develop tourism in the district.

### **2. The Arts in Torrige**

The arts sector in Torrige is well-developed with several impressive facilities and resources. Beaford Arts, the longest-running rural arts organisation in the UK, has a national reputation for its residential arts centre at Greenwarren House while its archive of James Ravilious photography is of international importance. Both the Plough Arts Centre and the Burton Art Gallery & Museum would bring credit to much larger towns than Torrington and Bideford.

Appledore now has two events firmly established in the region's cultural calendar, with the book festival complementing the visual arts festival. The Bideford Folk Festival plans to build for next year on the achievements of 2009 which was its most successful season so far. Some of the area's key attractions include a significant arts element as part of their offer to visitors – e.g. Clovelly, Hartland Abbey and RHS Garden Rosemoor.

The district is also home to Community Arts Network and Seize the Moment which work extensively with local children and young people, as well as Wolf + Water Arts Company which operates more widely across Devon and far beyond. Within and alongside the groups and organisations, many individual artists and creative practitioners are based in the district. There are, for example, no less than 19 members of the prestigious Devon Guild of Craftsmen, including several with an international reputation.

### **3. Audiences and Markets**

The sector offers a broad range of local opportunities to engage in the arts by visiting exhibitions and festivals, attending performances, concerts and film screenings, or taking part in workshops and courses. Available statistics suggest that participation rates are high, particularly for a sparsely-populated area.

The potential audience or market for the sector can be divided into three main groups: residents of the North Devon area; visitors staying in North Devon; day visitors from beyond the area. Local residents are of course the primary market for much of the work throughout the year – e.g. many of the workshops arranged by the Plough or performances in village halls organised in partnership with Beaford Arts.

The festivals give these estimates for their visitor numbers in 2009: Appledore Book, 6,000; Appledore Visual Arts, 8,000; Bideford Folk, 15,000. At the buildings, estimates are for the

number of visits rather than visitors: Burton, including TIC, 139,000; Plough, 65,000. (RHS Garden Rosemoor reported 143,000 visits for the same year). With its residential courses, Beaford Arts provided 2,000 bed-nights at Greenwarren House (financial year 2009/10).

Appledore Arts estimates that 60% of visitors to the 2009 Visual Arts Festival came from North Devon. 26% were staying in the area with family or friends, or in holiday accommodation. Only 14% were day visitors from beyond the area. These figures suggest that there may be scope for attracting significantly more day visitors from beyond North Devon.

#### **4. Challenges and Opportunities**

Arts organisations in Torridge face a considerable challenge in reaching just a 'local' audience which is spread across the large area of North Devon. Even the larger organisations can struggle to extend effective marketing beyond residents to the area's visitor population, let alone stretch their efforts into southern Devon or neighbouring counties. Collaboration within shared marketing initiatives may offer the best chance of overcoming this problem.

Visit Devon is responsible for promoting the county to national and international markets. The website has an area devoted to Cultural Devon with information on local arts and crafts as well as links to cultural events and attractions: [www.visitdevon.co.uk/site/cultural-devon](http://www.visitdevon.co.uk/site/cultural-devon). There is potential for local arts facilities to make more use of this resource in their marketing.

There is also potential for the arts sector to work more closely with accommodation providers, particularly around events and festivals which draw part of their audience from beyond the local area. By working with event organisers, accommodation providers can be better prepared to respond to the needs of visitors to the area. In some enterprising initiatives, accommodation providers already work with local artists to provide specialist breaks such as painting weekends. Beaford Arts has its residential arts centre and the Yarner Trust offers residential courses at Welcombe. Working through the Devon Tourism Skills Network, the County Council has produced a toolkit for creative and tourism projects. This is an online resource to support creative and tourism businesses to work together through creating solid business and project plans: [www.devontourismadvice.co.uk/tacss](http://www.devontourismadvice.co.uk/tacss).

Although the arts sector in Torridge is well-developed in many ways, it does not have a strong profile outside the district. This certainly inhibits the growth of visitor numbers. A collective approach to marketing might also open up ways to develop a shared identity which is both more visible and more attractive to potential visitors than anything which a single organisation could hope to achieve on its own. A shared identity might reflect the traditional strengths of the area – in ceramics, for example – or relate to more modern developments, such as the arts policy recently adopted by the North Devon Biosphere.

As one of the six Area Tourism Partnerships in the county which work with Visit Devon, North Devon + can provide a supporting structure for new initiatives of this kind. The organisation is leading on the development of the Tourism Strategy for North Devon and Exmoor. Local arts organisations which want to pursue these initiatives can also seek support from Audiences South West, the regional agency which works with cultural organisations to increase engagement and build participation in culture.

## **5. Public Funding**

Public funding has played a major part in developing the current strength of the arts sector in the area. The Burton is a service provided by Torrridge District Council. Great Torrington Town Council gives annual funding to the Plough. Arts Council England regularly funds Beaford Arts and has made a number of one-off grants to other local organisations.

In 2007-10 Devon County Council awarded one-off cultural grants to Appledore Arts, Beaford Arts, the Burton and the Plough, as well as to Dance in Devon and the Two Moors festival for events at Clovelly Court and Rosemoor. Beaford Arts received arts investment from DCC throughout the three years, and the Plough gained a capital grant from the Investing in Devon programme. Elected members also offered support from their locality budgets. 2010/11 funding from DCC is currently being considered through the Cabinet Member decision process.

## **6. Sustainability Considerations and Carbon Impact Considerations**

Developing new and wider audiences for the arts in Torrridge is likely to have positive effects in both social and economic terms. The effect on carbon emissions could be negative and this problem will need to be addressed within any large-scale marketing initiative.

## **7. Legal Considerations and Risk Management Considerations**

There are no specific legal considerations. No risks have been identified.

## **8. Options and Conclusion**

This report is presented for the Committee to note bearing in mind the increasingly difficult financial environment in which local authorities and their partners now need to operate. For this reason the County Council cannot give any indication at the present time of its level of future funding for the arts after March 2011.

Chris McCarthy

### **Electoral Divisions: All in Torrridge.**

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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