BURNLEY IS AN ART FESTIVAL







Imagine for a moment if Burnley wasn't a town in Lancashire, but a festival for art.

365 days of the year.

A big celebration of all forms of wonderful creativity.

What would it look like? What would it feel like?

And what would you doing there?



About Us

Burnley's Creative Alliance is an open group of artists and makers who live or work in the town. We're interested in imagining Burnley and Padiham as more creative places to live, work and visit.

The Alliance has been bringing creative people together for over a decade, providing a social and supportive framework through which our community strives to make great things happen, right here.

There's no membership to join us, you just need to be passionate about your creative practice and want to work with other likeminded people to help develop and share it.

We see Burnley as a festival waiting to happen and we're curious about who might come and what they might contribute.





There are Openings

In 2019 BC (Before Coronavirus), we held a series of open events across the arts, over a long weekend, called Openings.

Over 70 artists and makers opened their doors, or did a show, or ran a workshop or made something brand new. 100's of people got involved and 1000's watched.

We used this opportunity to ask everybody what they thought about 'art' in Burnley and commissioned a report based on what people said. Our hope is that the report provides a bit of narrative around where the town sits in terms of a creative culture and that it can be the start of a bigger plan to make Burnley the best festival ever.

You can read the report's findings and recommendations on the following pages.

Burnley's Cultural Narrative

Burnley, like many post-industrial towns, is struggling with the challenges of deprivation. The town falls far behind the country as a whole when it comes to education or job opportunities and it suffers large economic inequalities, even within the Borough.

Burnley's location provides for easy travel to nearby urban conurbations like

Manchester. When it comes to the arts, this proximity
results in a significant talent and audience drain.

Many young people who want to work in the cultural or
creative sectors end up commuting, or moving away in search of
opportunities. Audiences are drawn away from the town, accessing the
cultural offer of a major city.

The cultural infrastructure in Burnley reflects this reality, with just one receiving theatre. The rest of the cultural offer is largely made up of heritage sites and a handful of independent artists / organisations. Burnley Youth Theatre is the one major producing organisation, with a focus on young people and working with schools. It is the only National Portfolio Organisation in the town.

Burnley's art and cultural practitioners are mostly freelancers and community artists with a focus on participation. Most have to work in other sectors to supplement their income. Meaningful employment opportunities are scarce and many artists experience periods of economic inactivity.

Super Slow Way, an Arts Council England Creative People and Places programme is based in Burnley, demonstrating that the town is classed as an area of low arts engagement. Super Slow Way has done some work directly in Burnley, but due to a phased reduction in its funding, will be considering how to focus its limited resources.

Cuts to the arts continues to be detrimental to the local cultural infrastructure and Arts Council investment in Creative People and Places does not begin to cover recent losses.

Despite this current situation, at grass roots there remains a small, fairly resilient and diverse local creative ecology.

Mid Pennine Arts has decades of experience and was the commissioning body behind Burnley's much celebrated Singing Ringing Tree. MPA continue to operate from a base in Burnley. With support they could support artists in the town and generate more short term freelance and voluntary opportunities.

Recently, Burnley's Central Library has opened unused space for community artists and supports the annual lantern parade (Light Night), which is growing in stature and attracting high quality creative collaborators.



There is potential for arts and culture led regeneration through a newly funded Heritage Action Zone in the town centre. The project is run by the local authority and is promising a new 'cultural district'. The HAZ comes with an attached locally run public arts event programme and is in the early developmental stages.

The local authority through Burnley Leisure remains a dedicated investor in Burnley's cultural offer, leading on the delivery of the new Light Night and the annual Literary Festival. It has its hands' full providing leisure services to the Borough and has very limited resources, which it focusses on statutory duties, providing support for The Mechanics and Burnley Youth Theatres.

A Lancashire wide partnership exists via Burnley Leisure, with notable youth engagement projects run by Blaze receiving support from Curious Minds and Lancashire County Council.



Data

During 'Openings' in 2019, we carried out a survey of audiences and participants of many of the events. We asked 5 questions, that were devised via a facilitated consultation session with local practitioners.

The questions were:

What do you know about arts and culture in Burnley?

What difference does arts and culture make to your life and your town?

What makes you want to go, or get involved in the arts?

How can we make Burnley more creative?

If Burnley were a festival, what would you do there?

We had 29 respondents from Survey Monkey and over 100 responses during 'Openings'.

When asked the question "what do you know about arts and culture in Burnley, many gave the answer 'not a lot'. Those respondents who did pinpoint specific activities highlighted The Mechanics, Towneley Hall, Gawthorpe Hall and other heritage sites.

A small proportion said they thought a lot of activity was going on, which may reflect the audience at Openings, who were likely to already be engaged.

When asked 'How can we make Burnley more creative?' the most prominent answer, apart from a need to increase the opportunities to engage, was that more advertising was needed for activities that are already going on.

When asked about the difference that arts and culture makes to them, or why they want to get involved, the majority focused on quality of life impacts, rather

than economic or geographical reasons. People

highlighted the benefit of being able to connect with others through events, as well as personal impacts on their mental health, perspective, joy and happiness.

When considering the final two questions, again the answers were varied, but the common themes of participation, time with friends and family, activity in public spaces and live music were the most common responses.

Another key theme emerging from the research is the importance of support (and utilisation of) young emerging local talent. Enabling creative young people to practice in the town, stay and grow as artists, makers or performers, is seen by many as an urgent priority.

What Next?

There is still significant consultation to do. Stakeholders and audiences including politicians, businesses and economic experts in the town need to be addressed if we are to explore the potential impact of art and culture on the economic regeneration of Burnley, its markets and industrial spaces.

Work should be commissioned to underscore the instrumental impact of arts and culture locally, especially in areas such as health, well-being, cohesion, education and aspiration. It should link with our research and focus on the Local Cultural Education Partnership. This is now more crucial than ever as we aim to 'rebuild better' post Covid-19.

The town is well placed to apply for funding from a number of sources that can easily incorporate arts or cultural activity into programmes, feeding into economic and quality of life outcomes.

To inform future strategy a period of consultation and research into other similar towns and cities, such as Stoke on Trent, would be a useful exercise. This work could include mapping the cultural landscape and researching the impact of embedding of arts and culture as a driver for change.

The citizens of Burnley are makers and creators, they want to actively participate in creative activities. They love live music and want activity where they can have fun with family and friends, in accessible ways and spaces.

We should nurture, support and encourage them.

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Recommendations

- 1. Continued research and consultation on the evidence for arts and culture in economic regeneration and quality of life, linked to advocacy with funders and stakeholders such as Bond Holders and Local Enterprise partnerships.
- 2. A training, leadership and mentoring scheme for young creatives. It should include business support, production, with an emphasis on quality. Use the training to bring long standing community and participatory NPO's and organisations from across the UK. Sourcing seed funding to support this work.
- 3. A more coherent and innovative approach to advertising events and activity, in libraries, communities, and social media.
- 4. Providing affordable, accessible spaces for artists to share/ display their work, including redevelopment of empty shops and warehouses, on both temporary and permanent basis.
- 5. Production of 3 significant family friendly town events, based on the principles of Arts Council England's "Let's Create" strategy. These should be well resourced through a sizeable application to ACE, with Council funding and sponsorship. They include an upscale of the Light Night festival, to include national and local performers, live music and food, drinks. A summer music and arts festival, in either Thompson park or the grounds of Towneley, with low ticket prices and local performers, showcase and workshops for participation. A town centre, stumble across festival, utilising empty spaces and high streets to encourage footfall. These should sit alongside an enlarged annual Literary Festival.
- 6. Professional development programme for artists and practitioners who wish to work in the town, encouraging a two way movement from the larger cities and towns.
- 7. Increased networking and partnership working between independent and freelance artists and larger organisations, with collaboration on things like space and programming of moments and larger scale activity.
- 8. Set up of a Cultural Compact as per Core Cities Enquiry, to facilitate funding and investment approaches to arts and cultural activity.



Resources

- Arts Council England: Lets Create Strategy https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate
- Core Cities Enquiry
 https://www.corecities.com/cultural-cities-enquiry/read-report
- Appetite Stoke (Festivals and Audience Development) https://www.appetite.org.uk
- Arts Council England Arts and Economic development https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/economic-contribution
- Historic England Partnerships https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/call-to-join-local-authority-

<u>cultural-consortium-groups/</u>

- Cultural Development Fund https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding-finder/cultural-development-fund
- Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP Cultural Investment Framework https://gbslep.co.uk/cultural-investments



Burnley is a Festival – A Cultural Narrative

Written by Erica Love with contributions from Jai Redman

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Jai Redman at Creative Spaces Burnley

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