

Appendix A: Nottinghamshire County Council Cultural Services Strategy Refresh (2022-2032)

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1. Foreword

Culture creates a sense of place. It brings people closer to the shared heritage, customs and assets that make their communities unique. Whether through local literature, history, art, sport, environment or ecology, our engagement with culture affects how we see ourselves in relation to where we live. Fostering a common cultural identity, whilst also acknowledging the diverse interests and perspectives that lie beneath it, can help to shape a coherent local offer, recognisable and attractive both to residents and to outside visitors and investors.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely tested the resilience of our society. It prevented, for long periods of time, the normal pursuit of leisure, sport, social engagement and even schooling, all of which are essential to the public's physical and mental health. During this period, Nottinghamshire's country parks, green spaces and libraries assumed a critical role in mitigating some of the pandemic's worst effects. By adapting their offers in line with Government restrictions, our cultural services remained able to provide accessible outdoor spaces for exercise and social interaction, and, in the case of our library network, a wide range of resources to stimulate the mind. Now, as we move towards recovery, these services will again be crucial in supporting the long-term wellbeing of our residents and communities.

The health of local environments is also key to our cultural infrastructure. With a varied profile of ancient woodland, rare natural habitats and medieval monuments, it is vital that our cultural offer is run sustainably. This applies not only to the conservation and heritage activities necessary for the preservation of our most well-known and beloved parks and buildings, but also to the use of environmentally-friendly management techniques, the adoption of new technologies to reduce our carbon footprint, and the engagement of local communities to increase environmental awareness. These priorities reflect a national trend towards sustainability, as the Government and local authorities seek to couple their COVID recovery with long-term environmental aims, creating a greener economy and public estate in the process. As a Council, this is something that we support, and we have recently committed ourselves to achieving Carbon Neutrality in all of our activities by 2030—a promise that our cultural services model will help to fulfil.

In Nottinghamshire we are determined to make the most of our cultural assets by maximising their accessibility. Nationally, the pandemic has exacerbated existing problems relating to participation and engagement. Variations in cultural participation based on socio-economic background and demography mean that certain groups have felt under-represented in the sector. As a Council, we must plan with this context in mind, and grasp previously unforeseen opportunities arising from the pandemic. The wider use of country parks and green spaces in lieu of indoor hospitality, as well as ongoing demand for in-person and online library services, has raised the profile of our cultural offer, and represents a chance to increase inclusion and to reach new audiences.

Looking to the future, it is important that we recognise the realities of the current economic context. In the last decade, contending with the legacy of the 2007 global financial crash, the Council had limited capacity to maintain the levels of funding necessary to run its cultural services directly. This led to the adoption of an innovative commissioning model, which delivered services via third-party partnerships. These arrangements were commissioned to secure the long-term sustainability of the Council's cultural offer by reducing service delivery costs, securing investment, improving facilities, and widening the range of available activities through partnership-working. The pandemic tested the resilience of this model, and it took all the expertise and flexibility of our contracted partners to make the adaptations necessary to maintain service viability and operation. Building on this experience, and with an established network of cultural partners, we are well placed to collaborate on future projects for the culture-led regeneration of communities, the enhancement of existing services and the achievement of our overarching strategic aims.

To this end, I am very pleased to introduce Nottinghamshire County Council's new Cultural Services Strategy. And I am confident that we will be able to harness our tremendous local culture to improve the lives of residents and address the opportunities and challenges we will face as a county over the next 10 years.

Councillor John Cottee,
Chairman of the Communities Committee

2. Purpose

This Strategy establishes the principles, themes and intended outcomes for the delivery of Nottinghamshire's cultural services over the next 10 years. It represents the Council's commitment to prioritise culture as a driver of prosperity, economic regeneration, environmental sustainability, community health and wellbeing and, in view of the recent pandemic, the county's long-term recovery from COVID-19.

The Strategy will encourage a shared local engagement with Nottinghamshire's history, landscape and artistic heritage, increasing connections between sites and services across the county and expanding the reach of traditional cultural assets via new digital technologies. This approach will improve access to and participation in a coherent local cultural offer and will support the County Council's *Visitor Economy Strategy* in achieving its aim of promoting a unique Nottinghamshire identity.

The aims and outcomes of this strategy form a high-level framework for the delivery of more detailed service plans, which will contain specific development objectives for individual sites and services. Outlining the short-to-long-term ambitions, project ideas and required actions for country parks and libraries, these bespoke plans will contribute to the achievement of the Strategy's overarching aims. They will also align with the Council Plan and other key corporate documents.

Having a clear strategy and supporting service plans will ensure that the Council and its partners are well-placed to take advantage of funding and investment opportunities for the enhancement of the county's cultural provision in the next decade.

3. Vision

By 2032, Nottinghamshire will have a more integrated, flexible cultural services offer that appeals and is accessible to all of its residents and communities, and that contributes both to their overall wellbeing and to the prosperity and environmental health of the county as a whole.

4. Culture in the County

Adopting a third-party delivery model in the last ten years has meant that our cultural offer has become more customer-focussed. It draws more deeply upon sector-wide expertise provided by contracted partners, allowing for more varied, high-quality experiences that reflect customer needs and interests, whilst also maintaining financial viability.

Now that we have a set of mature commissioning relationships, the Council is looking to refine its cultural offer and expand the activities and experiences available to residents through closer partnership-working. This involves strengthening the links between major cultural attractions, deepening their association with core historical and environmental themes, such as Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest, and maximising the raised profile afforded to our cultural assets by the increase in local tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nottinghamshire's cultural offer comprises country parks, historic buildings, libraries, archives and adult learning services, alongside world-class sporting facilities and events. It spans the whole of the county, encompassing areas of varying affluence, geography, population size and demographic composition. Our main attractions sit on major transport routes, as well as in proximity to the River Trent and large urban settlements, presenting exciting opportunities to improve connectivity between different sites.

Country Parks

Each of our country parks offers something different; and their individual histories and environmental contexts provide unique experiences for residents and visitors to the county.

Rufford Abbey

Set in 150 acres of woodland, meadow and gardens, Rufford Abbey Country Park is operated via a partnership with Parkwood Leisure, which was established in 2017. The site possesses both historical and ecological statutory designations. The 12th century Cistercian Abbey and its associated archaeology and topography have Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) status, as conferred by Historic England on behalf of the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). This part of the park also falls under English Heritage Guardianship. Local Nature Reserve status and Registered Historic Park and Gardens designations apply to the remaining grounds, contributing to the national cultural significance of the site.

Together with our statutory partners, the Council and Parkwood Leisure will work over the coming years to enrich the overall offer on the site. This will be achieved through improvements to existing infrastructure, expansion of educational resources for visitor interpretation, implementation of a varied

events schedule and work to improve the wider local transport network, making the park more accessible to residents and visitors. All of this will be done with due regard for our heritage and conservation obligations, ensuring that we preserve Rufford for future generations.

Sherwood Forest

As the home of Robin Hood and the Major Oak, Sherwood Forest is at the heart of Nottinghamshire's history and culture. Set in 450 acres, the park comprises an ancient woodland habitat with Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and National Nature Reserve (NNR) ecological designations. In 2015, the Council established a partnership with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The RSPB manage the Forest on the Council's behalf, undertaking conservation activities, including with local community groups and volunteers, and delivering large-scale annual events, with the Robin Hood Festival attracting around 40,000 visitors each summer.

Sherwood Forest has received significant capital investment in recent years. In 2018, a new £5m Visitor Centre was opened. This was funded by the Council and contributions from other local partners. Since opening, the new Centre has been successful in enhancing visitor experience through improved hospitality, historical interpretation and gift shop facilities. It has also allowed for the site of the old visitor centre to be 'reclaimed' by the woodland, an action key to the long-term health of the Forest.

We will continue to work with the RSPB to explore future funding opportunities, making the most of the Robin Hood story and expanding the site's appeal through new event ideas and digital initiatives.

Holme Pierrepont and the National Water Sports Centre

Holme Pierrepont is unique. Located in Rushcliffe Borough, in the south of the county, it comprises a 270-acre country park, which also hosts the National Water Sports Centre (NWSC), a renowned elite sport facility.

As a country park, Holme Pierrepont offers a range of hospitality and catering outlets, campsite accommodation, family activities, including archery and rock climbing, and, of course, open green spaces for walks beside the River Trent. The NWSC supplements this outdoor offer with a gym, indoor fitness suite and exercise classes. It also provides a venue for world-class athletes, including Team Great Britain, to train in white water rafting, canoeing, kayaking and regatta rowing.

Water sport activities are also open to the public, with the Council's partner, Serco Leisure, contracted in 2013 to operate the site, offering classes and activities overseen by specialist staff, and in partnership with national sporting bodies, including British Canoeing. Each year, the site hosts large-scale events, including the Outlaw Triathlon and British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) Regatta, which attract thousands of participants and visitors from across the country. The Council and Serco also work with local partners on community outreach, including with schools and universities to promote water sports, and Emergency Services to raise awareness around water safety.

We will work over the next decade to develop the site further as a critical cultural asset, working with partners to secure external investment and to deliver new, ambitious projects. In particular, we will seek to improve the site's accommodation offer and, where possible, link its activities to wider tourism initiatives across the county.

Bestwood

The Council formed a partnership with Gedling Borough Council (GBC) in 2017, who assumed

responsibility for operation of the 650-acre Bestwood Country Park site. The park comprises a varied landscape, used for walking, cycling, horse-riding, and local sporting events, such as Parkrun. It also has numerous habitats of different ecological sensitivity and significance, including extensive woodland and the Mill Lakes. In 2020, Bestwood was awarded the prestigious Green Flag Award, the internationally recognised standard for environmental management of green spaces and parks.

The area's industrial heritage is embodied by the Grade II listed Victorian Winding Engine House, located near to the park's main entrance. This former mining infrastructure dates to 1876 and provides a historic focal point for residents and visitors. As well as guided tours, visitors have access to a popular community café in the adjacent Dynamo House, run by the Friends of Bestwood volunteers, who work closely with Council officers on matters affecting the Engine House and the wider park.

Alongside opportunities to maximise engagement with local history and heritage, the park and neighbouring Council land also have significant environmental potential. Adding to the ecological and conservational work already undertaken by site staff, certain areas of former pit tip and mining land have been identified as suitable for large-scale environmental projects, including the Trees for Climate planting scheme. Such initiatives will help to expand publicly accessible woodland and contribute to the carbon offsetting objectives of the Council's *Corporate Environment Strategy* and 2030 carbon neutrality target.

The Council and GBC work closely with volunteers to ensure that the site is properly conserved. Community engagement activities are also supported by key local stakeholders, including the Friends of Bestwood group and the Local Parish Council, with whom we will continue to work in order to develop the site and meet the future needs of residents and visitors.

Library Services

Inspire

Nottinghamshire's library network consists of over 60 library buildings and three mobile library vehicles, which provide varied services within our local communities. In 2016, the Council established Inspire - Culture, Learning, Libraries, a Charitable Community Benefit Organisation, to deliver cultural and learning services across the county. Since its establishment, Inspire has successfully delivered various aspects of the county's cultural offer, including:

- Archives and Heritage
- Arts in the community
- Learning and Skills Service
- Education Library Service
- Instrumental Music Teaching in Schools
- Nottinghamshire Music Hub
- Public Libraries
- Records Management for the County Council
- Youth Arts

Working with Inspire, the Council has been able to improve its cultural services by expanding the range of activities available to residents and increasing the efficiency of management processes, including in specialist areas, such as Archives and Records Management. The Council and Inspire have also worked together to make physical improvements to the county's library network, with over 35 successful new-build and refurbishment projects having been delivered in recent years. In 2020, the Council's Finance and Major Contracts Committee approved a five year extension to the Inspire contract, recognising the success of the commissioning relationship over the previous contract

period, and, indeed, its importance in maintaining community services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inspire's swift adaptation of its offer in response to COVID-19 was acknowledged in the findings of the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review, which took place in February 2021. The Review Team comprised senior Councillors from other local authorities, professional leads, LGA associates and a senior manager from the Arts Council England (ACE). Over two days, they interviewed key stakeholders, including Inspire staff, and Council leadership and Members, and reviewed documents against a number of key lines of enquiry. Areas of interest included membership engagement and volunteering, impact and performance, customer journey and innovation. The Review Team also considered lessons learnt about the library service from the COVID-19 crisis, how these might affect future vision and strategy and how Inspire's role could evolve after the pandemic.

The Review found that Inspire had successfully expanded its virtual offer, re-engineered its website and provided 'valued support to customers seeking information and resources' at a time when face-to-face services were unavailable. It also commended the provision of home delivery, and click and collect and mobile services, which ensured that Inspire continued to offer 'the fullest possible' array of 'safe and legal' services during the pandemic. These actions were driven by Inspire's 'unwavering focus on customer and community' and showed that, whilst it had been fulfilling its aims and mission 'very effectively' since 2016, it also has the potential to assume an even more prominent strategic role in the county as 'the front door to Council services'.

We will use this Strategy to build on the Council's strong partnership with Inspire, and, in light of the findings of the Peer Review, develop the relationship's strategic role, helping to address both the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the long-term objectives of the Council Plan.

5. Principles

The themes, outcomes and actions of the new Cultural Services Strategy will follow five key principles. These principles will, in turn, form part of the investment criteria for individual site and service plans. Cultural Services over the next 10 years will:

1. Contribute to the achievement of the Council's short-to-long-term aims and commitments, as expressed in key corporate documents, including the *Council Plan*, *Visitor Economy Strategy* and *the Corporate Environment Strategy*.
2. Support the long-term sustainability and resilience of the Council's Cultural Offer, contributing to the county's recovery from COVID-19 and sustaining the financial viability of value-for-money cultural services.
3. Enhance customer experience and broaden the appeal of our key cultural assets.
4. Protect the longevity of historically and ecologically sensitive sites and assets, whilst also making them more accessible to the public.
5. Improve the mental and physical wellbeing of our residents and communities.

Adherence to these principles will ensure that we deliver cultural services that are focussed on the immediate and long-term needs of our residents, and that contribute to the County's overall prosperity in the coming years.

6. Themes, Outcomes and Actions

Our themes have been derived from sector-wide research and discussions with key local partners and stakeholders, and reflect the main priorities and issues related to cultural services in Nottinghamshire:

- *Place and Identity*
- *Health and Resilience*
- *Access and Participation*
- *Partnerships and Collaboration*

Each of these will generate a set of desired outcomes, supported by the delivery of a number of key actions.

The four themes, and their associated outcomes and actions, should not be viewed in isolation; rather, they have been developed with mutual delivery in mind: achievements in one thematic area will yield achievements in the others. They will also contribute to the delivery of wider corporate objectives, and will be underpinned by the specific, bespoke projects and investment ideas contained within individual site and service plans.

Theme 1: Place and Identity

Thematic Statement

To develop Nottinghamshire's distinctive cultural identity through the creation, maintenance and improvement of infrastructure, services and activities that increase the affinity of residents with their home county and enhance the appeal of our attractions to external visitors and investors.

Context

National funding bodies, such as Arts Council England (ACE) and the UK Heritage Lottery Fund, have prioritised the development of 'place identities' in their long-term strategies. This entails the consolidation of local cultural themes, assets and services into a shared brand. Affiliation with local culture, whether through physical assets, such as country parks, environments, and heritage, or through ideas, as communicated by the arts and other creative projects, can help to overcome issues of inclusion, encourage greater participation and promote community cohesion. It can also engage communities in conservational and environmental causes, cultivating a sense of shared ownership over, and guardianship of, ecologically and historically sensitive sites and habitats.

Developing a strong cultural identity also has commercial benefits. Coherent local offers, well connected both thematically and in terms of transport and infrastructure, are better placed to be marketed to residents and visitors, as well as to prospective investors and national funding bodies. In fact, the Council's *Visitor Economy Strategy* recognises that 'Nottinghamshire needs a much clearer identity and a higher profile in the marketplace', supported by 'more joined up experiences'. It identifies the county's 'great natural capital, inspiring stories' and 'appealing heritage' as opportunities for sustainable growth, which can be 'channelled' into a unique and recognisable brand.

'Place-making' does not entail the loss or disregard of local differences. Rather, the individual histories and contexts of our sites, environments, buildings and people will be recognised and celebrated as equal components of the county's cultural brand. In other words, it is the variety of Nottinghamshire's cultural offer that makes it a sustainable whole, a shared identity with which all residents can engage, whatever their circumstances or background.

Outcomes

This theme will develop and/or maintain:

- A more defined Nottinghamshire identity and sense of place.
- A better-connected cultural services network.
- An improved set of visitor experiences across the county.
- The longevity of Nottinghamshire's most significant physical assets.

Actions

These outcomes will be delivered by completing the following actions:

a) Capital and Revenue Investment

- Work with partners to secure external investment in projects that will improve connections between cultural services and assets in our communities, and increase the accommodation offer at key sites.
- Work with partners to secure investment to maximise the use of existing library and community buildings.

b) Infrastructure

- Improve connectivity between sites and services through the implementation of a targeted transport plan.
- Improve tourism signage to help connect local cultural attractions.

c) Events

- Work with cultural partners to deliver large-scale, nationally significant events, such as the Tour of Britain cycling race.
- Work with cultural partners to expand and refine existing local events, such as the Robin Hood Festival, to widen appeal and increase visitor numbers.

d) Marketing and Branding

- Co-ordinate partner campaigns to align cultural assets, including country parks, more closely with one another and to promote Nottinghamshire as a visitor destination via joint branding initiatives, such as 'Nottinghamshire Day'.
- Strengthen thematic links between local attractions, using shared historical, literary and environmental heritage.
- Use digital technology to expand the appeal of our main cultural attractions and to reach new target audiences.

e) Interpretation and Education

- Increase local understanding of our main cultural assets through improved interpretation and visitor engagement, including via innovative digital technologies.
- Increase awareness of the historical and ecological sensitivity of our sites, including Rufford Abbey Country Park and Sherwood Forest, and engage visitors in conservation through events and volunteering opportunities.

Our Council Plan

This theme supports the delivery of the draft *Council Plan's* commitment to ensure that Nottinghamshire:

- Attracts more investment in infrastructure, the economy and green growth.
- Is an attractive and vibrant county.
- Enjoys improved transport and connectivity.

Our Visitor Economy

This theme supports the delivery of the *Visitor Economy Strategy's* commitment to:

- Develop a social media profile for Nottinghamshire as a destination across key channels.
- Deliver best-in-class visitor experiences at County owned visitor assets.
- Stimulate investment in tourism facilities that help unlock tourism growth potential.
- Ensure visitor-focused transport and digital infrastructure that is part of the experience.

Our Environment

This theme supports the delivery of the Corporate Environment Strategy's and carbon neutrality target's commitment to:

- Increase the use of public transport and promote greener active modes of travel.
- Conserve and enhance Nottinghamshire's built and archaeological heritage.
- Improve the sustainability of Council owned land and property.

Theme 2: Health and Resilience

Thematic Statement

To use cultural services to develop healthier and more resilient communities.

Context

The Health and Resilience Theme applies to every aspect of our cultural services model. As well as the physical and mental wellbeing of Nottinghamshire residents, the outcomes and actions of this theme consider the environmental and financial sustainability of our main attractions and commissioning relationships.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unique public health challenges, and compounded certain pre-existing national and local issues. The Council's own [COVID-19 Recovery Framework, 2021-2022](#) acknowledges that the virus and associated social restrictions 'led to an exacerbation of the social and lifestyle determinants of poor health' in Nottinghamshire, including 'unemployment, reduced educational achievement...poor diet and inactivity'. Our country parks and libraries were key to addressing these issues. Not only did venues such as Rufford Abbey, Sherwood Forest and Holme

Pierrepont provide much-needed spaces for exercise and social interaction, they also offered exposure to local history and heritage, increasing a sense of connection with the county and its local communities at a time of unprecedented loneliness and isolation. Our Libraries, too, by offering innovative digital resources and engaging alternatives to in person cultural services, were able to reach those residents unable to go to public places during the pandemic.

To capitalise on the good work undertaken during the pandemic and to strengthen the link between culture and wellbeing, we must continue to monitor and maintain the health and resilience of our cultural services. The longevity of our heritage and natural habitats and key buildings, especially those with national historical significance, is intrinsic to the success of this new Strategy. If we want to promote the health benefits of cultural engagement, we must, as a priority, ensure that our principal cultural attractions are themselves in excellent health. This will be achieved by continued development of our close partnerships, identified under theme 4, which help to care for and provide the various services in our country parks and libraries. The long-term financial sustainability of our commissioning relationships is also crucial. Using contractual governance arrangements to monitor and review partner performance, we will continue to ensure that resources are used wisely, that value-for-money services are delivered as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible, and that our cultural services remain financially viable.

Underpinning each of this theme's priorities is a commitment to environmental sustainability. The county's health, and indeed that of the planet, depends upon services such as ours leading by example and taking the necessary steps, large and small, to preserve our local environment and amend our more harmful behaviours. The fulfilment of local environmental obligations through a greener cultural offer will support the Council's wider effort to achieve Net Carbon Zero by 2030.

Outcomes

This theme will develop:

- Cultural services as health and wellbeing assets.
- Greener, more sustainable cultural services.
- Healthier environments and public spaces.
- Stronger commissioning relationships with key third-party partners.

Actions

These outcomes will be delivered by completing the following actions:

a) *Personal Health and Wellbeing*

- Better integrate the unique country park and sport and leisure offer at Holme Pierrepont Country Park and the National Water Sports Centre, and increase resident participation in activities that use both the open green space and world class sports facilities on site.
- Consolidate the reputation of country parks as places for outdoor exercise and fitness, both for individuals and community groups.

b) *Environmental Sustainability*

- Identify and deliver green-growth development opportunities across our main sites and services.

- Work with partners, volunteers and the local community to develop and support more sustainable site management practices, in terms of conservation, heritage and carbon reduction and offsetting activities.
- Work with partners and key local stakeholders, including volunteers, to develop and deliver up-to-date conservation and ecology plans, which include the environmental and heritage activities essential to the health and resilience of our sites.
- Undertake climate resilience planning, including flood prevention, to ensure that our main sites are adapted and resilient to changing environmental conditions.

c) *History and Heritage*

- Undertake and support activities that maintain and improve the condition of our heritage assets.
- Ensure that sites are operated responsibly and in full compliance with the requirements of heritage and conservation legislation.

d) *Financial Resilience and Sustainability*

- Work with partners to identify and deliver viable 'invest-to-save' initiatives, improving the income generating capacity of key sites and increasing financial sustainability of cultural services by reducing the Council's contractual subsidies.
- Use contractual governance arrangements to monitor and review partner performance, ensuring that value-for-money services are being delivered as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.

e) *Communications*

- Promote sport and healthy lifestyle events and activities, working with partners at Holme Pierrepont and the National Water Sports Centre, as well as other country parks, green spaces and libraries.
- Work with Inspire as a strategic partner to promote Public Health messaging, including on fitness, health and wellbeing, via its library service and educational channels.
- Promote environmental messages and educational materials via Council and partner communication channels.

Our Council Plan

This theme supports the delivery of the draft Council Plan's commitment to ensuring that:

- Communities and families are resilient and well supported.
- People are healthier and live independent lives for longer.
- We protect our environment and reduce our carbon footprint.

Our Visitor Economy

This theme supports the delivery of the *Visitor Economy Strategy's* commitment to:

- Create an engaging and distinctive green and active countryside experience.

Our Environment

This theme supports the delivery of the Corporate Environment Strategy's and carbon neutrality target's commitment to:

- Limit the negative impacts of a changing climate on Nottinghamshire's environment
- Protect essential habitats and improve biodiversity on all sites
- Help towards achieving net gains in biodiversity, supporting the delivery of the Local Biodiversity action plan.

Theme 3: Access and Participation

Thematic Statement

To make Nottinghamshire's Cultural Offer more accessible and inclusive, encouraging wider community participation and engagement.

Context

Over the last 10 years, the Council and its partners have worked closely to make our cultural services more inclusive. Whether through improvement of physical assets, ensuring that sites and buildings are correctly configured for disabled access, or refinement of interpretation materials, events and activities to broaden the appeal of our offer, we have strived successfully to increase the opportunities for cultural engagement across the county. The COVID-19 pandemic has, however, reinforced how much more work can be done, nationally and locally, through education, technology and physical access, to broaden participation in the cultural sector. For the Council, this means that our country parks, sporting facilities and library services must be made appealing, accessible and affordable to the widest possible audience, meeting the needs of all of the county's residents, whatever their background.

Educational attainment is key to accessing culture. Basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, are the foundation not only for academic achievement and employment, but also for confident engagement in the arts and culture. Our Library and Learning Services, operated by Inspire, have become critical educational and cultural assets for younger and older Nottinghamshire residents, delivering county-wide reading programmes, maths and English courses, creative writing and literature lessons, music tuition, and various training and apprenticeship schemes. Now, with a more developed online programme, refined and enhanced during the pandemic, Inspire are better placed than ever to extend the reach of local culture through education. This is especially important for those children and young people whose education was interrupted due to COVID-19. The programmes offered by Inspire will help to make up for lost education and mitigate against the potential loss of cultural engagement this could entail.

Technology can also help to improve cultural access. Offering a blend of digital and physical services gives access to culture to those who may not be able to travel to a physical site, such as a country park or library. During the pandemic, this became especially important in maintaining service access during periods of social restriction. In the future, we will continue to explore how digital technology can help our cultural offer to adapt to changing customer requirements and habits, ensuring that it remains attractive and available to as wide an audience as possible. This will involve technology like 5G connectivity. Since 2019, the Council has been leading on the 5G Connected Forest Project, which brings together local authorities, universities and technology providers to develop test-beds for new digital connectivity and augmented reality experiences. These explore how improved technological infrastructure can be used to enhance visitor experiences, encourage new target

audiences to visit and engage with the histories of country parks, such as Sherwood and Rufford, and even help with environmental activities through conservation management applications.

In recognising how digital technology can make culture more appealing and accessible to our communities, we must be mindful of a still persistent 'digital divide'. The pandemic accelerated the trend towards digital service provision; it also highlighted that some residents felt less able to engage with remote, online services. This applies especially to learning services; and we will work with partners, such as Inspire, to address these challenges, and ensure that no one is excluded due to a lack of digital equipment, proficiency or confidence.

The pandemic reiterated the importance of outdoor spaces to local people of all backgrounds. Whilst digital technology helped to overcome social isolation in lockdown, it was our country parks and green spaces to which residents turned in record numbers as restrictions eased. As explored in Theme 2, this trend was important to the maintenance of public health after a period of inactivity. Sport England's 10-year Strategy, '[Uniting the Movement](#)', aims to capitalise on increased outdoor activity during COVID and 'create and protect places and spaces that make it easier for people to be active'. It recognises that, 'for too long, people with the most to gain from being active have been the least able to take part', due to a number of societal inequalities. The Strategy views 'community spaces', such as parks, as having a wider reach than traditional sporting facilities; they 'may never be perfect competition or training spaces, but they attract people who might never go to a sports club, leisure centre or private gym'. In the case of Holme Pierrepont, which combines a country park with indoor and outdoor sporting facilities, we can offer access to green space and dedicated sport amenities on one site. Together with our other parks, Nottinghamshire is well placed to promote its varied portfolio as a network of 'active spaces', with the added attraction of heritage and ecology offers, in the case of Rufford, Sherwood and Bestwood, to encourage all residents, not just those with sporting interests, to get outdoors and be active.

Outcomes

This theme will support the development of:

- A more accessible and varied cultural offer with wider appeal.
- Recognition of our cultural offer among new audiences.
- More opportunities for community involvement and engagement.

Actions

a) Capital and Revenue Investment

- Work with partners to identify and apply for suitable funding opportunities designed to improve the inclusivity and accessibility of facilities at our sites for residents and visitors.

b) Communication

- Promote inclusive and accessible events and activities more widely via the Council's and partners' digital communication channels.
- Work with partners to support the aims of such initiatives as the British Sign Language Charter (2017).
- Ensure that cultural services communications are in standardised accessible formats.

c) Physical and Digital Access

- Ensure that sites are made as accessible as possible, both in terms of building access and local transport provision.
- Promote digital literacy and skills to reduce digital exclusion.
- Work with partners to adapt buildings, where required, for hybrid physical-digital use, to accommodate in-person and online activities.

d) Environment

- Involve more people, from different backgrounds, in conservation and ecological activities, increasing opportunities for residents to contribute to the long-term environmental sustainability and biodiversity of our sites.

e) History and Heritage

- Undertake and support activities that will lead to a wider range of people being involved in local heritage.
- Provide more learning opportunities, including through digital initiatives, to improve knowledge and understanding of local heritage among Nottinghamshire's communities.

f) Events

- Work with partners to provide more diverse events programmes, widening the appeal of our cultural offer to new audiences.

g) Sport

- Work with partners to create 'active environments' and promote wider involvement in sport at sites such as Holme Pierrepont.

h) Education

- Work with partners, such as Inspire, to use our cultural services network to support educational attainment and catch-up, following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Use library-based initiatives to promote reading across the county.

Our Council Plan

This theme supports the delivery of the draft Council Plan's commitment to ensuring that:

- Communities and families are resilient and well supported.
- People have the education and skills they need to get good local jobs.

Our Visitor Economy

This theme supports the delivery of the *Visitor Economy Strategy's* aim to:

- Create a more accessible and sustainable Visitor Economy. Improve the accessibility of Nottinghamshire's main visitor attractions.

Our Environment

This theme supports the delivery of the *Corporate Environment Strategy and the 2030 carbon neutrality target's* commitment to:

- Promote environmental volunteering opportunities with community partners and residents.

Theme 4: Partnerships and Collaboration

Thematic Statement

To develop and maintain mutually beneficial local and regional partnerships, and improve our cultural services offer through effective collaboration.

Context

Partnerships and collaboration already underpin Nottinghamshire's cultural offer. Due to the nature of our commissioning model, the Council has, over the last decade, established a wide range of positive working relationships with local and national organisations. From large private sector contractors to neighbouring local authorities and volunteer and community groups, we have worked with partners to deliver cultural services that draw on the widest possible range of expertise. Financially, these relationships have also secured the viability and resilience of our services, allowing continued operation within tighter budget constraints imposed since the 2008 recession. This theme seeks to reaffirm and refresh this collaborative approach in light of the Council's latest strategic documents, and, in turn, the main lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Balancing sector-specific knowledge and resources with commercial imperatives has been a key consideration in the award and management of contracts for our country parks and library services. Essential in striking this balance is the fulfilment of statutory obligations designed to preserve the safety, sustainability and longevity of our cultural attractions. To this end, due to the complexity of our offer, which straddles a number of specialisms, the relationships the Council and its contracted partners have with external agencies and statutory organisations are crucial. Managing sites with historic buildings and grounds, and offering sporting activities, such as white-water rafting, requires open communication with relevant national and local bodies, upon whose expertise and advice we and our contracted partners can draw. In this way, close collaboration with key agencies ensures that, for specialist areas of responsibility, such as heritage and conservation and water sports, the Council and its contracted commercial partners are able to follow best practice and remain legally compliant, both in day-to-day operations and in the planning and delivery of large-scale strategic projects.

Collaboration also has a number of wider community benefits, including for access and inclusion and place-making. Working with partner organisations and local volunteers can help to make our cultural services more efficient and appealing. On a small scale, this applies to the co-ordination of voluntary ecological and conservation activities by site rangers, as at Bestwood Country Park. Other sites, including Sherwood, also engage with local schools, involving class groups in conservation and heritage tasks. Local residents and volunteers have even in the past been involved in archaeological excavations at Rufford Abbey; and the operators of the National Water Sports Centre at Holme Pierrepont often engage with local schools and universities to widen access to water sport activities and raise water safety awareness. These examples show the role of country parks in fostering collaborative and voluntary activities and in strengthening local affiliation with, and understanding of, cultural attractions through opportunities for closer involvement with essential operational and conservation activities.

On a larger scale, programmes such as the Miner2Major initiative, a five-year Landscape Partnership Scheme (2019-2023), supported by the UK Heritage Lottery Fund, have sought to engage local communities through heritage and conservation projects. Involving numerous local partners, including the County Council, Inspire, the RSPB and local Friends Groups, M2M seeks to promote the Sherwood Forest area, which stretches from Bestwood to Ollerton, Mansfield to Rufford Abbey, 'as a distinctive, recognisable and appreciated landscape'. It also seeks to 'increase the commitment of local people to appreciate and safeguard the heritage' of the area 'through a programme of targeted activities'. Using its partnerships to reach the widest possible audience, M2M demonstrates how collaborative projects can provide opportunities for community engagement in specific conservation activities, with tangible benefits for the 'Health and Resilience' of our main ecological and historical assets, and, simultaneously, cultivate a sense of local ownership, or 'Place Identity', through wider 'Access and Participation'.

Inspire's Learning programme exemplifies successful multi-agency partnerships in the education sector. Strong relationships with Nottinghamshire's local schools, commercial learning providers, employers and district councils has helped to develop a curriculum, for children and adults, aimed at the specific needs of different parts of the county. Using intelligence provided by local partners, Inspire have been able to tailor their learning offer to address the particular educational gaps and skills shortages affecting different communities. They have also, by working closely with the Council's Integrated Children's Disability Service (ICDS), created courses aimed at children with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs), and, in partnership with Further Education colleges, employers and the Council's supported internships Team, offered pathways into employment for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Our Library Services also have a successful record of developing partnerships. With a network of 60 libraries, spanning the entire county, Inspire are responsible for delivering services to communities of varying size, affluence and cultural engagement. This requires a flexible, collaborative approach to library services, in order to meet the specific needs of residents in different parts of Nottinghamshire. In smaller rural settlements, for example, where library hours are often fewer than in urban areas due to lower footfall, communities and local stakeholder groups have been consulted on ways in which libraries might be used more effectively. This has yielded a number of 'multi-use' and 'co-location' partnerships, in which Parish Councils and other local stakeholder groups use the local village library as a base for their staff and services, and, in doing so, create a community hub. These hubs have then been able to draw in school and volunteer groups and local clubs to broaden the offer available to residents. Building adaptations and refurbishments have also been used to make libraries more flexible, with moveable shelving and open plan layouts more suited to collaborative arrangements and community use. This approach can, in more urban settings, even stimulate economic regeneration. Multi-use hubs, which include libraries, health services, hospitality and retail are becoming increasingly common, nationally, as a means to revitalise ailing high-streets. These arrangements require close partnership working between local authorities, library services and partners, such as the NHS, and will be supported, where possible, by the Council and Inspire.

Outcomes

This theme will develop and/or maintain:

- Stronger, more resilient partnerships with contracted partners and public, voluntary and commercial operators across the sector.
- Stronger partnerships with key external agencies and statutory bodies, including Historic England and English Heritage.
- Close collaboration with local and regional partners and stakeholders to improve services and deliver large-scale projects.
- A more closely connected county-wide cultural offer.

Actions

These outcomes will be delivered by the completing the following actions:

a) Revenue and Capital Investment

- Broker and co-ordinate local and regional partnerships to attract investment and bid successfully to national funding programmes.

b) Service Delivery

- Share information and intelligence with local and regional partners to identify best practice models and improve service delivery.
- Work in partnership with other Council services to identify and deliver sustainable service improvements.

c) Governance

- Improve current partnership arrangements by applying lessons learnt from the last 10 years and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Explore the possibility of creating new partnerships, with a view to supporting the outcomes and actions of Theme 1.

d) History and Heritage

- Work with Heritage partners, including Historic England and English Heritage, to plan, co-ordinate and deliver projects that maintain and improve the condition of our key historic and heritage sites.

e) Environment

- Lead and contribute to local and regional partnerships to secure investment for green initiatives that will improve the sustainability of Nottinghamshire's cultural offer.
- Support local engagement with conservation and heritage activities through partnerships, such as the Miner2Major Scheme.

Our Council Plan

This theme supports the draft Council Plan's commitment to the delivery of:

- A culture that supports innovation, collaboration and partnership working.
- Smart resourcing and governance that ensures value for money and resilience.

Our Visitor Economy

This theme supports the delivery of the *Visitor Economy Strategy*'s commitment to:

Work collaboratively with local authorities, businesses and other partners on its Visitor Economy Strategy as it evolves.

Our Environment

This theme supports the delivery of the Corporate Environment Strategy's and the 2030 carbon neutrality target's commitment to:

- Encourage and support our partners and subsidiary companies on delivering their own environmental agendas.
 - Improve the sustainability of Council owned land and property.
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7. Governance

Progress towards the achievement of the aims of this Strategy will be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis and reported to Council Members at relevant committees.

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