

2030 Vision for the Cambridge sub-region

Topic summary: Culture, leisure and sport

Issues:

- There is a clear need to reduce the impact of ill-health on the economy and to provide cultural and physical stimulation for an ageing population with more leisure time.
- Government support programmes do not reflect differences in needs (within the sub-region's villages and towns, its cities and age groups). Other barriers include administrative boundaries and inadequate (and costly) public transport (day and evenings) between cities and sub-region.
- Cultural well-being is required by the NPPF but there is no way it can be measured. But there are data.
- Local authority facilities/provision will remain driven by targets and finance. Existing public facilities will have to be used in different ways as we are unlikely to get new ones. However, whereas sports facilities in most countries are publicly owned, in UK most are in private hands. The University of Cambridge makes certain facilities available to groups. The Colleges' problem is a lack of supervisory resources.
- In certain areas there is a great shortage of recreation grounds (increasingly vulnerable to development).
- There is a shortage of spaces where artists can share facilities and work together.
- The boundaries between art forms and audiences are changing. There is an increasing desire for new types of experience. Cambridge has significant cultural activity but the cultural footprint is very tight – mainly connected to the older University. Despite a mass of information, the general public does not know much about it – although University-initiated events such as the annual Festival of Ideas attract significant numbers of local residents, young and old. In contrast, cultural activity outside Cambridge is under-represented; but here, too, it is difficult to discover what is going on.
- The same dissemination problem exists for sport – there is much unpublicised good practice locally.

Propositions:

- It is important to make use of the NPPF and understand what cultural well-being is.
- The comparative lack of interest and activity in the parts of the sub-region and in the deprived outer city areas and the less prosperous inner city ones needs to be addressed.
- The many emerging new communities in the city and sub-region are creating increasing demands on the city's facilities and also need identifiable foci for their own activities. There is scope to use community and village colleges more. New rural railway stations could include a community space.
- The barriers between young and old, able and disabled and so on need to be broken.
- We must unpick our idea of who should be in control, understand people's needs and offer the community a sense of control. The best things that will happen will not be planned - we must enable them. Dialogue is the key – between experts, professionals and communities. We must identify synergies of engagement with appropriate leadership.
- We must both respond to the increasing desire for new types of experience and reinvent the old.
- With less and less public money available, we must use what we have and engage with a new type of funding community – such as the amateurs. Non-professionals will not necessarily produce anything interesting or 'art' – but they can be engaged and stimulated. It is not enough to supply them with space – they need a good 'coach'. Accept specialisation and focus on the best possible experience rather than on events which are all things to all men and women.
- Build on the combination of 'traditional' and 'modern' culture which makes Cambridge distinctive.
- Cambridge would have an even higher cultural profile if there were a new concert hall venue and if some of its many smaller festivals were combined into a single large one.
- If we want to change things, we need to re-imagine. Digital can help – it is the new 'front of house', empowering audiences to discover and try things out, making possible the seemingly far-fetched, accelerating happiness and engaging the disengaged. The sub-region as a constant experimental space.
- Information on sub-regional events should be combined on a digital portal and social media exploited. Every effort should be made to continue to publicise through posters, brochures and print media.
- Organisations in the cultural and sport sectors should be encouraged to hold an annual fair (similar to university freshers fairs) where they can engage with the public (and each other).
- There is a mass of non-cultural specific data (population, health, transport, economic) that could be used by the culture sector together with culture-specific data on participation and venue use. With the help of university expertise, all this should be managed, 'mashed' and made available for policy making and programme development. Information overload should be avoided at all costs. Data should be used to predict success, and the case made for accounting differently, eliminating short-term thinking and influencing policy. Centralise digital booking and make use of digital media to publicise.
- Sports provision – the proposed Cambridge community stadium and the new CU sports centre and ARU's sports initiative – is currently in the headlines. And Cambridge is a leader in water sport provision. The big challenge – the rationalisation and mobilisation of resources – needs to continue, as does the fairly widespread sharing of college facilities. More synthetic pitches are needed.
- In sport, volunteers, ambassadors, coaches and school talent scouts need to be encouraged.
- The potential of large sports events to generate jobs – in hotels and catering – needs exploiting.
- The aim should be long-term health, energy and excitement. Culture (including libraries) and sport (physical activity) should feature prominently in policy. Local leaders need to set a style and example but, in the end, it is the local communities – with which there has to be improved communication – which are essential sources for new ideas.