

1.3.2 Legal

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

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1.3.3 Other

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1.4 Implications on corporate and community plan priorities

- 1.4.1** The future programming includes references to the Council's 2008/09 Business Plan – in which the delivery of an investment programme for the Art Gallery & Museum is a key ambition (9A).

1.5 Statement on Risk

- 1.5.1** A detailed risk register will form part of the project planning for the Development Scheme, *Building for a New Future*, which will include reference to access and arts development. This will also form part of the 2008/09 Wellbeing & Culture risk register.
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2. Introduction

- 2.1** Following the decision to sell the Axiom Centre building in December 2002, the Arts Centre Working Group commissioned consultants to carry out an audit and gap analysis of current arts provision in Cheltenham – and to recommend ways of meeting the needs identified. The recommendations included a proposal for the creation of a 'virtual arts centre' – a scheme aimed at addressing key gaps in arts provision, facilities and programming; and a significant element with regards to the delivery of the Arts Development Strategy. Funding for the scheme was secured through the interest earned on the capital receipt from the sale of the Axiom Centre – and a Virtual Arts Centre Officer was appointed in August 2006 on a two-year contract.
- 2.2** Within the Arts Development Strategy, a number of priorities were identified, including: to lead on the 'virtual arts centre', promoting access to (and use of) the arts in tackling social exclusion, health issues and crime & disorder, targeting arts projects at young people, promoting the use and role of the arts in developing the borough's economy, and to employ the arts in raising awareness of environmental issues. It also made reference to addressing issues surrounding the borough's arts infrastructure, to

develop and support partnerships which promote creative practice and to advocate for the positioning of the arts at the strategic centre of the Council.

- 2.3** In April 2005, the Council appointed a specialist arts advisory company David Pratley Associates (DPA) to undertake a review on behalf of Arts Council England on - and the final report and recommendations were approved by Cabinet in March 2006. With reference to the Art Gallery & Museum, DPA were tasked with providing views on the viability of the AG&M's redevelopment plan – and their recommendation concluded that a revised capital scheme for the AG&M should be developed to include provision for larger, flexible temporary exhibition spaces, artist's studios and dedicated education / outreach facilities.

3. Background

- 3.1** In December 2002, Cabinet made the decision to sell the Axiom Arts Centre and site. It was further agreed in March 2003 that the capital receipts from the sale would be ring-fenced to support the provision of a complementary 'arts centre' – or that in the event such a centre was not feasible, the matter to be referred back to Council for consideration. To this end, a cross-party working group was established and membership included representatives of Cheltenham Arts Council, Cheltenham Arts Steering Group, The Summerfield Trust, The Everyman Theatre and the County Council, Councillors Seacome and Hay and the Arts Development Officer.
- 3.2** The Arts Centre Working Group report went to Cabinet and full Council in November and December 2003 respectively – and was passed by both committees. The report made reference to a number of recommendations; and with particular reference to the Arts Development Strategy and the AG&M, it concluded that 70% of the capital receipt from the sale of the Axiom should be invested into a new development scheme at the Art Gallery & Museum to provide exhibition / gallery space – and potentially some artist's studios – primarily to meet the needs of local artists and groups, but also to enable the programming of the larger national touring exhibitions; for which Cheltenham currently has no suitable venue. It also proposed that a budget bid for annual revenue funding, equivalent to the interest earned on the sale of the Axiom capital receipt - (and until the capital is required) to fund costs associated with a 'virtual arts centre'.
- 3.3** A key issue within the Arts Development Strategy were the findings from a series of consultation events / activities with young people (from age 11 to 16) in the borough – asking for their opinions, in particular about arts activities and facilities. The overriding impression given by the research was that whilst this age group have an interest in a wide variety of arts and media subjects, there is little arts activity with which they can engage – and furthermore, that there are few opportunities for young people to see bands (pop / rock) in the town; and also few spaces in which it is possible for local bands to rehearse and perform.
- 3.4** Other key issues within the strategy included an acknowledgement of the areas within Cheltenham that have been identified as needing special attention, including Hesters Way, Whaddon, Lynworth and Priors; and the Lower High Street area of St Pauls. Central to the Arts Development Strategy is the fact that despite its prosperous and cultural image, there are areas of significant deprivation where the residents make little use of the arts and cultural facilities on offer in the town. There was also an acknowledgement of the needs of the growing elderly population in Cheltenham – the borough has a higher than average percentage of 75 to 84 year olds and the percentage of people aged 85 and over is set to rise by 10% over the next ten years

– with a recommendation that research should be undertaken into the needs of Cheltenham's elderly population and how arts projects may address these needs.

4. Access & Excellence – Progress Update

4.1 The following has been achieved between the periods July 2006 to March 2008:

4.2 **To promote access to, and use of, the arts in tackling social exclusion, health issues and crime & disorder:** A number of initiatives within 'arts & health' and community-based projects have taken place, including: a poet in residence and art-based projects in the Oncology Unit at Cheltenham General Hospital and at Gloucester Royal Hospital; and 'music on the wards', in partnership with Art in Trust, of bi-monthly concerts in four different ward settings at the General Hospital and Delancy Hospital. There have also been community projects based in St Pauls – with *St Paul's Said and Done* and *The Word on Crabtree Place*; and a project set in the Moors area, supported by public art funding, to raise the profile of this estate and the aspirations of local residents.

4.3 **To target arts projects at young people, including the promotion of arts in education:** The Arts Development Team have continued to work closely with the Lifelong Learning Officer and those responsible for young people in both formal and informal education. This valuable partnership working has culminated in a number of key projects, including: a graffiti painting project on hoardings around the building of the Oakley and Springbank community regeneration centres – led by a professional urban artist and working with Cheltenham Safety Partnership (CSP) and Gloucestershire Youth Service. More than twenty young people took part over a three week period, and CSP reported a significant reduction in crime against property and crime against person, during this time. Other projects include: working with young people in Whaddon on the design and build of the town's first bespoke youth shelter in Clyde Crescent Park.

4.4 **To develop and support partnerships, which promote creative practice and attract investment to the arts:** The Arts Development Officer attends the Gloucestershire Arts Advisory Group (GAAG), which negotiates spending of partnership funding with Arts Council England South West (ACE SW). Through successful partnership working with ACE SW and GAAG, the Arts Development Officer has devised and implemented a countywide visual artists festival, called *Encantas*, which culminated in a high profile symposium at the University of Gloucester. Other key partnership working includes, the opening of *Meantime* – an empty storage space on Oxford Passage (owned by Howells Furniture), and leased by local artist, Sarah B (under the guidance of Arts Development), as an experimental contemporary arts project space; and support for a new competition and exhibition for contemporary artists, called *The Open West*.

4.5 **To lead on the 'Virtual Arts Centre' initiative, aimed at addressing key gaps in arts provision, facilities and programming:** The Virtual Arts Officer has been in post since August 2006, and their appointment has been crucial in supporting the work of the Arts Development Officer in the delivery of Access & Excellence – and in particular, enabling even wider participation and access to the arts throughout Cheltenham. This has been achieved through the development of a number of key projects, including: finding non-arts spaces (i.e. vacant buildings / shops, the town's parks and gardens etc.) for arts activities - and these have taken place at The Brewery, Regent Arcade, *Meantime*, a 24-hour gallery on the street (at the AG&M), Advent Art (an online gallery, through a calendar-style medium), *'the little arts centre'*

at the Wychwood Festival, and film screenings at the Viewfinder film makers festival. There has also been extensive work with young people and music development projects, through: the launch of Rock School (a week of music industry advice sessions and practical workshops for young musicians), band showcases (at the Bacon Theatre), Battle of the Bands (in partnership with Kiss My Face and the Wychwood Festival) and support and involvement in the launch of Exposure Music Awards (linked to the Orange County Awards, USA) in Cheltenham. Other key projects, include: the launch of Zeitgeist – a digital storytelling project capturing a snapshot of Cheltenham people in 2007 (the centenary of the Museum) and liaison between Giffords Circus and community groups (Milsom Street Day Centre, Sandford School and Milestone School) to bring a taste of the Circus and related arts and crafts workshops to their settings.

4.6 To address issues surrounding the borough's arts infrastructure: The Arts Development Strategy made reference to a proposal (with initial seed-funding from the sale receipts of the Axiom Centre of £500k) for the launch of a re-development scheme at the Art Gallery & Museum to create larger temporary exhibitions galleries – and since September 2006, substantial progress has been made. Following the launch of a highly successful RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) Open Design Competition – to find an outstanding and eco-friendly design solution – work has now started on the planning for the Development Scheme: *Building for a New Future*. The proposals will significantly enhance the visitor experience at the Art Gallery & Museum, by greatly increasing the temporary exhibition galleries and community space; as well as offering artist studios and dedicated education and outreach facilities. A planning application will be submitted in the autumn, and the Fundraising Campaign will be launched this summer – a substantial grant towards this campaign has already been proposed (in principle) by a major charitable trust .

5. Conclusion

5.1 The overriding priority for arts development in Cheltenham is:

- to build upon Cheltenham's reputation as a centre of excellence for the arts and culture, to enhance the quality of life for residents of, and visitors to, Cheltenham – through the development of opportunities, resources, facilities and services which enable people to take part in, and to experience high quality arts, regardless of age, race, disability, gender, sexual orientation or ability to pay.

The Arts Development Team has been highly successful in delivering the key priorities and milestones contained within Access & Excellence – during the last three years. The outstanding projects that have resulted from the implementation of this strategy have increased access to, and participation in, a wide range of cultural activities throughout Cheltenham. Access & Excellence has become an effective policy framework; whilst the strategy itself has come to a close, the work is now fully integrated into the future planning and development at the Art Gallery & Museum – through direct links to the Art Gallery & Museum's annual Service Plan, the Council's Business Plan – from 2008-09 onwards – and more importantly, the Development Scheme, Building for New Future.

Report Author

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Accountability

Councillor John Rawson

Cabinet Member Finance & Culture

Scrutiny Function

Social & Community