

Warwickshire Heritage and Culture Strategy 2020 - 2025

Progress report

February 2021



Introduction

The Warwickshire Heritage and Culture Strategy 2020 - 2025 was approved and adopted in late 2019. This report provides an update on progress over the past year, and introduces plans to reprioritise some of the actions going forward.

Context

The Warwickshire Heritage and Culture Strategy is one of five core five-year strategies for delivering the County Council's vision "to make Warwickshire the best it can be - sustainable now and for future generations". The other core strategies cover:

- Customer experience
- Digital and technology
- Commercial objectives
- Voluntary and community sector

Warwickshire County Council (WCC) developed a new 'functional operating model' in response to the changing role of local government in post-austerity England. The model is based on 'one organisation' thinking, effective use of available resources, and services shaped around community input and involvement.

Collaboration

The Heritage and Culture Strategy 2020 - 2025 was developed in collaboration with heritage and culture organisations - and individual practitioners - from across Warwickshire. Whilst WCC

is spearheading the Strategy, it is essentially a county and sector-wide partnership.

Vision

Our collective vision is that, by 2025, Warwickshire will have a thriving, innovative and creative heritage and culture sector working collaboratively to develop and deliver a rich, high-quality, accessible heritage and culture offer for all who live, work in, and visit Warwickshire.



Getting started

Governance

The Heritage and Culture Strategy began to take shape in 2019. WCC set up a Project Group of four, a Steering Group made up of representatives from relevant County, District and Borough Council teams, and a wider Stakeholder Group comprising countywide sector contacts - from individual Warwickshire artists and volunteers to the Royal Shakespeare Company and The National Archives - a list which grows ever longer.

The Project Group is in constant e-contact and meets as and when required. The Steering Group, chaired by WCC Universal Services Manager Ayub Khan MBE, will continue to meet at key points of decision-making - approximately four times a year.

Background research

The Project Group conducted benchmarking research by comparing strategies from other areas. These ranged considerably in length and scope but were labelled 'culture' - rather than 'heritage and culture' - strategies. The group also looked at mounting evidence for the wider benefits of heritage and culture to individuals, society and the economy.

Definition

A decision was made to draft a broad definition of 'heritage and culture' for Warwickshire's strategy, encompassing not only history and the arts but also the natural environment, architecture, industry, innovation and sport. The thinking was that anything narrower could limit the strategy's scope and progress later on.

By 'heritage and culture' we mean:

- our collective experience, endeavour and achievement over centuries
- our history and our place in the world
- who we are, what we stand for and where we belong
- the context of our lives and the backdrop to our future hopes and aspirations
- what makes us proud to be from Warwickshire

In the context of this strategy, heritage and culture:

- describes our past, explains our present and informs our future
- celebrates our diversity but gives us a cohesive identity
- contributes to our wellbeing and economic growth

Developing the strategy

Priorities

WCC proposed shaping the strategy around three main themes reflecting current priorities:

- health and wellbeing
- sense of place
- economic vibrancy

Sector engagement

In Summer 2019 the Project Group sent out a survey to Stakeholder Group contacts which revealed (average percentages):

- Confirmation that we needed a Warwickshire Heritage and Culture Strategy (91%)
- Majority approval of the draft definition (82%)
- Strong support for the priorities suggested (89%)

In July 2019, WCC held an all-day conference in Warwick. The event was designed to both inspire the local heritage and culture sector, and give delegates an opportunity to share their opinions and suggestions for the development of the strategy.

More than 80 separate individuals and organisations, large and small, contributed via the survey and conference.

Strategy drafted and approved

The Project Group drafted the Warwickshire Heritage and Culture Strategy 2020 - 2025 in Autumn 2019, incorporating feedback from the survey, conference and Steering Group. The strategy was approved and adopted by WCC's Cabinet in November 2019 and can be seen [here](#):

Alignment

The finalised strategy was sent to a number of high-level partners and potential funders, including Arts Council England, Sport England and The National Archives, to get feedback on how it chimed with their own policies and forward programmes.

“I know how hard it is to get a simple and shared expression of priorities so it is great to see these expressed so clearly and linked into effective action. They directly address almost all of the priorities set out in CILIP's own foresight work.”

*Nick Poole - Chief Executive
CILIP - The Library and information Association*

Action plan workshops

Countywide workshops

Following WCC approval, the next step was to collectively develop an ambitious but workable initial action plan for the strategy. The Project Group organised a series of eight countywide workshops, inviting the heritage and culture sector to contribute their expertise, ideas and suggestions.

The first five workshops were held in different parts of the county to ensure local opportunities to get involved. The last three workshops each focused more specifically on one of the strategy's three key themes: health and wellbeing, sense of place and economic vibrancy.

The workshops took place during January and February 2020 and were attended by a total of 70 delegates. Discussions were wide-ranging and encompassed both local and countywide issues and ideas, as well as the strategy's three main themes. However, some recurring topics emerged.



Ten recurring themes

- Accessibility: limited public transport (especially in rural areas) and public perceptions - 'not for me'
- Communication and marketing
- North-South divide: wealth and diversity of heritage and culture across the county - 'hidden gems'
- Promotion of the county's industrial and manufacturing history, and the natural environment (green spaces)
- Lack of funding - and support needed for making applications
- Potential for cross-county promotional themes - eg Roman history and sites
- Importance of 'getting them young' to develop lifelong interests and participatory habits
- Heavy dependence on volunteers and concerns about recruiting the next generation
- Shortage of venues/creative spaces (particularly in the north of the county)
- Appetite for Festivals and outdoor events

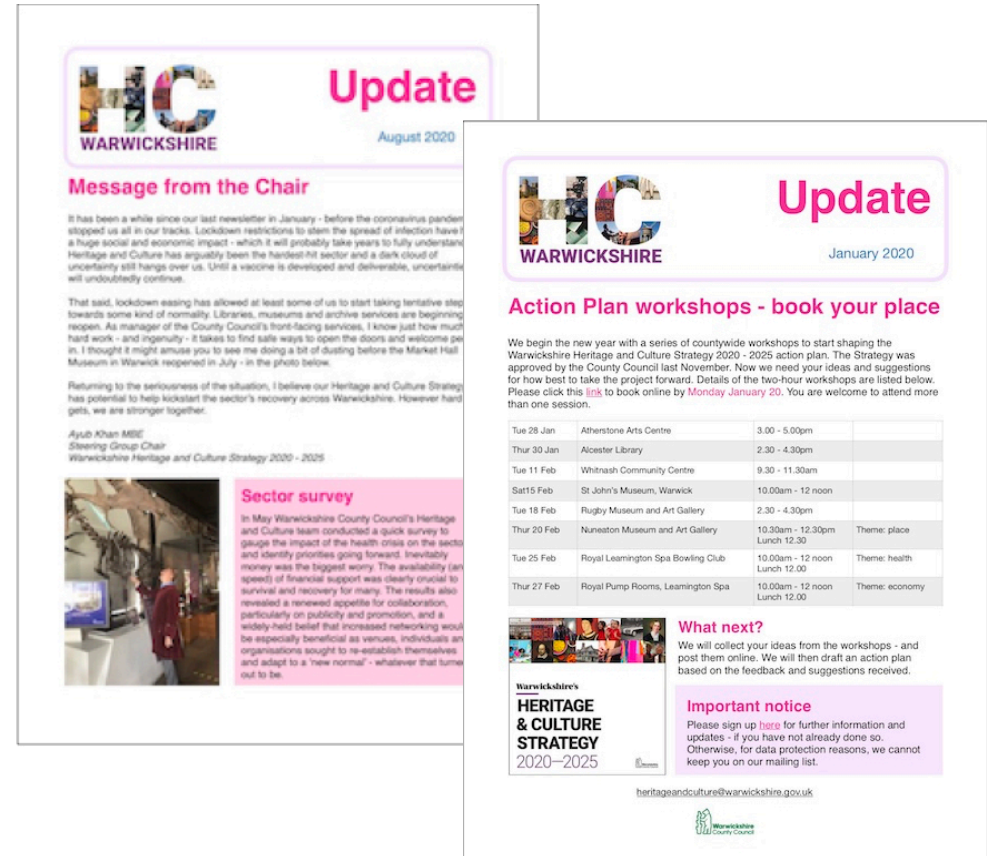
Developing an action plan

Benchmarking

The Project Group looked at example action plans from other areas. Approaches varied considerably - from a simple infographic to a detailed to-do-list over several pages.

Framework

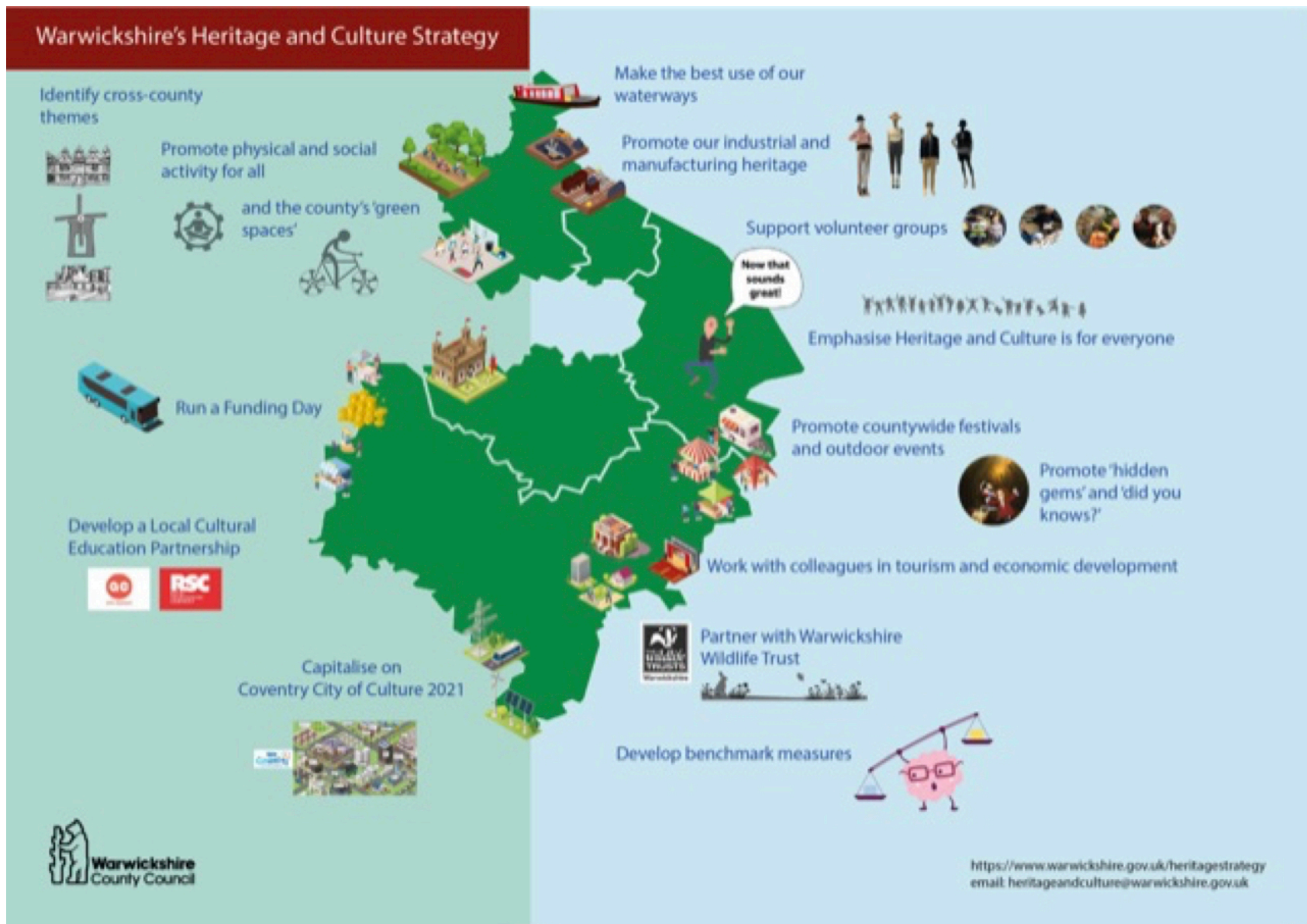
The Project Group took the view that whilst an initial framework was needed, Warwickshire's action plan would evolve and develop over time, with continuing input from the county's heritage and culture sector, and their evident willingness to work together towards shared goals. The recommendation to the Steering Group was, therefore, to keep it simple - and the action plan was drafted accordingly. See the video version [here](#):



E-newsletters

An ongoing series of e-newsletters keeps everyone involved up-to-date with the latest developments.

Initial action plan



Coronavirus impact

New perspectives

The original action plan was finalised just before the coronavirus lockdown of March 2020. The global pandemic hit the heritage and culture sector hard and, a year later, the world looks very different. Some of the behavioural and attitudinal shifts borne of the collective coronavirus experience will be long-term, if not permanent.

Restrictions to reduce the spread of infection made people more wary of public places and social proximity in general. Meanwhile many became online consumers, finding the services they needed - and entertainment - online. Warwickshire Libraries, for example, saw use of digital services rise by 800%. People lost the habit of going out or mixing beyond their immediate circle and, when restrictions eased, they remained uncomfortable with wider social interaction.

There will be a plus-side to all this. During lockdown pollution cleared, parking wasn't a problem, wildlife flourished, and people re-connected with the simpler things in life. Parks and green spaces became really important for local communities. The perhaps over-used phrase 'health and wellbeing' had real meaning. Lives became more local and less expensive - in both monetary and environmental terms.

People's preoccupations are now, quite literally, closer to home. The heritage and culture sector can - and should - capitalise on these new perspectives.

Sector survey

In May 2020 Warwickshire County Council's Heritage and Culture team conducted a quick survey to gauge the impact of the health crisis on the sector and identify priorities going forward. The survey was sent to more than 150 organisations and received a total of 77 responses.

The main categories of support respondents said they needed were:

- marketing and profile-raising 50%
- sector-specific financial support 39%
- networking 37%
- training and professional development 16%
- programme development support 12%

Of the 66 respondents who answered a question about digital adaptations, 38 mentioned delivering some form of their business online. Another strong theme was increasing social media communication to keep in touch with the public. However, some said digital expertise was an issue.

The results revealed an appetite for collaboration, particularly on publicity and promotion, and a widely-held belief that increased networking would be especially beneficial as venues, individuals and organisations sought to re-establish themselves once restrictions were lifted.

Progress to date

Partners across the sector furloughed staff and closed buildings during the pandemic - pausing a lot of developmental activity and limiting progress. However, it was not halted completely - meetings and conversations continued online. Despite the hiatus, we can report some achievements:

- Held two Steering Group meetings and planned a special session on finalising a 2021-22 action plan
- Sent out several e-newsletters to keep countywide sector contacts up-to-date
- Conducted a sector survey in May to take stock and gauge priorities going forward
- Developed a Warwickshire Waterways Strategy 2020 - 2025 in partnership with the Canal and River Trust
- Worked with Arts Connect and the RSC on a Local Cultural Education Partnership for the county's young people
- Started work on a *Visit Warwickshire* campaign to help the recovery of the county's tourism sector
- Secured funding for a three-year Creative Health project around social prescribing
- Engaged with a number of key organisations including Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Compton Verney, the North Warwickshire Heritage Support Group, and CW10
- Received funding for an Arts Challenge project
- Joined a City of Culture digital project with Coventry Libraries
- Set up an Officer Working Group to look at maximising the impact of Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022 on Warwickshire, including attracting live sites
- Partnership working on the above, between WCC and Museum and Art Gallery teams in Leamington and Rugby, is underway

Recovery planning

Whilst the main thrust and key elements of the five-year strategy remain unchanged, the focus for the year ahead will be on supporting post-coronavirus recovery.

A revised action plan is needed for the year April 2021 to March 2022. To this end, the Steering Group will schedule a special e-meeting in Spring 2021 to consider achievable and effective ways forward.

The updated action plan will reflect shorter-term priorities of a sector devastated by the pandemic, as well as longer-term, strategic ambitions to 2025. It will follow the six core principles of the [WCC Covid-19 Recovery Plan](#):

- Target recovery activity and support to where most needed
- Stabilise and accelerate the recovery
- Tackle inequalities
- Join up and work in partnership
- Focus on environmental challenges
- Apply our learning from COVID-19

WCC Heritage and Culture will work in partnership with colleagues in Communities and Public Health to ensure the action plan supports the Council's recovery priorities around health and wellbeing, digital resources, community involvement, the local economy and sustainability.

Immediate actions for the year ahead

Based on the May 2020 sector survey results and WCC's Covid Recovery Plan, we will prioritise:

- Providing opportunities for networking and peer-to-peer support - for example by supporting the Warwick District Cultural Compact and delivering a campus marketplace event, in partnership with Warwick School, for arts organisations and freelancers to support the economic recovery of heritage and culture education-providers across the county
- Focusing on outdoor activities and our natural heritage - for example by developing new strategic partnerships and projects with the Canal and River Trust and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, and the delivery of eight outdoor public realm projects in 2021-22, supported by WCC and LEP funding
- Further developing our social prescribing offer - currently being piloted through the Early Intervention Fund Creative Health Programme
- Signposting recovery funding for the heritage and culture sector, and acting as an advocate to maximise investment for the sector as part of COVID recovery
- Supporting the growth in remote volunteering
- Working with Coventry City of Culture 2021 and Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022 to explore opportunities for Warwickshire to participate and benefit from these major cultural events
- Planning and delivering an Arts and Nature project for the county
- Ensuring good practice and signposting to information on running COVID-safe venues and events

Measures of success

Measures of success will be identified by funding bodies supporting individual projects. Warwickshire's Heritage and Culture Strategy Steering Group will consider measures of success more broadly, using information from Arts Council England's [Taking Part](#) survey.