



COTSWOLD

District Council

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET – 10 JULY 2025
Subject	CREATIVE COTSWOLDS – A CULTURE STRATEGY FOR COTSWOLD DISTRICT
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Paul Hodgkinson Cabinet Member for Health, Culture, and Visitor Experience Email: Paul.Hodgkinson@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Joseph Walker Head of Economic Development and Communities Email: Joseph.Walker@Cotswold.gov.uk
Report author	Joseph Walker Head of Economic Development and Communities Email: Joseph.Walker@Cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To present Creative Cotswolds to Cabinet for approval
Annexes	Annex A: Creative Cotswolds – A Culture Strategy for Cotswold District
Recommendation(s)	That the Cabinet resolves to: 1. Approve Creative Cotswolds as the Council's approach to supporting the Cultural Sector
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivering Good Services• Supporting Communities• Supporting the Economy
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	The Strategy is the culmination of two workshops with cultural sector partners, held in 2024, and the outturn of a more recent



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	<p>discussion held 29 May 2025. The strategy and action plan is presented very much as a live document, to give focus to a collaborative approach to supporting the cultural sector.</p>
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** Cotswold District enjoys a vibrant cultural scene. The District hosts some well-known cultural assets, from long-established institutions reflecting the area's history, such as the Corinium Museum, through to more recently established institutions, such as the Cidermill Theatre in Chipping Campden and the Barn Theatre in Cirencester. The purpose of Creative Cotswolds is to bring together these organisations to facilitate opportunities for them to collaborate on events, to work together on promotion, and explore opportunities to expand the reach and impact of the sector. Creative Cotswolds will be a network of partners, working towards a live action plan for which we are seeking Cabinet endorsement.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The Council's adopted Corporate Plan, agreed in 2024, expresses the ambition to develop a Culture Strategy for the District. To this end, two workshops were held in 2024 with representatives of local cultural organisations, to hear their views and to try to work towards a shared vision and shared actions.
- 2.2** This work confirmed there is appetite within the sector to work together – exemplified by the already good joint working towards local events such as the Cirencester History Festival. Partners saw joint working as an opportunity to add value, and to provide a strategic context to support their work, for example through added weight to external funding bids. It should be noted that this ambition is not limited purely to sustaining the cultural sector economically, but also helping develop its capacity to engage, support and develop local people – culture can be an important tool to empower and re-engage local people in community and economic activity.
- 2.3** The strength of this ambition does need to be tempered by some realism around resources to deliver. The district council has had limited resource - either cash or officer capacity, to direct towards enabling this work. Phase 2 of the Publica Transition has established two posts - a Leisure and Culture Manager and a Leisure and Culture Support Officer. While these two posts will take on existing tasks supervising the Council's contracted services with Freedom Leisure for the Leisure Centres and the Corinium Museum, they also provide some capacity to convene a



Culture Group to co-own a culture strategy, and the resource to help assess progress on agreed actions.

- 2.4** Since the initial workshops, the White Paper on Local Government has been published. Amid the general uncertainty this creates for local government, it also creates an uncertainty for this type of area-based work where there may be a longer trajectory, presenting a challenge to how best to present and structure a Culture Strategy. If the convening partners and appropriate geographical footprint for a culture strategy long-term is unknown, there is a risk that work towards longer term ambitions is abortive.
- 2.5** With this in mind, officers have consulted with partners to prepare a different kind of strategy – the focus will be pragmatic, on short-term actions, quick wins that can be delivered, and on giving the sector within the district more of a collective voice to feed into emerging discussions about how Local Government Review will impact.
- 2.6** A meeting was held on 29 May to update partners and to brief them on this challenge, resulting in the strategy and action plan appended to this report for Cabinet's consideration.
- 2.7** Subject to Cabinet's endorsement, the Action Plan will be re-circulated to partners, and a publication version will be prepared and published. As the purpose is to promote and advertise culture in the district, this will also require a form of public launch to provide exposure. Partners have previously expressed support for simple messaging around #CreativeCotswolds and 'creative and cultural' to aid campaigns on social media and through the Council-sponsored www.Cotswolds.com tourism website.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1** The adoption and delivery of a cultural strategy is not a duty upon the Council – this work does not have a basis in statute but is instead seeking to realise the opportunity presented by the district's cultural sector. Therefore the clear alternative option would be for the district council to step back from this work.
- 3.2** This would avoid directing officer capacity at supporting partnership work, but would also mean the Council would lose its opportunity to influence partners through its 'convening' power. A minimal investment from existing officer capacity enables the



Council to work with a diverse set of partners, who have a key role, engaging local communities and underpinning our visitor economy.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1** The Culture Strategy, as attached, represents an opportunity to structure work with culture sector champions based in the district, to realise greater opportunity for local people and residents alike. This is a proportionate and realistic approach, given the constraints the Council is operating under.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** As proposed, this approach has minimal financial implications. This work will be delivered through existing officer posts, and while it will absorb some of their capacity, it also presents an opportunity to engage stakeholders collectively.
- 5.2** Partners have suggested that a Cultural Strategy helps give their own organisational aspirations a structure to report into, and provides a strategic layer to give kudos to funding bids to external funding bodies. A strategy that helps bring together partnership activity and strengthen funding bids should bring investment into the area.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** The approach proposed has limited legal implications. Creative Cotswolds would be an unconstituted network of partners – an opportunity but not a legal obligation to work together. The network will present an opportunity to inform and influence activity by partners, but any decisions will sit individually with partner organisations.
- 6.2** Any project work will formally be led by individual partners, or subject to additional agreement between collaborating entities.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1** Given the limited financial dimension to this strategy, the biggest risk is reputational – developing a culture strategy without significant underpinning resource may raise aspirations of delivery that the Council cannot meet. This risk is mitigated by the explanation within the strategy of its remit and reach, and a focus on short term deliverables.



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8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.1** The approach proposed does not directly provide nor restrict any service provided to residents so is unlikely to have a direct equality impact. That said, the breadth of offer within our local cultural sector is a strength in terms of recognising and celebrating diversity within the district, so this work should help create a positive local narrative around diversity and equality in the face of increasing challenge.

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1** Not applicable

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1** None.

(END)