

## **Cultural Consortium – Annual Report June 2011**

From Steve Pitt, Chair.

Since the 2010 AGM, the Cultural Consortium (CC) (colloquially also known as Culture Matters) committee have been involved in a range of activities. In July, we decided to run a Culture Matters open public meeting on the Local Transport Plan, and so, after a great deal of planning including liaising with transport planners in Hampshire County Council and Portsmouth City Council, we ran a workshop, facilitated and led by Peter Wainwright in September with over 30 attendees, including 8 people with learning disabilities (subsequently, John Attrill met with Colas who have agreed to allocating a number of job roles in transport for people with learning disabilities). The purpose of the meeting was to express views at a strategic level about what needed to be improved. The report can be found at <https://sites.google.com/site/gettingaround2010/> The results of the workshop were briefed to City Council transport planners in Nov 2010 in time to influence the Local Transport Plan. However, we feel many of the ideas from the workshop remain valid and are by no means past and dealt with. In fact, with the emergence of the “Shaping Portsmouth” initiative, the name for the regeneration of the city, transport has a massive role to play.

Much of our energy has been put into getting the Culture Partnership (the CP) up and running effectively, and as predicted, much of the lobbying that the CC was involved with has been taken up by the CP. See <http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/yourcouncil/17613.html>

The CP has 4 priorities:

- Work to improve the city’s self-image as well as the image of it held by others.
- Develop the marketing of the visitor experience and economy both internally and externally.
- Further develop partnership working and encourage and support volunteering.
- Find new ways to secure investment in existing infrastructure and new development.

As well as the CP collectively, and the efforts of its individual members, there is a huge amount going on culturally, compared to a few years ago, with more and more organisations working together to improve culture in the city. I and Jonathan Fost have been heavily involved in facilitating theatre groups to work together, and took forward the CC committee’s decision to initiate a fringe festival, to coincide with the Southsea Food festival and the Portsmouth Festivities.

In July last year, we again provided financial support to GLOO, a series of highly valuable artists' networking events, led enthusiastically by Steve Bomford and Daniel O'Neil. The GLOO event in Summer 2010 was held on the seafront at the bandstand, providing a huge range of exciting activities for children and families. See <http://www.visitportsmouth.co.uk/site/whats-on/saturday-bandstand-gloo-artists-network-p733931/map>

In February this year, it was the CC who at very short notice, set up a public meeting, with some 40 people, to discuss city council budget cuts to culture. That the Leader of the council, Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson and the cabinet member for culture and leisure, Cllr Lee Hunt, attended, along with the Labour spokesman for the portfolio, Cllr David Horne, is testimony to our reputation for energising public debate in such crucial issues. We did the same thing by email, and initiated a Facebook campaign, and, within 2 weeks, provided the council with an independent impact assessment across a range of services, not just culture.

As a result of our constant lobbying, with your support, we now have a situation where the role of culture in Shaping Portsmouth, is being taken much more seriously (something I don't think would have happened 5 or so years ago). The CC and the CP providing the impetus for this, with the CP's priority on "improving self image" also being tackled by the City Brand group in Shaping Portsmouth see <http://shapingportsmouth.co.uk/> A number of you, and some of the CC committee, are involved in the various groups under Shaping Portsmouth.

We now feel that the CC's role has to change, and due to commitments in our other areas, the volunteer committee is fully stretched. We are proposing that the CC focuses on one task for the next 3 to 6 months, which is to use our remaining funds to support the development of a "Cultural Portal"-type website, which complements the Shaping Portsmouth website being produced by Highbury College, and builds on our own website, managed by Jonathan Fost over many years. The Cultural Portal idea was first aired over 3 years ago, and now we want to make it a reality; not replacing the numerous other excellent websites about what's on and other projects but providing a single route to direct people to these websites. The idea is to present an overall picture of culture in the city, whilst not in anyway trying to constrain it. (see separate briefing document which will be issued to attendees at the AGM).

We are also proposing that the Culture Partnership becomes open to anyone to apply to join, when they have specific interests around an issue. The CP's strategic role, and its now informal links to the LSP, enable it to have real weight in supporting the cultural aspects of Shaping Portsmouth. You may be forgiven for being confused by a plethora of different organisations tackling culture (CC, CP, Shaping Portsmouth, not to mention many other projects and initiatives); this is because culture is so diverse, and the statutory provision elements quite small, so its "governance" is not like health, education and so on. All we can see is that due to efforts of many people, a large number of whom are volunteers, things are improving culturally across the city, and the CC, and its hard working committee, has played a significant part in this.

These two proposals, the funding of a cultural portal website, and the shift towards the CP but still enabling CC to participate, will be the subject of formal resolutions at the AGM, as our constitution requires this.

Looking back over the 7 years since the CC has been operating, we are proud to have achieved so much. We were instrumental in leading the creation of a bold vision for Portsmouth for the next 10 years, not just for culture, but across all areas of public life and services; I recall the many hours Peter Wainwright, John Phillipson, myself and others spent pouring over the material generated from the workshop, and creating the Vision for Portsmouth document “Aspirations” which was then adopted by the Local Strategic Partnership and endorsed by the full Council and is at <http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/yourcouncil/5245.html> For a 100% voluntary body such as ourselves to play such a leading role in this document remains a national example of citizen involvement. Now Shaping Portsmouth is using the Aspirations document as a key foundation for its work.

During these years, we also ran several Culture Matters public open events tackling wide ranging and serious hard-hitting strategic cultural issues, much wider than traditional expectations of culture as “events” and “things to do”, and our work led directly to the establishment of the Culture Partnership. If we were to cost this kind of work that we have been involved in (leading, connecting, making things happen on the ground), that other cities might still be using paid staff to deal with entirely, it would run into 100s of 1000s of pounds!

I am immensely grateful to the hard work of my colleagues, Steve Bomford, John Phillipson, Peter Wainwright, Daniel O’Neil, John Attrill, Jonathan Fost, and also our predecessors on the committee, and for their goodwill, time and teamwork in getting a great deal done – no one of us can do this on our own. And it is this highly diverse mix of skills and aptitudes and variety of viewpoints that has been a great strength. My sincere thanks to Sharon Watling, our administrator who, steadfastly since the beginning of the CC, has supported us magnificently, with great humour, and who has used her links within the Council and its wider network to make us aware of vitally important information. We hope that Sharon will in some way be able to carry forward her role into providing support for the CP as the two organisations merge.

Lastly, and most importantly, I wish to thank all those who have been involved, by giving your time and ideas at one of the many events I have mentioned earlier. One of the most significant, being the Vision workshop at Portsmouth Football Club, where over 120 people came along to help shape the 10 year Vision for Portsmouth.

I do hope you will support the resolutions and look forward to seeing you at our 2011 AGM.

Regards  
Steve Pitt  
Chair