

Report for - Cultural Wellbeing & York: A Creative Workshop
 Tuesday 17 July 2018



Background & Purpose

York Council's new Local Plan is the key spatial planning document that will guide the city's development over the next two decades.

Thanks to partnership working over two years between the Council and York's arts wider cultural sector, the Local Plan contains strong statements on the importance of both contemporary culture and heritage: 'It is equally important that York becomes, and is perceived as, a forward looking and creative city, one that values learning, retains its graduates...and supports creative, digital, and media industries...The Plan will ensure that the city's arts and cultural assets are protected and enhanced, with new assets and resources created whenever possible.'

As part of the planning application process, the Local Plan sets out for developers a range of expectations pertaining to 'cultural provision'. Principles of good design should 'add to the city's overall cultural qualities as a place, and also enhance its cultural capacity - its ability to create opportunities for cultural creation, expression, learning, sharing, and enjoyment...' (*Local Plan Section 8.2*)

In particular Policy D3, 'Cultural Provision', includes the requirement for a Cultural Wellbeing Plan to be provided as part of the planning process 'on all strategic sites, of whatever scale'. This would include an audit of current cultural assets and activity but also, importantly, a statement of the potential for increasing an area's cultural capacity and activity, and a plan to make this happen. This echoes a call initially made in the national *Manifesto for the Arts in Place* (Beam, 2015).

This workshop aimed to help York Council, developers, communities, and the city's arts and heritage sectors to better understand how to implement the Local Plan's policies on culture as part of good place-making. Calling on the wealth of knowledge and expertise available in and beyond York, the purpose of this half-day workshop is to apply theory to practice by creatively engaging Council planners and local arts, cultural, design and other professionals.

Looking at an actual part of the city renamed for the workshop as 'Rivergate' participants were invited to explore and test practical ways in which meaningful consideration of culture can be audited, articulated, applied, and normalised as a part of the planning process. In particular it explored how to practically implement a cultural audit and Cultural Wellbeing Plan.

Although the workshop itself had limited capacity, its results are being shared among all those involved with the cultural sector, planning, and development in York, and nationally through the Arts in Place consortium.

This event was organised by Beam as part of its national *Arts and Place* programme, with funding from Arts Council England in collaboration with York@Large, with funding from the Royal Institute of British Architects Local Initiative Fund, and the support of York Council, York Explore, York Museums Trust, the Guild of Media Arts and York Architectural Association.

Forty participants attended with representatives from the cultural sector in York, planning, built environment sector, and developers. The workshop was chaired by Chris Bailey, Chair of York@Large.

Presentations

Participants first heard from a range of speakers:

City of York Council's CEO Mary Weastell - Welcome

- York is very proud to be hosting a national workshop on this very important topic and to welcome guests from around the UK.
- It comes at an important moment for York, which recently submitted its Local Plan to the Government. We believe we are the first to include provisions that require a Cultural Wellbeing Plan for all significant developments.
- We have a long tradition of social innovation in the city and fully understand that partnership is the best way to develop good policy. This workshop is in the tradition of openly sharing our professional experience and skills.

Chris Murray, *Core Cities – Cities & Culture*, an overview

- A free copy of *Psychology & The City* by Charles Landry & Chris Murray was provided to all participants. Chris spoke about some of the key findings from the research for the book.
- We are beginning to understand the link between wellbeing and productivity.
- Cities create a sense of connection to place – anchorage and stability.
- Culture emerges from needs that it is trying to fulfil.
- Mental health issues generally more prevalent in cities and the western world.
- Can we build cities to support human development?
- There is a shift from 'I and me' to 'us and we'
- Book includes a personality test for cities – this methodology is an accessible way to talk to people about cities and impact on wellbeing etc.
- See culture as a mediator – comes from a deep place within people, if you nurture culture it will always grow.

Janet O'Neill, O'Neill Associates - A Planners Perspective

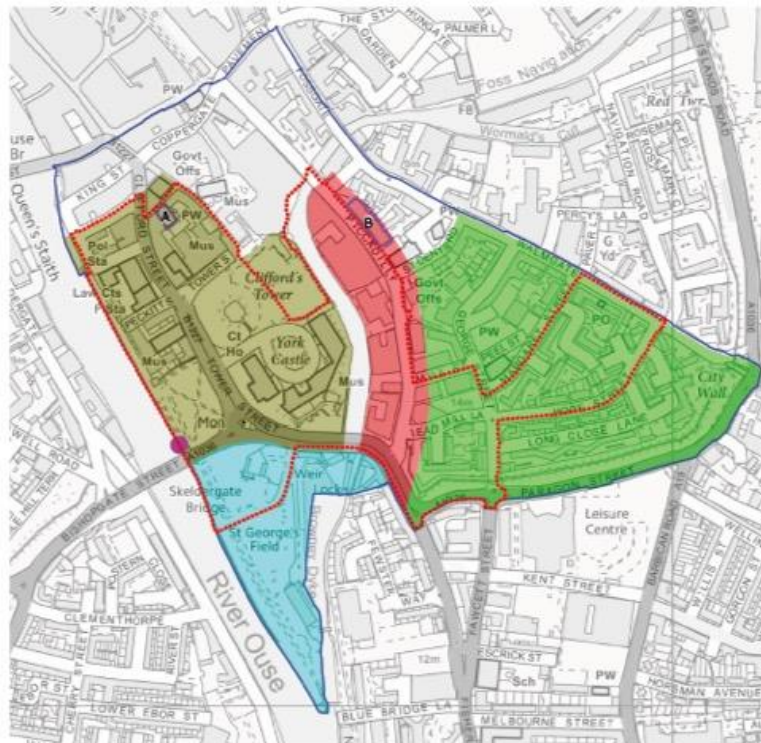
- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – 3. Good Health and Wellbeing / 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities
- NPPF update in 2018 – published in July - Includes as one of its 12 Core Planning Principles, the need to: “take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs.”
- York Local Plan – strong, clear policy – but how will decisions be made?
- How does culture and wellbeing fit into the mix and what is the decision-making process around this? Need to provide clear advice to potential developers on how to prepare a Cultural Well-being Plan and how the implementation of plans will be monitored.

Pete Massey, Arts Council England (ACE) – The Arts in 'Culture'

- ACE is interested in York's approach and the potential to use this as an exemplar.
- ACE doesn't have a definition of 'cultural wellbeing'.
- A key question - how we can make it easier for people to engage in culture.
- Referred to an ACE funded piece of research 'Cultural Activities, Artforms and Wellbeing' by Daniel Fujiwara and George MacKerron published in 2015. Consultation included the use of an App titled 'Mappiness'. More details can be found here - [https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Cultural activities artforms and wellbeing.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Cultural%20activities%20artforms%20and%20wellbeing.pdf)
- Hull City of Culture 2017 has had a massive impact on policy makers, ACE and others.
- ACE has invested in arts and place – Great Places scheme was a 'pilot' resulting from the 2016 White Paper.
- Leeds City Region – adopting a citizen centred approach, starting to understand the value of culture.

Participants were split into multi-disciplinary groups to undertake a site visit and consider what a 'cultural audit' might include, focusing on 4 different areas within the fictional 'Rivergate' development. Following their walk about each group considered what a cultural wellbeing plan might include.

Exercise example - York's Rivergate Quarter



- A cultural centre
- A blank canvas
- An existing residential community
- A new city-living neighbourhood

Feedback from group activity:

Area: 'Blank Canvas'

Key Questions

- What physical features are present that can tell the story of the place?
- How navigable are the cultural assets?
- Can an asset be made of any negative aspects in the area?
- Who's using the space and how?
- What gaps are there in cultural provision in the rest of the city?

Cultural Audit:

- Area regularly floods
- Large flood defence building
- Half of the river walk - green promenade, the other half seems more 'back of house'
- Large coach park
- Riverside experience ends with noisy ring road
- Obscured site lines

Cultural Wellbeing Plan:

- Artist commissions that are only revealed when the area floods or commissions that reference the flood levels (lighting).
- Tree top walk that can still be utilised when area floods.
- Inclusion of creative play for all ages. Iconography of fairground.
- Open up flood defence building as a learning resource.
- Programme of regular temporary commissions (light house / tree house).
- Open up lines of sight across the river.
- Wild swimming area.
- New river market / floating market.



Area: Existing residential community

**“There was a redevelopment called Rivergate,
Which we all thought could be really great,
We put in mixed use,
Let rogue artists loose,
And said *there you go ---*
there’s some culture, mate!”**

Key Questions / cultural audit

- Rich social cultural history.
- Set of key vista’s – important to protect the ‘nothing’ spaces.
- Focused on how people move through the area – nodal points, cultural use.
- How people feel in each space?
- How do people perceive each space?
- What does culture mean to different people in the city?

Cultural Wellbeing Plan:

- Set up incubator spaces for artists.
- Change use of key nodal points – i.e community garden.
- Extend street festivals and temporary installations
- Engage the community in the process.

Area: ‘New City Living’

Cultural Wellbeing Plan:

- Should be a destination place – mix of residential, business, hotels etc.
- Introduce a bridge to the castle
- How can you draw the community into the area?
- Need to prioritise people in the space.
- Space for indoor play / family time.
- Creative industry opportunities – new contemporary art gallery
- What is the longer-term maintenance requirements for arts facilities?
- Don’t capitalise enough on the river.

- Promote derelict spaces for community/culture use.

Area: 'A Cultural Centre'

- Area is dominated by institutions – encourage sharing of resources.
- No one is interpreting the history of the area.
- Open up green space and desire lines.
- Improve linkage between cultural assets.
- Create genuine public realm – impact on people.
- Mapping behaviour.
- Temporary arts and events – cultural production creates cultural wellbeing.
- Interpretation of historic narrative – sense of place – some conflicting narratives. Cultural Wellbeing isn't all about 'happiness'.
- Physicality of a space – play, textures, materials, water, vegetation.
- Focused on a space for residents rather than visitors.

Key Points Conclusion

- York is preparing a sector-led Cultural Strategy, which will provide a benchmark.
- The process is for the developer to prepare Cultural Wellbeing Plans and the context within which they are situated must be clear. A proposed Supplementary Planning Document on Culture should fulfil this role, referring to other reports and strategies as appropriate.
- There will have to be a process for assessing the Cultural Wellbeing Plans once they are submitted. Who would be represented and how will wider 'ownership' of plans be secured for the future?
- As a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts York already incorporates the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in its monitoring and evaluation through mechanisms such as One Planet York.
- The overall goal is to create better places, in York and in the context of the region and the Greater North. This means understanding York's changing role as a city, and using development opportunities to advance this in full consultation with the population. The processes developed by My Future York, such as My Castle Gateway and My York Central, are valuable examples.
- Data on York often portrays the city as a wealthy place. These favourable averages mask serious inequality in many quality of life areas, such as housing, adult social care, and education. These are links through York's Wellbeing model, which connects economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing.
- Resourcing Wellbeing Plans was identified as an issue but the answers are not yet clear. This must be thought through within a process whether there is benefit for the population and for the developer.
- The assets, both physical and human, that are created as a result of Cultural Wellbeing Plans, must be sustainable. We need to give more thought as a city to the Finance and Delivery aspects of the planning process.

Next Steps

York's draft Local Plan is currently being assessed by central government. The Arts and Place Consortium (APC) and York@Large will continue to support CYC to develop a clear methodology for the delivery of a cultural audit for the city and SPD for the inclusion of cultural wellbeing plans to provide clear guidelines to developers. Pending further funding APC may be able to support further creative workshops with a view to utilising this new methodology/approach as an exemplar that can be shared nationally.