

# A Review of Cultural Services

By a Working Group of the Environment, Culture and  
Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel



September 2014

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## 1. Foreword by the Lead Member

- 1.1 Members of the Working Group who carried out this review were pleased to learn of residents' interest in the cultural services provided in this Borough. Some residents interest is with the aim of broadening their knowledge of life today and in the past: some interest comes from our wonderful volunteers who help the young, the elderly, the disabled and others in need: some associate with cultural services while pursuing their interest in sport. Whatever their reasons, there is no doubt that many residents have connection with our cultural services.
- 1.2 Several councillors would support the Borough Council giving increased financial assistance to our cultural services. However after years of not increasing Borough Council tax the Borough Council has had to be very prudent with its expenditure and it is unlikely that increased funding will be available in the near future.
- 1.3 South Hill Park and Libraries form an important and large sector of our Cultural Activities and that is why we have singled them out in our Review. It was apparent that many residents appreciated the contribution which they have made particularly after the extreme financial pressures which they have experienced in recent years.
- 1.4 I would like to express my grateful thanks to the members of the Working Group, the Borough Council officers who have assisted us, the help which we have received from Town and Parish Councils and all other people who have contributed.
- 1.5 I realise some people will be upset that their contribution has not been mentioned and I apologise to them but we were under pressure to watch the length of the Report.
- 1.6 I hope that you will find the Review of interest and that it will assist the development of our cultural activities.

**Councillor James Finnie**  
Lead Working Group Member

## 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report summarises the review by an Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Working Group (the Group) of cultural services in Bracknell Forest.
- 2.2 The term 'Culture' is a very wide concept based on a term first used in classical antiquity by the Roman orator Cicero: "*cultura animi*" (cultivation of the soul). It encompasses refinement of mind and tastes by education and training. Many people participate in one or more cultural activity, of which there is a huge range. Some cultural activities (e.g. libraries) are provided by Bracknell Forest Council, others are supported by the Council (e.g. theatrical productions and many other activities at South Hill Park); and many other cultural pursuits have no Council involvement (such as a local camera club).
- 2.3 The Group's report is organised in the following sections:
- Part 3 Gives background information in respect of cultural services, and summarises how we set about our review.
  - Part 4 Summarises the information and evidence gathered by the Working Group.
  - Part 5 Contains the conclusions we have reached following our review, on which we have based a number of recommendations to the Council's Executive.

At the end of our report is a glossary of terms used and appendices containing detailed supporting information.

- 2.4 Our overall conclusion is that the Council puts a good level of effort and resources into cultural activities. The Council provides and facilitates the delivery of a range of valuable cultural services in Bracknell Forest, commensurate with the resources available for that. These services are used and enjoyed by many residents, and give good value for money.
- 2.5 Our recommendations to the Executive are:

### Libraries

**To devise a clear vision for the Library service of the future, updating the 1998 version (paragraph 5.4)**

**To review the scope for further income generating activities for libraries in the light of the Arts Council guidance, once it becomes available (paragraph 5.5)**

**To encourage all Council departments to consider how they might use the valuable network of community libraries to publicise and deliver their departmental services (paragraph 5.6)**

### **Cultural offering in the regenerated Bracknell town centre**

Complementary to the regeneration, the Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration should ensure that (paragraph 5.9):

- there is good signage welcoming people to the Borough, conveying the sense of newness;
- there is some public art at the bus station, perhaps a statue or decorating the ends of the bus shelters; and
- there is promotion of the Borough as a whole, involving the Town and Parish councils.

### **South Hill Park**

To encourage all councillors who are not familiar with South Hill Park to visit it, and talk to the people who work there, to build awareness and understanding (paragraph 5.10).

To ask South Hill Park Trust (SHPT) to conduct periodic surveys of what existing and potential customers want from the venue (paragraph 5.12).

To ask SHPT to submit a bid including the minimum core grant they need to remain in existence, together with a range of additional optional bids for the various arts activities they propose running (paragraph 5.13).

To explore the possibility of issuing a side letter to the lease with SHPT. This could make it clear that that SHPT retain the responsibility under the lease for repairs and maintenance. It could also acknowledge that the Council may decide of its own volition, and without making any future commitment, to provide certain expert advice, repairs and maintenance to SHP land and buildings, at no charge to the Trust. We also recommend that this revised approach is informed by a fresh reappraisal of the SHP estate, its condition, maintenance costs, and usage (paragraph 5.17).

That a publicity strategy for SHP is drawn up and actioned by the Council, working with SHPT and Bracknell Regeneration Partnership (paragraph 5.18).

To encourage SHPT to take an initiative to increase income from bequests, perhaps by enlisting the interest and support of local firms of solicitors, and learning from successful charities how best to approach this sensitive issue (paragraph 5.19).

That the Executive Member for Transport gives consideration as to the viability of provision of transport (including the possibility of a community bus, see paragraph 4.58) to and from SHP particularly in the evenings (paragraph 5.20).

### **Cultural Activities in the Voluntary Sector**

To take every opportunity to both promote the take-up of the wide range of cultural pursuits, and to commend everyone in the

**voluntary sector who invests their time and skills in running these cultural activities for the benefit and wellbeing of the whole community. This should be recognised in a more comprehensive Cultural Statement, which should not be limited to the Council's direct activities (paragraph 5.21).**

**To consider supporting a low-cost alternative to a museum, perhaps by facilitating the temporary, rent-free use of a vacant retail unit or other suitable space by the voluntary sector to display artefacts and other material illustrating and celebrating Bracknell Forest's unique history and culture (paragraph 5.22).**

### **Promotion of Cultural Activities and Opportunities**

**The Council's A-Z listing should include a culture heading, containing for example links to SHP and other websites, and the list of cultural activities referred to in paragraph 4.60 (paragraph 5.23).**

**Rather than be confined to an adult social care audience, the very helpful source of information in i-Hub is replicated as a principal 'signposting to cultural services' both on the Cultural activities Council's main website and in hard copy format in libraries and other suitable locations (paragraph 5.24).**

2.6 Members of the Working Group hope that this report will be well received and we look forward to receiving responses to its recommendations.

2.7 The Working Group comprised:

Councillor Finnie (Lead Member)  
Councillor Brossard  
Councillor Ms Brown  
Councillor Gbadebo  
Councillor Thompson

### 3. Background

3.1 'Culture' is a very wide concept, open to varying interpretations. In its widest sense it can mean refinement of mind and tastes by education and training, improving the mind, faculties and manners. Participating in cultural activity can have a physical or mental dimension and often both. There is an incredibly wide range of activities and pursuits that contribute to the cultural landscape. The Department of Culture Media and Sports has listed cultural activities as:

- The performing and visual arts, craft and fashion.
- Sports events, facilities and development.
- Museums, artefacts, archives and design.
- Libraries, literature, writing and publishing.
- Parks, open spaces, wildlife habitats, water environments and countryside recreation
- Children's play, playgrounds and play activity
- Tourism, festivals and attractions
- Informal leisure pursuits

3.2 Culture is also very important, affecting the very 'soul' of the population of Bracknell Forest. There is a huge range of cultural activities going on across the borough, some directly provided by the Council (e.g. libraries), some directly supported by the Council (e.g. South Hill Park) and many other activities continuing with no involvement from/financial support by the Council. Many residents of Bracknell Forest participate in one or more of these cultural activities, which helps to promote wellbeing in the Borough.

3.3 The value of culture is illustrated in a report by the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association in April 2014, where it was said:

*There is a vital role for culture and leisure to play in improving the health and wellbeing of local communities. Engaging in accessible, affordable cultural activity or contributing as a volunteer can play a major role in supporting independence, providing an opportunity for people to socialise, which is vitally important as loneliness can speed up cognitive decline and memory problems.*

3.4 There have been many reports of councils severely cutting back their financial support to community arts facilities, and Bracknell Forest Council ('the Council') has scaled its support back somewhat over time; for example, we no longer have the Heritage group or community arts development officers, and the Bracknell Forest Culture Theme Partnership has ceased. In a sense, reducing support for culture is an 'easy target'. Unlike many front line services, like education and waste collection, much of the Council's support for culture is not to meet a statutory duty, neither is there pressure from

central government to maintain or enhance cultural support – for example the Audit Commission’s performance assessment of local authorities included inspections and a detailed performance rating on culture, all of which ceased a few years ago.

#### Why Did We carry out This Review?

#### 3.5 The Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Panel decided to review Cultural Services because:

- There is a high level of public interest and participation in cultural activities. For example, there are some 233,000 participants in various activities and events run at South Hill Park each year, and the Council’s most recent survey of residents’ views showed: there were 424,000 visits to libraries in 2012/2013, with 69% of respondents using the library service. In the same survey 24% listed Cultural facilities including South Hill Park and 23% Sport and Leisure Facilities in the best three things about living in Bracknell Forest.
- Whilst there have been previous O&S reviews of specific areas, such as the Library service, there has not been a comprehensive O&S review of culture, to date.
- At its meeting on 11 February 2014, when it determined the financial assistance to South Hill Park Trust, the Council’s Executive resolved, *‘That the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for Environment, Culture and Communities be requested to include a review of the grant awarded to South Hill Park Trust as part of its current consideration of cultural services.’*

We did not embark on this review because we thought there was anything wrong. We set about our work with an open mind, aiming to constructively scrutinise the topic and, through our recommendations, help to improve the Council’s role and effectiveness in cultural services, for the benefit of all residents of Bracknell Forest.

#### Cultural Activities by the Council

- 3.6 The principal cultural service provision by the Council is in running a network of community libraries and in providing funding and in-kind support for the arts activities of South Hill Park Trust (SHPT). Both functions are the responsibility of the Council’s Leisure and Culture (L&C) Division. Additionally, other parts of the Council make a significant contribution to the Borough’s culture, both directly and indirectly.
- 3.7 The Group was shown a draft document setting out the work of the L&C Division. We welcomed the new document, and we made some comments on it and suggested changes to it. These included that in that document or elsewhere, there needs to be some recognition of the extensive cultural opportunities open to residents by other parts of the Council, and by organisations outside the Council. Some key information in that document pertaining to cultural services is provided below.
- 3.8 Many of the facilities providing cultural opportunities and the activities within those facilities are managed, organised and/or supported by the Council. The



Council also provides infrastructure for some other organisations to deliver cultural activities. Furthermore, the Council works closely with commercial operators, trusts and voluntary organisations that make a significant contribution to the cultural landscape.

- 3.9 Bracknell Forest has one of the foremost Arts Centres in the South of England, at South Hill Park located within a Grade II listed building and set within a 23 hectare Grade II Registered Park of Special Historic Interest. South Hill Park delivers a wide range of the cultural activities of the Borough including theatre, cinema, dance, music and craft courses. The combination of an important designed landscape, which benefited from a major refurbishment in 2012, with a vibrant Arts Centre creates an excellent opportunity to enhance understanding and enjoyment and engenders an unusual and striking mix of heritage and modern creativity. The Council makes a significant financial contribution to the South Hill Park Trust (SHPT), who manage the Arts Centre (£433,000 in 2014-15, plus maintenance and repair costs of some £102,000 annually, and additional sponsorship of some individual productions). SHPT also receives substantial financial assistance from Bracknell Town Council.
- 3.10 The Council owns and manages the main library in Bracknell town centre as well as 8 other branches distributed across the Borough and offering a range of services both within the libraries and in the local community. At a time when some other local authorities are closing a number of libraries, Bracknell Forest Council continues to invest in this community centric service.
- 3.11 The Libraries and Information Service delivers a modern service which is much more than borrowing books. It also offers a wide range of ancillary services including, for example:
- Home Library Service to vulnerable customers in their own homes
  - Books, EBooks and audio items including maps, holiday guides and hotel guides
  - Books in other languages
  - Online services such as renewal of loans, access to library catalogue, reminders for loan items and access to e books.
  - Information about groups, events and organisations – with plasma screens to advertise events in Bracknell and Crowthorne
  - Local and family history resources and link to Berkshire Record Office
  - Music CDs and Computer games are available at some branches.
  - National and local newspapers, including access to back issues
  - Office services such as scanning and photocopying, free access to the internet and WiFi
  - Music scores
  - An activity programme including author visits, book clubs, and story times for children
  - Displays and exhibitions by Government and external organisations
  - An e plus library membership scheme which offers discounts to users in shops and concessionary services to library members
  - Owl monitors available for loan to monitor energy expenditure
  - Bracknell Heritage trail at the central Library

3.12 Statistics for the Library and Information Service in 2011-12 were:

- Received 424,357 visits
- Issued 569,722 items
- Attracted/kept 88,362 members
- There were 58,278 public internet sessions in libraries
- 39 weekly volunteer hours to support the Home Library Service and undertake weekly children's 'story times'.

Purpose And Approach Of The Working Group

3.13 In order to make this review of manageable length, we confined it mainly to the visual and performing arts/culture. We did not look at the wider sports and leisure facilities available, nor did we look in detail at libraries (which were the subject of an earlier O&S review in 2007).

3.14 The Working Group saw its broad purpose as reviewing cultural services and recommending improvements as appropriate, with a strong focus on the Council's services provision. This entailed some research, and taking an overview of the range of services provided both by the Council, the voluntary sector and other organisations which were active in the culture field. This was all set out in the standard scoping document for O&S reviews, reproduced at Appendix 1.

## 4. Investigation and Information Gathering

This section of the report is based mainly on the meetings which we held. Mark Devon, as the responsible Chief Officer for culture was our Link Officer throughout the review and attended most of our meetings

### Introductory Review Work

- 4.1 The Working Group ('the Group') met for the first time on **8 January 2014**, to: elect a Lead Member (Councillor Finnie); to receive an introductory briefing; and to discuss with the Executive Member for Culture and officers the possible scope, purpose and approach to our review. That was subsequently formalised in the standard scoping document for Overview and Scrutiny reviews, attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.2 The Working Group decided that its main occupation would be to embark on a series of meetings with key people, to be supplemented with some research, the outcome of which is summarised at paragraphs 4.44 – 4.45 and 4.59 – 4.62.
- 4.3 The Chief Leisure and Culture Officer, Mark Devon (MD) briefed the Group on the Council's Cultural Services offering, with reference to a briefing document<sup>1</sup> circulated in advance, which described the services supported and delivered by the Leisure and Culture (L&C) division. MD referred to the draft 'Cultural Statement' in course of preparation, and the Group decided to put forward their views on the draft before it was finalised for Executive approval [We subsequently sent our queries and suggested changes to the statement. The main outcome was that officers decided to confine the statement to the activities of the L&C Division].
- 4.4 MD described the rationale and range of leisure and cultural services, referring to the significance of these in the recent residents' survey. These broadly covered : built leisure facilities; libraries and archives, which incorporate the relationship with South Hill Park (SHP) arts centre; parks and countryside (which included the Tree Service and public rights of way) which in turn had an input to the Council's planning process, by making an input to the consideration of planning applications regarding biodiversity and amenity space. It was observed that the survey response result showing that 69% of respondees who used the libraries might not be representative of the whole population.

Other key matters arising in discussion were:

- a) The aims of the Cultural Statement were consistent with the budget proposals undergoing consultation.
- b) There had been previous reviews of possible privatisation of Council Leisure services, including the possible sale of Easthampstead Park Mansion, but none had led to a better route than retaining the services in-house.
- c) The Bracknell Forest Partnership's Cultural theme partnership no longer existed.

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<sup>1</sup> The content of the briefing document is summarised in the section 3 of this report

- d) In addition to the grant to the South Hill Park Trust (SHPT), the Council also incurred expenditure on related items, such as grounds maintenance.
- e) The final grant claim relating to SHP grounds had recently been submitted to the Heritage Lottery fund. This included 10 years' management and maintenance costs. Overall, there had been a small underspend on the project.
- f) No major change to the Council's grant to SHPT was expected for 2014-15. Bracknell Town Council had indicated that their grant to SHPT would be materially unchanged.
- g) MD described the World War 1 commemorative events at SHP, including a theatrical production and an exhibition.
- h) The IT terminals in the libraries are used frequently.
- i) The ten year maintenance agreement for Lily Hill Park was due to expire within the next three years.
- j) The Group considered that the Cultural Statement should include reference to disabled users and the physical facilities and programmes for the disabled at Bracknell Leisure Centre; also to the wider cultural offering across the Borough.

- 4.5 On **25 February** the Group met and agreed the final scope and approach to the review, the document subsequently being sent to the Executive Member and Director for their comments. MD thanked the Group for its comments on the draft Cultural Statement, which were being actioned. These comments indicated that the Statement's principal purpose – to describe the activities of the L&C Division, as opposed to a wider description of cultural activities across Bracknell Forest – needed to be much clearer at the start of the document. The Group asked that the role of Parish and Town councils be recognised in the Statement.
- 4.6 The Group had a preparatory discussion for the ensuing meetings concerning South Hill Park, with reference to the report to the Executive of 11 February recommending the annual grant amount and related matters. MD referred to the annual process of grant application, based on the partnership agreement. The covering report described the range of the Council's (BFC) support, the sources of support from elsewhere, and usage of the SHP facilities.
- 4.7 In response to members' questions, MD explained that the achievement of value for money was measured through various information sources. He suggested that additional lines of enquiry/assessment might be appropriate, for example customer satisfaction, also comparisons to other arts venues. SHPT was held to account in various ways, such as the Annual General Meeting, and in BFC councillors being both SHP Trustees and Board Members. The Group discussed its lines of enquiry, also deciding to meet two Borough Councillors on the SHP Board, to gain an understanding of their role and perspectives.
- 4.8 The Group devoted most of its next meeting on **18 March** to an initial consideration of the libraries issues, meeting with **Abby Thomas (AT), Head of Community Engagement and Equalities**. The Group considered the Chief Officer's briefing note on the use of volunteers in libraries, the services currently available, and examples of the use of volunteers and the service offering of 'Community Libraries' elsewhere. MD described how the Community Empowerment pilot project at Great Hollands library was at a very early stage. This involved aiming to recruit more volunteers and extend the

library's opening hours. Similar trials had been pursued by Royal Borough (RB) Windsor & Maidenhead. AT added that the pilot would explore having a volunteer working alongside a council officer, hopefully enabling the library to open four mornings each week, compared to the two mornings currently. Depending on the outcome of the pilot, the model might be extended to other neighbourhood libraries.

- 4.9 MD described that nationally, community supported libraries comprised around half of the 5% of libraries which are defined as Community libraries. Community supported libraries were the predominate model for delivering the mandatory library service. Councils are not allowed to charge to provide the public library service. MD explained that Community Associations run the Borough's community centres, and had the ability to generate income, for example from hiring out their hall. Conversely, community libraries had little opportunity to generate income, and this was typically the key challenge to them being independently financially viable. Volunteering in BFC libraries was not new, a wide range of people already volunteered, however the issue had been more in the news lately. Regarding diversification, most libraries ran a variety of activities beyond lending books, however the obvious constraint was the space available, and libraries such as Harmans Water had little space.
- 4.10 MD told us that the Council's libraries have a standard Information Technology (IT) offering, comprising public access to Personal Computers with internet access and standard office applications such as MS Word. The IT offering was being expanded at Great Hollands library. It was considered that the Government's move to putting more state benefits applications (such as Universal Credit) on-line meant that public access PCs would be in greater demand.
- 4.11 Other matters arising in discussion were:
- a) Members saw the professionalism of librarians as being important.
  - b) There was little hard data and no clear evidence of savings with the alternative model of library provision. Anecdotal feedback was that the projects were time consuming and difficult; they had not been rigorously costed and they did not seem to have generated the savings intended.
  - c) Authors visiting BFC libraries for promotional events were not remunerated, though their travel expenses were occasionally reimbursed.
  - d) Attracting volunteers has the additional benefit that it was used by some people as a route towards paid employment.
  - e) One Member said that setting up a charitable Trust would be fraught, and the current model should be left unchanged.
  - f) A Member expressed the view that it was difficult to obtain sufficient, committed volunteers, and the focus should be more on what the library of the future might comprise. For example, this might entail having fewer books on shelves and more centrally delivered; and increased local exhibitions and cultural activities, making more dynamic use of the library buildings. There might not be much scope to reduce net costs of libraries, but there might be scope for improved access to services from longer opening hours. MD said that the 'library of the future' had been hotly debated for some time. The value of co-location with other public services was well recognised, but for that to work it required suitable opportunities and the necessary investment being made. The advantage of the Great

Hollands library was its close proximity to the Youth Centre, shops and medical centre, effectively comprising a community hub.

- g) Many residents do not visit the Council's libraries.
- h) The EBooks facility should be better publicised. MD said that EBooks are promoted; there are limitations with the technology – Kindle dominates the market and they are not compatible with BFC EBooks (similarly with other public libraries). One Member said that the Council's EBook catalogue was tiny, and consideration might be given to becoming an Amazon shop affiliate. MD commented that BFC would not be allowed to buy books from Amazon and lend them out as EBooks.
- i) Consideration should be given to locating in libraries some of the other functions of the Council. There were also opportunities for community activities to take place in libraries, such as the 'Reminiscence group' meetings at Crowthorne library.
- j) One Member observed that a café worked well in a prominent bookshop. MD commented that a café needed to be commercially viable in its own right, and required sufficient space. Achieving both those criteria was not feasible in BFC's libraries. Vending machines were an alternative possibility, and there was a machine in the main library.
- k) S106 monies (property developers' contributions towards infrastructure costs arising from the impact of developments) were already being accessed to extend the library offering, in concert with the Council's planning team. However, there were many other demands on S106 funds for infrastructure works in the Borough.
- l) There might be opportunities to site library books in the Council's leisure sites. MD said that leisure centres were used to promote libraries. Consideration had been given to using a shop unit at the entrance to Bracknell Leisure Centre as a small library, but that would lead to a loss of commercial rental income.
- m) Historically, there had been a mobile library service, operated jointly with RB Windsor and Maidenhead, but that had ceased due to budget reductions. Currently, there are 15 active volunteers visiting residential homes, etc, and delivering c. 15,000 items annually. The RB Windsor & Maidenhead library offering was similar to BFC's, the difference being making greater use of volunteers than BFC for front line work.

Cllr Finnie summed up the view of the Group that it supported the community Council-led libraries, but saw the need to increase the offering at those sites.

- 4.12 In preparing for the meeting with South Hill Park Trust (SHPT), the Group asked for information on SHP's productions and other activities, and an indication of the number of participants. The Group discussed how value for money might be measured in the context of the Council's support to SHP. The definition was seen to be difficult and subjective. One measure could be the subsidy per participant, compared to arts venues elsewhere. The danger of measuring only those items which lent themselves to easy measurement (such as the number of visitors) as opposed to more qualitative measures, was recognised.



*South Hill Park Mansion (Wilde Theatre on left)*

- 4.13 The Group's meeting on **9 April** concentrated on South Hill Park (SHP). Firstly, we met **Councillors Robert Angell (RA) and Mrs McCracken (JM)**, to discuss their role as SHP Board Members, and their perspective on SHP's activities. Their responses to our questions were as follows.

*How would you describe your role and responsibilities as a BFC councillor on the SHPT Board?*

- 4.14 JM described her role as being a critical friend, and initially she had needed to be very critical. SHPT had been 'coasting' somewhat, and the withdrawal of Arts Council core funding had forced SHPT to think hard about how to manage their affairs better; and SHPT were now performing much better. RA described his role as Chairman of Haversham Trading Company, a subsidiary of SHPT, which concentrated on commercial activities such as room hire. RA described his long association with SHP, and how its current performance was greatly improved on its earlier days. SHP's current caterers similarly performed much better than their predecessors. All offices at SHP were let, and some of the main rooms were not always in use during the day time.

*How do you see SHP's functions evolving in future?*

- 4.15 RA described how the major reduction in Arts Council funding had forced SHP to increase the number of popular and profitable activities. Looking to the future, the main change was likely to be live streaming of events, for example to hospitals. JM mentioned the increasing number of engagement, wedding, anniversaries and wakes events. SHP's future depended on it carrying out commercially viable activities and keeping the centre lively, for example by regularly changing its art displays.

*Do you think the Borough is getting good value from its grant to SHPT?*

- 4.16 Both RA and JM considered that the Council obtained good value for money from its grant to SHP. One indicator was the evident popularity with residents of SHP productions and facilities. In addition to the recorded numbers of people purchasing tickets for events, many people visited the SHP grounds. The shortage of toilet facilities was a drawback. RA pointed out that the BFC grant now was less than that in 2007, since when there had been the additional major challenge of losing the Arts Council core grant. If, hypothetically, significant additional funding became available, RA and JM

saw the priorities as being: additional toilet facilities; a mezzanine floor/ceiling in the atrium, and better heating. Also, the Wilde theatre was too small for major productions attracting large audiences. It was noted that some top comedians regularly performed at SHP.

*Could that value be improved in any way?*

4.17 RA pointed out that SHP had increasingly delivered more with less resource. Courses were only run if they were expected to be profitable, and only a few returned a marginal loss. Room hire was not straightforward, e.g. a quiet activity could not be sensibly housed alongside a loud activity. SHP is principally a community based arts facility, and only around half of the year was available for commercial bookings. Some community groups are charged concessionary hire rates. BFC had previously specified which groups were so entitled, but this was now for the SHP Board to determine, as stated in the partnership agreement. RA encouraged anyone doubting SHP's value for money to visit it and its staff, going behind the scenes to gain an insight and better understanding.

4.18 RA estimated that SHP spent some £30,000 annually on the maintenance of SHP buildings, to which could be added some £150,000 spent directly by BFC on the buildings and grounds each year. It is an old mansion, costly to maintain. MD pointed out that SHP have a full repairing lease, but BFC has helped carry out building maintenance for many years. Some councillors had also used their member initiative funds on SHP works.

*Is there anything which you suggest this Working Group should be paying attention to?*

4.19 JM suggested that SHP should be asked how they intend to grow the business whilst maintaining a diverse cultural offering. JM described how the SHP Board had constantly reviewed this matter, and had concluded that as a community arts centre they should not operate solely the most profitable activities. It was also noted that SHP aimed to cater for all age ranges.

*Are you aware of any challenges facing SHP?*

4.20 The main – and enormous - challenge was seen to be maintenance of the SHP mansion.

*How do you answer any criticism of SHP?*

4.21 RA responded that all criticism was worth considering and some was well-founded. SHP was an emotive issue, which was arguably a good way of keeping people's attention on it. In response to members' questions, RA explained that the SHP Media Centre had video recording and film making equipment. It was a very limited activity, with capacity for about 8 people, but was fully in use. It attracted £10,000 support annually from John Nike. The Group considered that the centre should be better promoted.

4.22 RA explained that the SHPT income and expenditure figures in the Executive report could be misinterpreted – the expenditure figures included a transfer of profits from Haversham trading company over to SHP Trust. Income to the Trust from concessions had increased significantly in recent years.



*How does SHP determine what the public want?*

- 4.23 RA and JM described the detailed information regularly presented to the SHP Board on attendance/participation and profitability. Some productions, such as Macbeth attract much smaller audiences than other productions, but should nonetheless be run by an arts venue. The SHP Chief Executive and staff are employed to identify what the public want, and they are accountable to the SHPT Board. JM added that the restaurant had helped to raise awareness of SHP productions and activities.
- 4.24 It was noted that very few councillors accepted invitations to SHP's 'VIP' nights. In response to members' questions as to whether a free-entry event would be worthwhile, RA observed that the SHP 'Big Day Out' had free entry and was well-attended, and many people visited the SHP grounds at no charge. Otherwise, SHP could not afford to have free-entry drama etc productions.
- 4.25 The Group then met with **Geoffrey Taylor (GT, Chairman), and Ron McAllister (RM, Chief Executive) of South Hill Park**, to discuss SHP's activities, and the support given by the Council to the SHP Trust. GT and RM responded to the Group's questions as follows.

*How do you determine what the public want?*

- 4.26 SHPT believes the public wants an arts centre with as comprehensive an offering as possible, within the confines of a small theatre and a limited budget. There was a wide range of facilities:
- The arts centre offered a comprehensive range of courses, despite the limitations such as an old house with some small rooms.
  - The Wilde Theatre is a big resource for the community, and 'imperative' local productions include Park Opera, EBOs, CMP Lift Off and the Gang Show with the balance of available performing time reserved for high profile events including "Journeys End", "Birdsong", and similar classic drama and big names such as Jimmy Carr, Michael McIntyre and Lee Evans. The annual pantomime was increasingly successful. SHP necessarily ran limited cost productions. GT commented that it would help if schools were more supportive of Shakespeare productions.
  - The Studio Theatre is well used but has limited seating. Binfield Parish Council was supporting works to that theatre.
  - A Recital Room, used for classical repertoire, for example.
  - An art gallery, increasingly displaying local painters' work, though occasionally visiting exhibitions.
  - The Dance Studios were in enormous demand.
  - The Cinema has always had a reasonable programme, and was now displaying live streaming from e.g. Covent Garden.
  - Catering was increasingly popular with SHP patrons, and the menu was occasionally changed to suit demand from customers.
  - The restored SHP grounds were wonderful and this had transformed SHP's clientele.

In short, SHP endeavoured to give people the best possible within the resources available. Patrons' opinions were sought occasionally, for example people leaving the cinema were sometimes asked to complete a feedback

questionnaire<sup>2</sup>. SHP had also made use of on-line surveys, supplemented by cards and posters. GT agreed to Members' suggestion that it might be worthwhile carrying out a periodic survey - in collaboration with the Council - of what people want.

*How do you endeavour to get the right balance between getting the optimum activity level consistent with the resources available?*

- 4.27 Attention was drawn to the Service Level Agreement between SHP and BFC. Performance against those targets was regularly monitored. Performance was challenging due to reduced funding. GT commented that in retrospect, SHP had cut too severely on education, and had consequently lost liaison with schools for a period of time. This had been exacerbated by teachers being increasingly busy and not having time to talk to SHP. SHP gave thought to appropriate advertising and use of social media as a low cost means of promotion. GT considered that SHP's marketing and education activities were both under-resourced. Cinema audiences average 80% of capacity.

*What is SHP doing to reach out to everyone in the Borough, from different cultures?*

- 4.28 RM described the close relationship SHP has with ICAB (an Indian community association), for example to celebrate Diwali. SHP also worked, for example with Afro-Caribbean groups. Events such as 'War Stories' increased SHP's 'reach' into various sections of the community. Social Services occasionally referred people to SHP events, and activities also included drama productions by 11-19 year olds every Friday evening. - 1119 as it is called, in fact covers all art forms from film making, street dancing, massed choir, to theatre work. 1119 plus "Art Plus Me" reach some of the most vulnerable young people in the Borough. JF commented that Edgbarrow School and Wellington College were jointly working on a book about World War 1. RM mentioned that a major current project for SHP is 'Oh what a lovely war', which would include an outdoor trench scene.

*Please describe what actions you have taken in response to your financial challenges in both financial and artistic terms. How has it affected the artistic programme?*

- 4.29 GT said that SHP's approach had been to cut costs and increase income. This had not been easy and it had included making redundancies. A 'parachute' payment from the Arts Council had helped to relieve the blow of losing their core funding. Measures had included increasing commercial theatre productions, reducing the number of minority productions, and increasing the volume and profitability of catering. A commercial manager had been recruited, whose activities included increasing the number of bookings for weddings and wakes. A food fair had replaced the craft fair, and that was

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<sup>2</sup> GT subsequently advised that there had been a cinema audience questionnaire during the digitisation project, which was definitely audience research. Generally, the audience research for the cinema has been 'low level' over the years – focusing at a surface level on what they see and think about the cinema and programme but not really going into who the audience are and why they see what they see, so as to develop the audience in terms of what they see or how often. SHP's cinema consultant had produced a strategy for the Cinema, which included audience research and development, but there had been no resource to tackle it 2014-15.

expected to be more profitable. A specialist producer had been appointed for the studio theatre, which had been a successful move; and the Wilde Theatre was now more popular than previously. GT said that SHP were forecasting a small operating loss in 2014, and expected to break even in 2015. There is a small amount of reserves.

*What impact do you think these changes have had on the public that attend South Hill Park. Is it a different audience?*

4.30 SHP is experiencing increased footfall, and feedback from customers is that it seems more vibrant. SHP is not neglecting its duty to support challenging work, but this is small scale and 'behind the scenes'. The Exhibition space is used for a variety of purposes and no longer operates at a loss. National exhibitions are now a rarity at SHP. Instead, they are concentrating more on local artists and groups, such as the Bracknell Camera Club. SHP understand that around 1/3 of their audiences come from Bracknell town, 1/3 from elsewhere in Bracknell Forest, and 1/3 from outside the Borough. Public transport links to SHP are poor, particularly as the bus service ceases before evening performances end.

4.31 The £25,000 allocated for subsidised room hire is given to local societies operating from within the Borough who are presenting work of artistic merit to the citizens of the Borough, as agreed in the Service Level Agreement with the Borough Council. Currently the subsidised theatre hire is made available to EBOS, Crowthorne Musical Players, and Park Opera. There is currently no regular programme of disability arts, and SHP would like to find partner organisations to progress that. Strong relationships had been forged with young people, ICAB, and University of the Third Age.

*What is your current relationship with the Arts Council?*

4.32 SHP currently receive Arts Council funding of £141,000 spread over three years for developing live streamed work, for example to care homes, and this is being extended to live streaming abroad. SHP hoped to make further applications for Arts Council funding in due course, though it was clear this would not be available for core funding to maintain an arts venue. SHP's digital media department, which is supported by John Nike, is valued by the Arts Council. SHP has a YouTube presence. Live streaming is to be developed further, including the annual pantomime.

*What are you doing to maximise income from all sources?*

4.33 The sources were:

- a) Growing the number of SHP Members SHP currently has some 1,700 members. Efforts to increase membership included, for example, only allowing members to buy tickets for comedy promotions. The rates of annual subscriptions varied.
- b) Commercial sponsorship This has been hard to develop, particularly due to the recession. Panasonic and John Nike maintained their support, and Waitrose's support - e.g. to the Food Festival - had been supplemented by having a representative on the SHP Board.
- c) Foundation sponsorship The Garfield Trust and the Foyle Foundation supported SHP. A number of councillors had been very supportive. SHP has a part time voluntary fund raiser.

- d) Trading income had grown substantially, from £175,000 in 2010/11 to an estimated £212,000 in 2014/15.
- e) Bequests were limited. Information was available on how to make a bequest, but efforts to attract new bequests had only started in the last two years.
- f) Grants were obtained from BFC, Arts Council and all the Town and Parish Councils (excluding Sandhurst TC).
- g) Hiring out the venue was an important field of endeavour, and success. For example, some £59,000 is obtained annually from hiring out the Wilde Theatre.

*What else would SHPT do if it had more money?*

- 4.34 SHP's constant concern is the condition of the mansion. It appears shabby, and there have been problems with leaking roofs and the lifts, which BFC has assisted on. The toilet facilities are unsatisfactory and need investment, and there is some backlog of maintenance. This was now more difficult due to the recent departure of the operations manager - SHP needs access to building expertise.
- 4.35 RM commented that they were advised by BFC officers how much grant to apply for each year, and a detailed application was submitted for that sum. Additional funding would allow more major outdoor events to take place, for example to celebrate a Royal Jubilee. The Marketing manager is part time, similarly the Youth contact. Both were important and needed more resource.

JF commented that SHP's aspirations needed to be viewed in the context of very severe pressure currently on the Council's finances.

*What are your other concerns at present?*

- 4.36 The upkeep of the SHP mansion is the top concern. Parking space was seen to be a major constraint. There is no prospect of an affordable parking shuttle service on a regular basis, though this might be feasible for a major event.

*The performance measures in the partnership statement are quantitative. What scope is there for qualitative measures (e.g. customer satisfaction ratings)?*

- 4.37 All courses were monitored through customer satisfaction forms. SHP had recently released an on-line survey; and there had been a joint survey concerning the arts and catering. Detailed information on performance was regularly presented to the Board. One Member suggested having a tear-off postcard in the SHP brochure, inviting people to send in their views on what they would like at SHP, which could also be used to build SHP's email distribution list.

*What future plans do South Hill Park have:*

- *To make the financial position more sustainable*
- *To develop the artistic offer to reach out to more customers*
- *To work with Town and Parish Councils*
- *To improve Value For Money for BFC as the major funder*

- 4.38 RM said that SHP intended applying for VAT exemption on charity grounds, and if successful this could save some £20,000 annually. SHP constantly

worked to build new audiences and generate new ideas for commercial activities. Capital works were reducing energy costs; for example replacing the heating system might save c.£7,000 annually. In-house shows such as 'History Boys' and 'Fawlty Towers' were creative and very successful, and were being grown further. There was more Youth Service activity, a closer relationship with Bracknell Town Council, and all SHP's endeavours aimed to provide more value. A further development might be rehearsed play readings being live streamed to schools. In growing the business, it needed to be recognised that SHP was never designed to be an entirely commercial operation; instead it had appropriate commercial activities, in the context of being a collaborative enterprise needing sponsorship. One Member observed that more streaming of live performances would not be constrained by the size of the theatre nor the size of the car park.

*Within the confines of our existing relationship, what other support would you like the Council to offer to help make SHP more sustainable and relevant to the local community?*

- 4.39 SHP was grateful for the tremendous help already given by BFC, and if possible would welcome BFC taking over responsibility for the SHP buildings, also more advice and mentoring on buildings issues. RM said SHP would welcome an opportunity to make an input to Bracknell Town centre events and plans. Examples were SHP's exclusion from the Christmas Lights Switch-on, and the need for better poster sites, etc. to publicise what is on at the local theatre. One possibility might be to have a TV screen display in the window of the Bracknell Town Council office.
- 4.40 Councillor Finnie thanked Geoffrey Taylor and Ron McAllister for a very informative meeting. GT thanked the Council for all its support, which SHP depended on for its existence.
- 4.41 On **15 May**, the Group met **Victor Nicholls (VN), Assistant Chief Executive** for a briefing on the cultural offering in the regenerated Bracknell town centre. We were advised that this came under four headings:
1. The Definition Of Culture This can be very wide, and the definition used in the Council's 2003 Cultural Strategy had been applied. When the UK recession occurred, the Town Centre strategy had needed to be changed, and culture was an important aspect of that (for example, the built heritage) and the aim was that the regeneration of the town centre would contribute to achieving the goals in the Cultural Strategy.
  2. What Is The Cultural Offering Currently, And What Is The Council Trying To Solve? At the commencement of the regeneration planning, Bracknell was one of the towns which was poorly perceived by the Arts Council and others. There was extensive consultation, and a recurring theme was that people wanted more opportunities/venues for an evening out. There is clearly a need to promote further the great cultural opportunities in or close to the Borough, for example: there are 22 arts venues within 30 minutes travel from Bracknell; there is a real sense of cultural identity in the Borough's towns and villages; and there is a phenomenal number of places to go; with London and even Paris easily accessible, for example.
  3. The Masterplan Vision, Which Has Culture At Its Centre The vision sends a clear message, for example for the town to achieve cultural self-

confidence; and to transform the town centre. The range of the offer meant that the whole town centre would be affected. Examples of the new cultural offering were: an 11 screen cinema (due to open Easter 2016), new public event space near Bond Way (anticipated in 2015), quality and varied architecture; extensive retail outlets and restaurants; and creating a new park opposite Time Square. These all contributed to meeting the aims of the 2003 Cultural Strategy.

4. The Specific Cultural Offering Public art has been incorporated in the design of Jubilee Gardens. The new cinema and leisure facilities will be high quality. The overall aim is to engender the best customer experience - having a clean environment, with high quality service throughout, good accessibility, with an outdoor market, encouraging the provision of new shops and restaurants, and improving the ambience near the railway station. There were no plans to replace the former artist studio facilities, and the heritage trail remained to be addressed. The regeneration included substantial road works, a redeveloped bus station, and improved gateways into the town, and 'way finding'. All-in-all, the town centre work is positively addressing many of the aims in the Cultural Strategy.

4.42 Other matters arising in discussion were:

- a) Members were concerned about the timeliness of the regeneration, stressing the need for promotion of the Borough as a whole and involving the Town and Parish councils.
- b) The plans showed an imaginative use of public space, and the plans for the bus station were positive. Members saw littering as an issue, sending a message that residents do not care about their environment. Having regular litter picking and good presence of litter bins was therefore important.
- c) Better signage welcoming people to the Borough, signposting to major venues and community facilities, and conveying the sense of newness would be worthwhile.
- d) Members wished to see some public art at the bus station, perhaps a statue or decorating the ends of the bus shelters.
- e) VN commented that the earlier plans for the town centre regeneration had included a theatre/concert hall, which people had frequently requested. It needed to be recognised that: South Hill Park (SHP) already had an offering in that regard; venues at Reading and Wycombe, for example, were already well established; and venues of this sort are rarely viable commercially, and require continual public financial support.
- f) The Council is working with SHP on the town centre cultural offering, for example events such as 'Sunny Saturdays'.
- g) Transport to and from the town centre was a significant issue affecting the enjoyment of the cultural offering.
- h) Mark Devon (MD) reminded members that the Cultural Strategy was now time-expired and was being replaced by the new 'Cultural Statement', the draft of which was in discussion with the Executive Member. The statement had been revised in the light of the Group's comments, and is likely to be entitled 'Bracknell Forest Council's Leisure and Culture Services Delivery Plan'.
- i) It was important to build confidence in and recognise the distinctive nature of Bracknell, for example its green landscape and relative newness.

- j) The planning application for the town centre regeneration includes a public arts strategy.

4.43 At this stage the Group discussed its preliminary conclusions and recommendations relating to SHP. Other matters arising in discussion were:

- a) MD commented that SHP's parkland had benefitted from a huge investment, and it needed to be distinguished from the building; this was an iconic site for the borough, and any major physical changes to the building would be difficult and expensive.
- b) A Member commented that SHP made good use of their space and had organised the renting out of offices well.
- c) MD observed that the grant application contained much more detail and evidence than previously.
- d) SHP could consider seeking public donations, for example to improve their toilet facilities.

4.44 The Group then considered the report of its own desk research principally on 'libraries of the future' and possible issues for the Working Group to reach conclusions on. Our desk research, via the internet, was on the following documents:

- a) Public library services in the 21st century – Carnegie UK Trust, May 2012
- b) The library of the future - A response to *Envisioning the library of the future* by Arts Council England Chief Executive Alan Davey, May 2013
- c) Department of Culture Media and Sports summary references
- d) The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 – key sections
- e) Bracknell Forest Council Website – main references to libraries /Service Plan and latest Quarterly Service report
- f) An example of a library vision/strategy - The Gateshead Library Strategy

4.45 These documents caused us to give further thought to:

- a) Is there a clear vision for the Library service?
- b) Is the delivery structure of the Library Service the most appropriate?
- c) Is there sufficiently good information on what the Library Service provides?
- d) Is there scope for more volunteers to deliver the service?
- e) Are there any services which should be provided which are not currently, and if so, are they affordable in the current financial climate?

4.46 Key matters arising in discussion were:

- a) The exhibition of wartime costumes at Crowthorne library had been very successful but needed better signage
- b) A minority viewpoint was that libraries needed to change radically from the outdated image of just lending books. Instead they should become community 'hubs' with multiple uses, in partnership with organisations such as Bracknell Forest Homes.
- c) Volunteers have a role, particularly if they have specialist skills/knowledge to impart, but there are limitations to the increased use of volunteers.
- d) Sandhurst has a vibrant and welcoming library which provides valued services. MD commented that the services offered by the Council's

libraries – such as free Wi-Fi – exceeded those in many other libraries, nationally.

- e) Members felt that libraries should continue on existing lines, but keep new opportunities under review, for example to use volunteers to allow opening hours to be extended.
- f) Subject to space limitations, it might be worthwhile using libraries for debating societies and similar activities.
- g) There is promotion of the library service, and good information is available on its range of services.
- h) Members queried whether enough was known about the views and wishes of users and prospective users of the library service. This particularly applied to the teenage population. The website could perhaps have photographs of the attractive interiors of libraries.
- i) MD commented that there are c.85,000 library members. The Council worked hard to make libraries more welcoming, modern and non-stuffy, and showing that they are about a lot more than lending books. Members queried whether the title of Library could be changed to better describe the range of services available.
- j) One Member expressed concern over the poor accessibility currently to the main library.

4.47 On **17 June** the Group met representatives of the Voluntary Sector, at Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action's offices at Amber House, Bracknell.

#### Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action

4.48 **Janet Dean (JD, Chief Officer) and Yvette Hockley (YH, Community Project Coordinator), Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action (BFVA)** summarised BFVA's role, with particular reference to cultural activities. BFVA is the support organisation for voluntary, community and faith groups. BFVA's support was principally on : infrastructure (e.g. to help set up a group); best practice (e.g. to assist in finding funding); support on training; support to acquire volunteers; and attracting the support and involvement of local businesses. All these measures served to strengthen community support across Bracknell Forest. There are some 647 registered groups in the Borough, of which around 350-400 are members of BFVA.

4.49 BVFA had started a database of groups some ten years previously. This was in Microsoft Access, which did not readily allow analyses, and BFVA lacked the necessary expertise in-house to overcome that; BFC support on that would be welcome<sup>3</sup>. The majority of the 350-400 groups were on the BFVA mailing list. It was challenging for BFVA to keep in contact with all those groups, and an initiative was underway to refresh the membership list (which could not be fully released due to data protection requirements).

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<sup>3</sup> Subsequent to the meeting, we arranged for the Council's Chief Information Officer to meet BFVA to see whether the Council could assist in this database issue.





*Left to right: Councillors Thompson and Gbadebo, Mr Andrew Radgick, Councillors Ms Brown and Finnie, Yvette Hockley, Maurice Alston, Janet Dean, Councillor Brossard*

- 4.50 BFVA maintain records of the people they deal with. They make use of the 'Do It' software, to capture details of prospective volunteers. BFVA run recruitment fairs to attract new volunteers. Currently, there was much activity in combating social exclusion – for example through the Befriending scheme – and to identify suitable opportunities to meet people's needs. BFVA encourages young people to volunteer, and they intend enlisting more help from employers, also visiting schools and colleges more to promote volunteering. BFVA pay £10 for every new volunteer to undergo a Disclosure and Barring Service (DSB, previously Criminal Records Bureau) check. Janet Dean said it would be helpful if BFC could cover that cost, also to promote volunteering through notices in Community Centres.<sup>4</sup>

#### Bracknell Forest Society

- 4.51 **Andrew Radgick (AR), Chairman, Bracknell Forest Society (BFS)** summarised the cultural activities of the Society, which he had been chairman of for three months. The stated aims of the society are to:

- *Improve the image of Bracknell Forest and encourage community spirit*
- *Ensure local information is easily accessible to all*
- *Welcome new appropriate development and business which enhances the Borough*
- *Celebrate our environment with its trees and green open spaces and promote local improvements*

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<sup>4</sup> Subsequent to the meeting, we raised both issues with officers. We were told that it would not be possible to waive or reduce the DSB charge on this as: the Council has to perform a number of administrative stages with this; where positive disclosures are received officers advise what actions need to be taken; and the department concerned is not funded to provide this service for external bodies. On the second point, the Community Engagement Team advised us that they are very happy to promote volunteering through posters in the community centres as long as the Community Associations that run them are happy to display the posters.

- *Encourage the participation of youth in their local community*
- *Be an umbrella for all organisations in Bracknell Forest especially those with limited resources*

The society had initially concentrated on Bracknell, but was now forging strong links with other parts of the Borough. The society has some 40-50 members, and has a programme of monthly events; these had included a sculpture walk at South Hill Park; a Victorian tea party at Lilly Hill Park, a talk about the 'Nabobs'<sup>5</sup>; and a health forum on changes to health service provision. At present, there are no links to similar societies outside the Borough. The society has a closed group on Facebook, also a website ([www.thebracknellforestsociety.org.uk](http://www.thebracknellforestsociety.org.uk)), which receives around 8,000 'hits' monthly.

4.52 Bracknell Forest Society's members include an architect, and the society is compiling a collection of historical photographs of the Borough. There is no separate heritage group. Other key matters arising in discussion were:

- a) Mr Radgick proposed that a market stall in Bracknell should be made available for voluntary groups<sup>6</sup>.
- b) The society was currently trying to recruit a youth representative and a publicity officer.
- c) Mr Radgick suggested that BFC could usefully produce information on what other cultural groups were active in the Borough, perhaps on the Council's website; also in his view, the Borough should have a museum to celebrate local history. We return to this in paragraph 5.22 below.
- d) Mr Radgick asked whether BFC would be making alternative central Bracknell space available for Bracknell Horticultural Society and other occupants of space at Coopers Hill, where BFC had recently issued Notices to Quit. Yvette Hockley commented that this was a wider issue for voluntary sector bodies losing low-rent premises.<sup>7</sup>
- e) Mr Radgick commented that the BFC heritage website had ceased some three years previously. He said that the society had proposed to the Council that the society take the site over.

### University of the Third Age

4.53 **Maurice Alston, Vice Chair of BFU3A**, said that the University of the Third age is a self-help educational organisation open to anyone no longer in full-time employment who wishes to take part in various educational, creative and leisure activities, with an emphasis on learning for pleasure. Participants were mostly over 50 years old, though there is neither an age limit nor any barriers

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<sup>5</sup> A 'Nabob' was a person who having become wealthy in a foreign country, often India or the Indian subcontinent, then returned to Europe with considerable power and influence.

<sup>6</sup> We relayed this request to officers, and have informed Mr Radgick of their response: that they had spoken with the operator for the new town centre market. They all want to make sure that the new market is as successful as possible in commercial terms, especially at the start of the operation. Once the market has established itself, they would see whether a voluntary sector stall could be provided. But it would be premature just at the point that they were going to launch the new market.

<sup>7</sup> We subsequently queried this and officers advised that no one at Coopers Hill had been issued any notices to quit. The Council's Chief Officer had met with the users forum a month or so earlier to update them on plans for the re-development of the site, and minutes were circulated. A further meeting is to be held in the Autumn.

to join. There are numerous interest groups, and all members contribute, for example in having meetings in their homes. Nationally, there are some 1,000 U3A groups with around 340,000 members.

- 4.54 Bracknell Forest U3A has some 330 members, each paying a £15 annual subscription, also contributions towards refreshment costs, etc . They meet collectively at the Open Learning Centre periodically, and the 40+ interest groups meet at various locations, pursuing interests as varied as art appreciation, philosophy, music makers, bridge, and current affairs, for example. BFU3A issue a newsletter every two months, and they have an open meeting every six weeks, with around 100 members attending. An example of a recent initiative of BFU3A, in collaboration with the main Library, was to produce a photo montage of Bracknell from the 1950s. Other matters arising in discussion were:
- a) Mr Alston said that BFU3A were not short of members.
  - b) Wokingham U3A is much larger than BFU3A. The two had some interchange, also with RB Windsor & Maidenhead.
  - c) BFU3A is a registered charity and it is in good financial health.
  - d) Mr Alston said it would be helpful if BFC publicised BFU3A more, perhaps by having the U3A magazine in libraries.
- 4.55 On 17 July, the Group met **Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection, and Vincent Paliczka, Director of Environment, Culture and Communities**, to receive their views on the Group's provisional conclusions and recommendations. We considered their views carefully before finalising our report.
- 4.56 One main issue discussed was the responsibility for maintenance of SHP. MD commented that SHPT's expenditure tended to be on reactive maintenance issues; planned maintenance - for example the extensive roof repairs – tended to be planned, funded and carried out by BFC. VP said that a five year maintenance plan was in the course of being compiled, and that might be used to apply for external grant aid; SHPT had better prospects of attracting such grants than BFC, and BFC expenditure on maintenance could be shown as matched funding. VP also pointed out that SHP, like other buildings owned by BFC, had an annual inspection with a Surveyor, which identified planned maintenance needs; to which were added reactive maintenance issues between inspections. It was most unlikely for major issues to not be spotted during the structured process of the annual inspection. Any health and safety items were progressed without delay, with other works depending on priority and resources available.
- 4.57 MD commented that the small maintenance budget in the Leisure and Culture Division was partly deployed to pay for reactive maintenance at SHP (some £20,000 pa). VP pointed out that the full extent of BFC's support was transparent in the annual report to the Executive on support proposed for SHP.
- 4.58 Another main issue discussed was the Group's provisional conclusions in relation to libraries. One Member expressed the view that libraries should be used more as information hubs for the wide range of BFC services, and another Member said he would have preferred the recommendations regarding libraries to have gone further, in terms of supplementary and alternative service provision. It was agreed that a useful recommendation

could be that all BFC departments should consider how they might use the valuable network of community libraries to publicise and deliver their services.

In response to members' queries, MD said that:

- Libraries' signage had been reviewed and further improvements were under consideration, to make clearer what the full extent of the service offering is.
- The number of 13-17 year olds who are members of libraries slightly exceeded their proportion of the Borough's whole population. MD described the requirements to become a library member, estimating the number of library members as some 85,000
- Officers constantly looked to see how the wide range of library activities additional to the core activity of lending books, might be extended further.
- There are no longer any nationally-set measures of success for libraries. Instead, guidance was issued by the Arts Council, and comparable information was sought from librarians' networks.
- The BFC library service offering was superior to many others', for example on the availability of Wi-Fi. IM suggested this should be better recognised. E books are available, though there are practical limitations in that area, and there is a sophisticated stock selection process.
- The use of volunteers in libraries is not new, for example in the home library service. There is a pilot underway on using volunteers in Great Hollands library, to extend opening hours.

In response to members' suggestion, VP said that a community bus travelling around 'the Bracknell Forest cultural circuit' had been considered previously, and it could be worth re-visiting the concept.

JF thanked IM, VP and MD for their views.

Members commented that the information in 'Town and Country' on cultural activities could perhaps be presented more attractively.

#### Research On Cultural Activities In Bracknell Forest

4.59 To supplement what we learned at our meetings, as set out above, the Group also decided to conduct some research of its own. The research on libraries is reported at paragraphs 4.44 – 4.45 above. We also set out to gather information on the range of cultural activities in Bracknell Forest, external to the Council. The work of the Berkshire Records Office, Berkshire Maestros, Communities and Local Government Heritage Champion, and Standing Conference for Archives is set out in Appendix 2.

4.60 We endeavoured to form a picture of voluntary sector cultural clubs and activities through a variety of means:

- a) The local clubs lists used for 'Town & Country', the Council's newspaper
- b) The list of Mayoral engagements
- c) The Open learning Centre - courses brochure
- d) The website of Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action (BFVA)
- e) Responses from Town & Parish councils in response to Councillor Finnie's request to them; and
- f) The outcome of the request for information placed in 'Town & Country'.

This research enabled us to compile the listing at Appendix 3. The listing is almost certainly incomplete and not correct in every respect, but it serves to illustrate the huge range of cultural activities outside the Council's control.

- 4.61 The Group also researched how, outside the L&C Division, the Council supports cultural development in various other ways too, for example:
- The Borough's schools provide a wide range of cultural learning and recreational activities for children and young people, for example on music, art, history, literature and acting.
  - The cultural offering to be provided by the regeneration of Bracknell Town centre was described to the Working Group at its meeting on 15 May.
  - The community learning function provides a wide range of craft, skills and other adult learning courses. Further details are at: <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/communitylearninggeneral>
  - Community Engagement activities include recognising and celebrating different cultures in the Borough
  - Operating Listed buildings consents for works affecting heritage buildings, which have been 'listed' because of their special historical or architectural importance
  - Encouraging Reminiscence and family history groups to meet at Council libraries
  - Running Youth Centres which provide a range of activities for young people

#### Bracknell Forest Residents Survey 2012

- 4.62 The Group also noted the results of the 2012 Residents' Survey relating to culture. These are shown in Appendix 4.
- 4.63 The Group met for the last time on **14 August**, when – in consultation with officers - it considered its draft report.

## 5. Conclusions And Recommendations

From its investigations, the Working Group (the Group) has drawn the following conclusions, on which we have based a number of recommendations to the Council's Executive. The recommendations are addressed to the Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection, unless specified differently.

### General

- 5.1 This has been an interesting review. Our main reasons for having the review were that Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) had not comprehensively reviewed cultural services previously, also because the Council's Executive had asked O&S to review the grant awarded to South Hill Park Trust.
- 5.2 Our overall conclusion is that the Council puts a good level of effort and resources into cultural activities. The Council provides and facilitates the delivery of a range of valuable cultural services in Bracknell Forest, commensurate with the resources available for that. These services are used and enjoyed by many residents, and give good value for money.
- 5.3 We believe that some improvements to the Council's cultural services operation would be possible without any discernible increased cost, as set out below. In the current financial climate, we see no purpose in recommending other enhancements to the cultural services offering which would require additional resources. Indeed, we acknowledge that in recent years the Council has had to make some difficult choices in scaling back cultural services which were valued by some – perhaps many – residents.

### Libraries



*Crowthorne Library*

- 5.4 The Working Group regard libraries to be a valuable community asset, and we congratulate officers on their efforts to make the libraries welcoming, with an interesting and diverse range of services and activities. We consider there is good information on the current library services. **We recommend that the Executive devise a clear vision for the Library service of the future,**

**updating the 1998 version** which we were shown, and reflecting the major technological changes and the topical interest nationally in developing the usage and service offering of public libraries.

- 5.5 In terms of the service offering, Members felt that libraries should continue on existing lines, but keep new opportunities – particularly income generating activities - under review. We particularly draw attention to the report ‘Enabling Enterprise in Libraries’, commissioned by Arts Council England and published in March 2014<sup>8</sup>. This explored how library services can widen their area of operations to generate significant income, without compromising the library service ethos. The report recognised that all local authority respondents were “*comfortable*” with the idea of undertaking enterprising activities to maintain acceptable levels of service but concerned “*not to stray too far from core purpose and ethos of library while generating income*”. The report also concluded that the preferred approaches to income generation were non-library public sector contracts, such as public health contracts, and new-emergent ICT services, such as 3-D printing. The Arts Council has said that it will develop a good practice guide for library service providers from this initial Research and Co-Design Phase, and **we recommend that the Executive review the scope for further income generating activities for libraries in the light of the Arts Council guidance, once it becomes available.**
- 5.6 Mindful that the number of library visitors frequently falls short of expectations, we think the efforts already being made to attract people to libraries should continue, within the bounds of affordable resources. We consider that ‘footfall’ would increase if there was more for people to see and do in libraries, within the physical space limitations that apply. **We recommend that the Executive encourage all Council departments to consider how they might use the valuable network of community libraries to publicise and deliver their departmental services.**
- 5.7 On the use of volunteers, we were informed that the Library service has used volunteers for some time already, and we were interested to see that a pilot of enhanced use of volunteers is underway at Great Hollands Library. Whilst we welcome developments such as using volunteers to allow opening hours to be extended, the Working Group firmly believe that the quality of the library service offering means that local libraries must continue to be led by professional librarians. We also see practical limitations to achieving a step-increase in the number of volunteers.

#### Other Council Cultural Services

- 5.8 The Council has a diverse and significant input to local culture in many ways, beyond the Leisure and Culture Division (see paragraph 4.61), most notably through the Borough’s Open Learning Centre, also schools educating children and young people in many art forms. The Group considers this to be under-recognised and we return to this in paragraph 5.21 below.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Locality-Enabling-Enterprise-in-Libraries.pdf>

### Cultural offering in the regenerated Bracknell town centre

- 5.9 The Group was encouraged to see the attention being given to cultural issues in the regeneration of Bracknell town centre. **We recommend that, complementary to the regeneration, the Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration ensures that :**
- **there is good signage welcoming people to the Borough, conveying the sense of newness;**
  - **there is some public art at the bus station, perhaps a statue or decorating the ends of the bus shelters; and**
  - **there is promotion of the Borough as a whole, involving the Town and Parish councils.**

### South Hill Park

- 5.10 South Hill Park (SHP) is a valuable part of the life of the Borough, in which the Council has made a big investment over many years. SHP Trust (SHPT) is the organisation which uses the SHP building and grounds and draws on the Council's support to deliver a wide range of arts activities. SHPT has its critics, and some of that opposition possibly stems from a lack of understanding of what SHPT is and does. **We recommend that the Executive encourage all councillors who are not familiar with SHP to visit it, and talk to the people who work there, to build awareness and understanding.**
- 5.11 We commend SHPT's efforts and achievements in becoming more commercially viable. Loss of the core grant from the Arts Council was a major blow, and they have risen to that challenge well. Indeed, it has both freed and spurred SHPT to think and act much more commercially than previously, which we think was probably overdue (we were told that they had previously been 'coasting somewhat').
- 5.12 It is important that SHPT have a comprehensive and up to date understanding of what the public want from the arts centre. The SHPT Chairman agreed to our suggestion that it might be worthwhile carrying out a periodic survey - in collaboration with the Council - of what people want. **We recommend that the Executive ask SHPT to conduct periodic surveys of what existing and potential customers want from the venue.**
- 5.13 On the Council's substantial financial assistance to SHPT, we were pleased to see that the usage of the grant and the related performance indicators - showing what the Council Tax payer receives in return for the grant - were much more detailed than in previous years. However, we were informed that SHPT is effectively told the amount of grant funding to bid for, being the amount which Council officers think is likely to be affordable in the forthcoming annual budget setting process. We believe that this approach should be modified. **We recommend that the Executive should ask SHPT to submit a bid including the minimum core grant they need to remain in existence, together with a range of additional optional bids for the various arts activities they propose running.**
- 5.14 SHP comprises a magnificent listed building and expansive grounds, which are enjoyed by many thousands of people. The Council owns the freehold –



thus having a very clear interest in their upkeep - and has leased the entire estate to SHPT on a long term basis, with SHPT having responsibility through the lease to keep the buildings and grounds in an adequate condition.

- 5.15 Maintaining old listed buildings is an expensive challenge, and it brings a real risk of significant, unbudgeted maintenance and repair costs. Maintaining the grounds is an expensive undertaking too. SHPT is clearly struggling to cope with that challenge. SHPT told us they spend some £30,000 annually on the task, and they lack the technical expertise and capacity to do this well. Consequently, the Council spends around £150,000 directly on the SHP buildings and grounds each year, as well as providing expert property advice.
- 5.16 We consider that the current arrangements for maintaining the grounds and buildings at SHP are unsound, as the lease agreement between the Council and SHPT is not being applied in practice. Our concerns are three-fold:
- That SHPT, being a small organisation with expertise principally in the arts, lacks sufficient property expertise and capacity to care for this landmark heritage building and grounds.
  - That SHPT have insufficient financial resources to meet their obligations under the lease, raising the risk that the buildings and grounds might not be adequately maintained.
  - That the continuing non-adherence to the conditions of the lease might complicate the validity of the lease, in the unlikely event of a dispute arising between the Council and the SHPT in the future.
- 5.17 We cannot see that this blurring of responsibilities is the best way to run things, particularly for a landmark heritage building for the Borough. We do, however, recognise that the Council should not be taking on any more risks or financial commitments, in the austere financial climate for local government currently. The present arrangement – whereby BFC is not contractually bound to do any work at SHP, but chooses to ‘help out’ – might be the best practical solution. If so, some sort of formal and transparent recognition of the current arrangement – where BFC is not contractually bound to do any work at SHP – would be necessary in our view. To achieve this greater certainty over the maintenance responsibilities at SHP, **we recommend that the Executive should explore the possibility of issuing a side letter to the lease with SHPT. This could make it clear that that SHPT retain the responsibility under the lease for repairs and maintenance. It could also acknowledge that the Council may decide of its own volition, and without making any future commitment, to provide certain expert advice, repairs and maintenance to SHP land and buildings, at no charge to the Trust.** We consider this is preferable to the alternatives of
- Doing nothing, since the current lease agreement does not reflect what is actually happening; or
  - Enforcing the terms of the current lease agreement, i.e. SHPT would be required to keep the building and grounds in an adequate state of repair, with no free assistance by the Council. In reality, this would require SHPT to devote substantially more resource to maintaining the estate than currently, which at the current grant level would almost certainly be unaffordable to them. SHPT would also need to employ people with the necessary property expertise, which would be incongruous when their principal skills lie in delivering arts activities.

- The Council reducing its grant by a sum to be agreed (taking note of the £30,000 SHPT told us they currently spend on upkeep of the SHP estate), and the Council assuming responsibility for maintaining the estate. This might be reinforced, for example, by holding SHP responsible for all costs beyond normal 'wear and tear', and in allowing the Council sole discretion in determining what works to carry out.

**We also recommend that this revised approach is informed by a fresh reappraisal of the SHP estate, its condition, maintenance costs, and usage.**

- 5.18 SHP needs good publicity if it is to succeed and the Council is to get the best return on its investment there. For example, the Media Centre has a valued purpose yet few people know about it. We were also strongly persuaded by what the SHPT Chief Executive told us – that there is a dearth of posters and other promotional material on display in Bracknell town centre and other community areas on SHP's current and forthcoming productions and events. We were also told that SHPT lacked enough opportunity to make an input to Bracknell Town centre events and plans. **We recommend to the Executive that a publicity strategy for SHP is drawn up and actioned by the Council, working with SHPT and Bracknell Regeneration Partnership.**
- 5.19 SHPT's income from Bequests has been limited. Bequests are a major source of income for most successful charities. The income to be obtained should comfortably exceed any associated costs for SHP. **We recommend that the Executive encourage SHPT to take an initiative to increase income from bequests, perhaps by enlisting the interest and support of local firms of solicitors, and learning from successful charities how best to approach this sensitive issue.**
- 5.20 Public transport to SHP is limited. **We recommend to the Executive Member for Transport that consideration be given as to the viability of provision of transport (including the possibility of a community bus, see paragraph 4.58) to and from SHP particularly in the evenings.**

#### Cultural Activities in the Voluntary Sector

- 5.21 The Council is not the sole provider of cultural services in Bracknell Forest, nor should it be. On the basis of our meeting with representatives of three voluntary sector organisations, also on our research of cultural activities, we were very impressed by the richness and variety of cultural activities which are thriving across the Borough. The activities on offer – which do not rely on public sector support – present a very wide range of opportunities to suit almost anyone who is interested in taking part in a cultural pursuit. We believe that this is a huge asset for the Borough. Consequently, **we recommend that the Executive take every opportunity to both promote the take-up of the wide range of cultural pursuits, and to commend everyone in the voluntary sector who invests their time and skills in running these cultural activities for the benefit and wellbeing of the whole community. This should be recognised in a more comprehensive Cultural Statement, which should not be limited to the Council's direct activities.**
- 5.22 The Bracknell Forest Society suggested to us that the Borough should have a museum to celebrate local history. Officers advised us that the Council has no current plans to operate what would be a new service, and we recognise that

this would presently be unaffordable. However, **we recommend that the Executive consider supporting a low-cost alternative to a museum, perhaps by facilitating the temporary, rent-free use of a vacant retail unit or other suitable space by the voluntary sector to display artefacts and other material illustrating and celebrating Bracknell Forest's unique history and culture.**

#### Promotion Of Cultural Activities and Opportunities

- 5.23 Bracknell Forest is surrounded by other Boroughs with world-renowned visitor attractions such as Windsor Castle and Legoland, consequently we think it is important to celebrate and make clear what our Borough has to offer. We entirely concur with the Council's leadership in recognising the importance of culture by having that word in the title of the major 'Environment, Culture and Communities' Department. We therefore consider it is illogical that 'culture' is not accorded a heading of its own in the very extensive 'A-Z' listing on the Council's website. **We recommend that the A-Z listing should include a culture heading, containing for example links to SHP and other websites, and the list of cultural activities referred to in paragraph 4.60.**
- 5.24 The Bracknell Forest Council Information Hub, also known as i-Hub<sup>9</sup> has been created by the Council's Adult Social Care and Health team as an online directory of services, support, advice sources and activities for residents of the borough who may need some support to remain independent. The i-Hub features extensive information about local groups, activities in the community, education and volunteering opportunities, including various cultural activities, with helpful links to other websites. **We recommend that, rather than be confined to an adult social care audience, this very helpful source of information in i-Hub is replicated as a principal 'signposting to cultural services' both on the Cultural activities Council's main website and in hard copy format in libraries and other suitable locations.**

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<sup>9</sup> <http://ihub.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/kb5/bracknell/asch/home.page>

## 5. Glossary

BFC / 'The Council'	Bracknell Forest Council
BFS	Bracknell Forest Society
BFVA	Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action (Now 'Involve')
BRO	Berkshire Records Office
ECC	Environment, Culture & Communities Department
IT	Information Technology
L&C	Leisure and Culture
O&S	Overview and Scrutiny
SHP	South Hill Park
SHPT	South Hill Park Trust
'The Group'	The Working Group of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

## BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
PANEL

## WORK PROGRAMME 2013 – 2014

Terms of Reference for

## CULTURAL SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP

**Purpose of this Working Group / anticipated value of its work:**

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To map the full cultural services offered by Bracknell Forest Council – <i>building knowledge and understanding</i></li> <li>2. To research, map [with reference to Parish areas] and promote awareness of the range of cultural activities in Bracknell Forest, external to the Council – <i>celebrating the variety and richness of what Bracknell Forest has to offer culturally, and increasing take-up of cultural opportunities</i></li> <li>3. To make an input to the formulation of the Council's 'Cultural Statement' before its approval by the Executive – <i>assisting in improving the Council's policy making</i></li> <li>4. To review the support given to South Hill Park (SHP) Arts Centre – <i>reviewing the achievement of value for money</i></li> <li>5. To research learning points from the diversification of libraries and the increased use of volunteers – <i>to assist in improving the efficiency and usage of libraries as 'community hubs'</i></li> <li>6. To review the cultural offering in the plans for the regeneration of Bracknell town centre</li> </ol> |
|---|

**Key Objectives:**

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To build understanding of the Council's Cultural Services offering</li> <li>2. To put forward Members' views on the draft 'Cultural Statement' before it is finalised for Executive approval</li> <li>3. To gather information on the range of cultural activities in Bracknell Forest, external to the Council</li> <li>4. To review the terms of the SHP Grant and monitoring of what that grant delivers, in advance of the Executive/Council decisions on the 2015/16 grant.</li> <li>5. To research learning points from other local authorities on the increased use of volunteers and alternative use of library premises/modes of delivery, also the Council's Community Empowerment project.</li> </ol> |
|--|

**Scope of the work:**

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The cultural activities within the Leisure and Culture Division</li> <li>2. The wider cultural offering external to the Council</li> <li>3. The work of the South Hill Park Arts Centre</li> <li>4. Examples of work elsewhere on libraries' innovation</li> </ol> |
|--|

**Not included in the scope:**

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Any detailed review of the leisure centres (that would merit a separate review)</li><li>2. Any detailed review of the current library provision (the subject of a previous O&amp;S review).</li><li>3. Anything else outside the scope defined above</li></ol> |
|---|

**Terms of Reference prepared by:** Richard Beaumont

**Terms of Reference agreed by:** The Working Group

**Working Group structure:** Councillors Brossard, Ms Brown, Finnie, Gbadebo and Thompson

**Working Group Lead Member:** Councillor Finnie

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection

**BACKGROUND:**

The agreed work programme for the Environment, Culture & Communities (ECC) Overview & Scrutiny Panel includes:

*Cultural Services*

*To review the Council's cultural services offering, in the context of pressure on public finance, with particular reference to libraries and assistance for South Hill Park.*

The Leisure and Culture division within the Environment, Culture and Communities department supports and provides a range of leisure and cultural services, which are valued highly by many residents. These broadly cover: built leisure facilities; libraries and archives, which incorporate the relationship with South Hill Park (SHP) arts centre; parks and countryside (which included the Tree Service and public rights of way). Direct support for cultural activities has been reduced in recent years owing to budget reductions.

Nationally, there is a move in local government to make greater use of volunteers, for example to assist in delivering library services. There is also increasing innovation in using libraries for a wider range of community purposes.

Outside the Council's direct activities, there are many cultural activities carried out by voluntary sector and other organisations.

There has been a previous O&S review of the Council's Library provision, published in February 2007.

**SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL TO ADDRESS:**

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Questions will be raised to meet the purpose and objectives of the review, as set out above</li><li>2. By written exchange, to summarise the work of the Berkshire Records Office, Berkshire Maestros, Communities and Local Government Heritage Champion, and Standing Conference for Archives.</li></ol> |
|---|

## INFORMATION GATHERING:

### Witnesses to be invited

Name	Organisation/Position	Reason for Inviting
Councillor McCracken	Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection	To discuss with the Executive Member and Director: 1. The Council's overall approach to cultural services, in the context of the previous Executive decision to cease arts development and heritage work. 2. At the end of the review, the Working Group's provisional conclusions and recommendations.
Vincent Paliczka	Director of Environment, Culture and Communities	
Geoffrey Taylor Ron McAllister	Chairman Chief Executive South Hill Park Arts Centre	To review the terms of the SHP Grant and monitoring of what that grant delivers, in advance of the Executive/Council decisions on the 2015/16 grant.
Councillors Mrs McCracken and Angell	BFC Councillors on the SHP Board	To understand the role and perspective of SHP Board members
TBA – possibly to include U3A (University of the Third Age), Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action, and the Bracknell Forest Society	A few representatives of the wider arts/culture fraternity in the voluntary and private sectors	To gain an overall view of the entirety of the Borough's cultural offering
Victor Nicholls	Assistant Chief Executive	To discuss the cultural offering in the plans for the regeneration of Bracknell town centre
Mark Devon	Chief Leisure and Culture Officer	Responsible Chief Officer and Link Officer for the review
Abby Thomas	Head of Community Engagement and Equalities	To learn about the diversification of libraries, use of volunteers and the Community Empowerment project, particularly at Great Hollands Library.

## Site Visits

Location	Purpose of visit
TBC	To be considered during the course of the review

## Key Documents / Background Data / Research

1.	To receive a briefing from the Chief Leisure and Culture Officer on the Council's Cultural Services offering
2.	Draft 'Cultural Statement'
3.	Research the range of cultural activities in Bracknell Forest, external to the Council
4.	Research learning points from other local authorities on the increased use of volunteers and alternative use of library premises/modes of delivery

## TIMESCALE

Starting: January 2014

Ending: August 2014

## OUTPUTS TO BE PRODUCED

1. A published report with formal recommendations to the Executive.
2. Promotion of the opportunities to engage in and support cultural activities across Bracknell Forest.

## REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

Body	Date
A report containing recommendations addressed to the Executive and possibly other organisations	For adoption by E,C&C O&S Panel at its meeting on 23.9.2014

## MONITORING / FEEDBACK ARRANGEMENTS

Body	Details	Date
Environment, Culture And Communities Overview And Scrutiny Panel	Monitoring reports to each Panel meeting	18 March 2014 and subsequently



### **Examples Of Other Public Sector Organisations Involved In Cultural Activities**

The **Berkshire Records Office** says its job is to locate and preserve archives and records relating to the Royal County of Berkshire and its people, and to make them available for research to all. Part of its function is one of democratic accountability. They store the records of public authorities like councils, hospitals and courts, so that members of the public can see how decisions were made. They also have a cultural remit, acting as an historical memory of Berkshire, enabling research for business, leisure or scholarly interests. The BRO was established in 1948, and is run as a joint service for the Unitary Authorities that provide local services in Berkshire. Councillor Iain McCracken is the Council's nominated representative on the BRO working Group.

Further information on the Berkshire Records Office is at <http://www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk/>

**Berkshire Maestros** is the lead organisation for the Berkshire Music Education Hub, responsible for delivering the aims of the government's National Plan for Music Education across the Unitary Authorities in Berkshire. They aim to provide a high quality, comprehensive musical experience to the widest group of pupils, regardless of their background or ability.

Councillor Ward is the Council's nominated Trustee of Berkshire Maestros.

### **Communities and Local Government Heritage Champion**

English Heritage supports a network of Heritage Champions across the country. Champions are mainly elected members in local authorities. Champions across the country aim to use the historic environment as an asset to help achieve their local authority's strategic goals and bring a better quality of life to their community. Heritage Champions have been appointed in a majority of local authorities and are sometimes allied with the local Design Champions. The role of a Heritage Champion is to act as the elected representative championing the historic environment, working alongside the local conservation staff. Champions should provide authority and clarity about heritage issues, connecting the work of elected representatives with local planning authority officers.

Councillor Mrs Hayes is the Council's nominated Heritage Champion for Bracknell Forest.

**The Standing Conference for Archives** is a consultative forum for matters relating to the services provided by Berkshire Record Office. It was set up in accordance with the terms of the Joint Agreement for Archive Services in Berkshire, to which all Berkshire Unitaries are party. Membership comprises representatives of the six unitary authorities in Berkshire and of other bodies with a special interest or expertise in the service

Councillor Iain McCracken is the Council's nominated representative on the Standing Conference for Archives.

**CULTURAL CLUBS AND ACTIVITIES, AND COMMUNITY LEARNING  
OPPORTUNITIES IN BRACKNELL FOREST**

Note – this listing has been compiled from readily available information in the public domain, consequently Bracknell Forest Council cannot vouch for its completeness or accuracy.

*The Contact details contained in this appendix were removed in April 2015 as in some cases they would be out of date since the report's publication in September 2014.*

<b>Name of Club/Activity</b>	<b>Activity</b>
<b>A</b>	
Active over 50s dance club	Dance
Ascot Locomotive Society	Locomotive
Aldance- Dance Classes for 2 ½ years & Up at Bullbrook Community Centre.	Dance
Ascot Horticultural Society	Horticultural
Ascot Art Group	Art
<b>B</b>	
Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action (Now 'Involve')	Clubs and events
Ballroom Dance Tuition with sprung floor- Owlsmoor Community Centre:	Dance
Bracknell Forest U3A (University Of the Third Age)	Educational, creative and leisure activities
Bracknell and Binfield Ladies Darts League	Darts
Bracknell Circle Dance	Dance

Bracknell Forest Society	Encourage residents to be proud of where they live. They celebrate and safeguard their communities and environment
Bracknell Open Learning Centre	Learning
Bracknell Reel Club - Scottish country dancing	Dancing
Berkshire Junior Chess Association	Chess
Bracknell Sub Aqua Club	Scuba diving
Bracknell Camera Club	Photography
Bracknell Chess Club	Chess
Bracknell and District Historical Society	Local History
Bracknell and Wokingham College – a wide range of adult leisure courses including Tap Dancing, Languages and Art	Personal development and leisure activities
Bracknell and Wokingham branch of the Berkshire Family History Society	Local History
Bracknell Afternoon Townswomen's Guild	Offering support, companionship and encouragement for women to honour their past and realise their future
Bracknell Active Retired Association	Social club for over 50s
Binfield Laughter Club	Laughter exercises, playful games, free laughter, and relaxation
Ballroom Tuition – Owlsmoor	Dance

Bracknell Conservation Volunteers	Conservation work and practical tasks to promote wildlife and enhance the local environment.
Binfield Singers	Singing
Binfield Badger Group	To improve the protection of badgers
Berkshire Walkers	Walking
Bracknell Film Society	Film
Berkshire County Scouts	Helping young people enjoy new adventures; to experience the outdoors; interact with others, gain confidence and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.
Bracknell and Wokingham Community Band	Band
Bracknell Choral Society	Choir
Boys' Voices	Choir for treble-singing boys age 7/8–12 years
<b>C</b>	
Charles Church Camberley Brass Band	Brass Band
Carnation Hall Monthly Friday-Saturday Night Social Ballroom Dancing	Ballroom dancing
Carnation Sequence Dance Club	Dance
Crowthorne Chess Club	Chess
Crowthorne Musical Players	Music
Crowthorne Symphony Orchestra	Orchestra
Crowthorne Village Singers	Singers
Crowthorne Choral Society	Choir
Crowthorne and	Art

Sandhurst Art Society	
Crochet: First Steps	Crochet
Chocolate truffles	Cookery
D	
Duke of Edinburgh's Award	Practical conservation
Dance classes - Owlsmoor	Dance
E	
Easthampstead Rotary Club	Brings together business and professional leaders to provide humanitarian services
F	
Faith & Belief Forum	Mapping, Understanding and Engaging with Faith and Belief Communities in Bracknell Forest
First time on a computer	Computer training
G	
Great Hollands Art Group	Art
Girlguiding	Giving girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, build friendships, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference to their lives and their communities.
Go Sky Ride / British Cycling	Cycling
H	
Harmans Water Women's Institute	Provides women with educational opportunities and the chance to build new skills, to take part in a wide variety of activities and to campaign on issues that matter to them and their communities
"Healthy Voices" Awards Ceremony,	Choir

I	
Indian Community Association	Preserving the richness of Indian culture
L	
Learn to draw	Drawing
O	
Off-Road Skills Club	Driving
P	
PACT (Parents and Children Together)	Parenting skills, craft, support, advice and skills.
Photography at the Pub	Photography
Park Opera	Music
R	
Rotary Club of Bracknell	Rotary
Ramblers Association	Walking
Royal County of Berkshire Churches Trust	Religion
RSPB Wokingham and Bracknell local group	Wildlife
Royal Naval Association	Social and welfare activities for current and former members of the Royal Navy
Royal British Legion, Bracknell Town Centre	Helps the whole Armed Forces community through welfare, companionship and representation as well as being the Nation's custodian of Remembrance
S	
Sandhurst and Crowthorne Flower Club	Flowers
Sandhurst Women's	See above

Institute	
South Berkshire Dog Training Society	Animals
St Mary's Winkfield Tower Bell Ringers	Campanology
South East Berks Ramblers	Walking
South East Berkshire District Scouts	See Berkshire County Scouts, above
Sewing machine: introduction	Sewing
Softpots (fabric plant pots)	Crafts
T	
The Royal Air Forces Association	Provides welfare support to the RAF Family
Thames Voyces Chamber Choir	Choir
The Savoy Singers	Singers
Tai Chi	Tai Chi
W	
Warfield Environment Group	Environment
Warfield and Wick Hill Women's Institute	See above





**Bracknell Forest Residents Survey 2012**

In total there were 4,816 postal and 293 online surveys completed, giving a total response of 5,109. Given the survey was sent out to 47,000 households this is a response rate of 11%.

Key extracts from the survey relevant to culture were:

Respondents were asked to indicate the three things they liked best about living in the Borough. The fifth highest score, at 24%, was 'Cultural facilities (e.g. cinema, South Hill Park)'

The responses to the question '*On average, how often would you say that you or members of your immediate family used the following services that are provided by the Council?*', included:

	At Least Monthly	Less frequently than monthly	Never
Parks and open spaces	73%	22%	5%
Sport/leisure facilities	34%	38%	28%
Libraries	32%	37%	31%
Arts facilities	11%	36%	53%

Respondents were asked to provide an indication of their satisfaction with the services provided by the Council. Respondents indicated their satisfaction on a five point scale ranging from Very satisfied to Very dissatisfied. However on the following chart the 'Very satisfied' and 'Satisfied' ratings have been merged together, along with the 'Very dissatisfied' and 'Dissatisfied' ratings for the purposes of clarity.

	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Don't know
Parks and open spaces	86%	8%	2%	4%
Sport/leisure facilities	52%	21%	3%	24%
Libraries	56%	17%	2%	25%
Arts facilities	33%	20%	2%	45%

For further information on the work of Overview and Scrutiny in Bracknell Forest, please visit our website on <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/scrutiny> or contact us at:

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