

# Renaissance

## The Cultural Strategy for Rochford



# Reawakening

## What are we doing?

This document symbolises the beginning of a very exciting time for the people of Rochford District because it maps out the cultural future of our district.

Many people are unaware of the benefits we can reap through culture but, as the saying goes, you can only reap what you sow, so it's through this strategy that we're going to make sure that none of our cultural seeds fall on stony ground.

## What's all the fuss about?

Just what is culture and what can it do for everyone in Rochford District?

We may not know it, but everyone's life is touched by culture in some way and it's almost certain that we will take part or reap the benefits of culture everyday.

Whether its reading a book, watching a film or the T.V, listening to a CD, participating in sport, going to the theatre or a museum, visiting a tourist attraction, attending an evening class or simply enjoying an outing to the local park.



As you can see, the scope of culture is very broad therefore it's very difficult to actually define. So for the purpose of this strategy we've adopted the Government's Department of Culture, Media and Sports definition which includes the following activities.

- The performing and visual arts, craft, fashion, media, film, television;
- Museums, archives, design, libraries, publishing;
- The built heritage, architecture, landscape, archaeology;
- Sports events, facilities and activities;
- Parks, wildlife habitats, countryside recreation and water environment;
- Children's play activities and playgrounds;
- Tourism, festivals and attractions.

The Grand Theatre of  
Lemmings

# Recognition

## What's so special about culture?

### Economic

The links with local economy and cultural activity are widely documented; for example, the famous Angel of the North public art piece has been the catalyst for a £1.16 billion investment into the regeneration of Gateshead from the 35<sup>th</sup> most deprived area in Britain, to the thriving cultural city it is today.<sup>1</sup>

In the East of England, during the year 2000, 222,000 people were employed in the cultural sector and contribute £3,700 million to the regional economy.<sup>2</sup> In Essex, according to Essex County Council's Social Impact Study, in 2001 over 800 staff are employed by arts organisations, with a turnover of £12.5 million of which £2 million was spent with local suppliers.

### Social and Community



St Mark's Community Project

As well as economic benefits, being part of cultural activity brings communities together, creating a sense of place and belonging. Through social interaction, participation in sport, visiting local parks and experiencing local events, culture can inspire changes in regeneration; address major social issues such as crime and drug use, promote healthy living and provide an essential platform for new talent and personal development to occur. We have seen these benefits during the community projects that have been

instigated, including the St Mark's community art project, Battle of the Bands and the Mill mosaic.



Community Mosaic by Maggie Mills

<sup>1</sup> Newstart vol. 4 6<sup>th</sup> September 2002

<sup>2</sup> GVA – Gross Value Added taken from latest draft of Regional Economic Strategy EEDA

## Environmental

Environmental issues cover a wide subject area from litter, to conservation, to heritage, all of which are very important to the residents of Rochford District.

Rochford has substantial areas of natural beauty and a wealth of local heritage, local architecture, unique folklore and its substantial range of woodland areas. Through cultural activity, this uniqueness can be promoted and used as a tool to benefit the local population economically, socially and environmentally. Some of the projects we have developed include the Rubbish Riot, Heritage wheel project with schools and the development of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park.



Tiger Child by Tam Tam Theatre Company part of the Essex On Tour scheme

## Corporate

It's not always easy to reach everyone in the community but Council's are now utilising all methods of communication, to target the issues that matter to the local community.

# Research and Record

## **Aren't Strategies a Waste of Time?**

The traditional view of a strategy is a long, dull document, which means very little to people who haven't written them. However, strategies really are useful documents that bring together ideas, aims and opportunities from various information sources, so that a comprehensive, all seeing action plan can be developed.



Library Art Workshops

For this particular strategy, we have been consulting, investigating and communicating with departments, businesses, organisations, groups and individuals, to understand and incorporate their views into a plan for the whole community.

We have already mentioned that culture effects us all on a daily basis, so it is essential that we do not leave future developments to chance. By creating this strategy and continuing the evaluation and development of the action plans, we can ensure that all gaps in provision, opportunities, demands and aspirations, priorities and partners, are identified and acted upon.

For those living in the District, this strategy will ensure equity and access to cultural activities, as well as create opportunities for people to participate and have a say in the development of their communities.

It is also true that this document will be used as a tool to promote the District to the wider community, potential investors and act as a means to lobby for funding from national bodies.

## **What's everyone else doing?**



Mobile Skate Park

Rochford District is not working alone to promote cultural activity. All local authorities have been encouraged to develop their own strategies, as well as regional level organisations.

### **National**

The Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) have issued their first strategic plan, documenting their aims and action plan for 2003-2006. Through this document, Central Government recognises the importance of culture to quality of life, "cultural, artistic and sporting activities make a vital contribution to the educational attainment of children and young people, can contribute to neighbourhood

renewal and make a real difference to health, crime, employment and education.”<sup>3</sup>  
This document will lead the national development of cultural activity and investment for the whole country.

The Arts Council England East has also developed a document, stating its priorities for the future and the importance of local partnerships. “The arts are central to local economies in design, manufacturing, retail and leisure services. The arts make all the difference to how we feel, and the quality of our lives; participation can improve physical health as well as mental well being. The arts help us express our different cultures and ideas and enables us to communicate with others.”<sup>4</sup>



Rayleigh Physically handicapped Group

### Regional

It has to be acknowledged that Rochford District is part of a wider community, not just in the county of Essex but also in the Eastern Region. Key members and funders of the cultural industry have set out their priorities in strategies. Organisations such as Living East, the cultural consortium for the East of England, launched Culture: a catalyst for change – a strategy for cultural development for the East of England in 2001, stating that “Culture - in its widest sense – can improve the quality of life for communities and for individuals. Culture can lead regeneration, make people feel good about themselves and help the community recreate itself.”

### Essex

Essex County has also stated their county-wide strategy ‘Celebrating Essex – a Shared Vision’

“Culture in its many different forms – from sport to the arts, from natural and historic environment to libraries, from media to museums – has a key role to play in tackling social, economic and environmental issues”.

The document sets out the aspirations of the County in terms of promotion of culture and its benefits, as well as promotion of Essex as a cultural county.



St Mark's Community Art Project

Rochford is an active partner in the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership and therefore our cultural aims will also link into the objectives set out in the partnership's strategic framework document. These will primarily involve the

<sup>3</sup> (Pg 9 DCMS Strategic Plan 2003-2006).

<sup>4</sup> Arts Council England East. Local Government and the Arts. A vision for partnership. March 2003

development of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park and the promotion of leisure, tourism, arts and heritage throughout the district.

Within the Gateway, Southend / Rochford have been identified as the educational / cultural hub.

# REWIND

## Rochford District: The picture so far.....

### Facts and Figures

Rochford is a district steeped in unique heritage, natural beauty and cultural identity. It covers an area of 65 square miles and has a population of 78,500 (census 2001). The district is a mixture of town and country, with miles of unspoilt coastline and attractive green belt.

Studies show that Rochford is considered to be reasonably affluent, it is ranked 289 out of 354 on the overall deprivation index (Indices of Deprivation 2000) but there are pockets of deprivation, although none are in the nation's top 30%.

The population is ageing; people are living longer and there is a declining birth rate. This trend is higher than the national average. For example, an increase of 30% is forecast in those over 85 years by 2011, compared with 3.4% for England and Wales and 8% for Essex.



The Dutch Cottage

### Cultural capacity (what have we got)

#### Leisure and Recreation

Rochford District is renowned for the good range of leisure facilities that it provides, either directly or indirectly. These include sports pitches, which are maintained by the Council via its Grounds Maintenance Contractor, skate parks, privately run golf courses, marinas, activity centres and school facilities, which are open during the holiday period.



Paglesham

There are also the Clements Hall and Great Wakering Leisure Centres, the Freight House, The Mill Arts and Events Centre and Castle Hall, which are all managed on behalf of the Council, by Holmes Place, by way of a new innovative 20 year partnership contract that commenced in 2002.

Lack of formal cultural input has meant that Rochford hasn't had any designated venues for cultural activity. However this has changed dramatically in 2002 due to key changes in the leisure and cultural section of the Council and primarily, through the partnership with Holmes Place.

The new contract is of a very different nature to the previous agreements and promotes a continual enhancement of the facilities and level of service provided throughout the 20 year partnership, therefore ensuring the long term development of the facilities.

All the facilities are currently or due to be refurbished and renovated to create up to date, accessible facilities for the whole community. The Mill Hall has undergone significant transformation and has been repositioned as The Mill Arts and Events Centre, providing a focal point in the District for the development of arts based activities. As part of the contract, Holmes Place are also funding the employment of an Arts Development Officer, to lead the various arts' initiatives

Clements Hall Leisure Centre is the beneficiary of a £2½m capital investment by Holmes Place that will enhance and expand the facilities currently available and confirm its standing as one of the premier leisure venues in the South East.

Other key factors of the leisure management contract are the funding of the Sports Development Officer post, also for the 20 year period, the funding of the Council's newspaper, Rochford District Matters, the complete responsibility for the maintenance of the leisure buildings and the allocation of an annual budget, specifically for staging special events around the District.

This means that Rochford District is now at the beginning of a very exciting and positive journey to develop and promote cultural activity for the district and its residents.

Within the district there are 14 different parish/town councils each with a number of well maintained village halls and community centres available to hire. These have and will be fundamental to the development of rural cultural activities in the district.



Rochford Farmers Market

In 2001 the Council invested in a local Cinema, which currently runs two films every month. There is also a children's cinema showing films on Saturday mornings. These facilities are under review in preparation for a relaunch.

The Council also maintains many parks, recreation grounds and open spaces; some dedicated to formal sports, for example over 30 football pitches are available for public hire. The district also has the benefit of areas like the 57 acre Sweyne Park that is divided into children's play space, a wildlife area with environmental ponds and 2 km bridle path.

Children's play spaces are also a high priority and there are 27 within Rochford District, maintained by the Council and open to the general public.



Belchamps Scout Centre

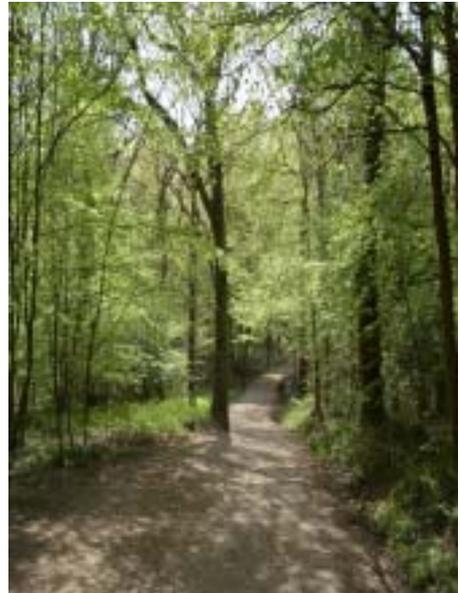
### Organisations and Businesses

Rochford has a wide range of active organisations, businesses and societies, both voluntary and professional, dedicated to arts and sports activity. Everything from painting to scuba diving, lawn bowls, ballroom dancing, as well as pubs, outdoor and indoor activity centres, independent high street shops and artist studios. These play a very important role in the opportunities and development that Rochford District Council can offer.

### Green Spaces

Due to the area's substantial countryside, green belt as well as parks and public open spaces, Rochford District offers superb opportunities to experience nature. Hockley Woods is the largest of the Council's open spaces, almost 300 acres in size. It is an ancient, semi-natural woodland, a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) and a Local Nature Reserve, which attracts over forty thousand visitors each year.

It is managed in a method that provides for the abundant wildlife and for the informal recreation and education of visitors. There is a large car-park, toilets, picnic area, and play space, as well as marked trails with an associated leaflet to help guide visitors through various parts of the woodland. A permissive horse route provides riders with a surfaced circular ride through the woods. The Council is finalising 5-year management plans with both the Forestry Authority and English Nature



Hockley Woods



Planting Trees at Cherry

that will secure grants to assist in the development and management of these facilities.

Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park, in the Roach valley, is two years into a five-year project, to create a 100 acre country park, with woodlands, a lake, bridleways, flower meadows and way marked walks. When finished, (approx 2006) the park will provide a free and real countryside experience to all its visitors. Consideration is also taking place around the possible future expansion of the country park, both westwards to Edward Hall park and eastwards to the Cherry Orchard link road, specific details of which are included within the local plan.

The district also benefits from four Local Nature Reserves, managed by parish councils, at Kendal Park, Hullbridge; Magnolia Park, Hawkwell; Doggetts, Rochford; and Marylands, Hockley. All of these are open to the public.

### **Tourism and Heritage**

Tourism and heritage in Rochford District have not been formally promoted and it is currently an area that the Council is committed to developing. This will include creating opportunities for cultural based business to develop in the area and highlighting the extensive areas of interest in the district, including the development of Rayleigh windmill into a museum and heritage resource centre.

Tourism and Heritage is an objective in the Economic Development Strategy for Rochford District (2003-07)

“Develop tourism and heritage initiatives which provide new local employment and wealth generation opportunities, and visitor attractions aimed at improving access to recreation facilities and preserving the District’s heritage for future generations.”

This work will be developed through partnership work with county and local organisations and businesses such as Essex County Council, the Crouch and Roach Estuary Management project and the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership.



Rayleigh Windmill



Wallasea Island

# React and Realise

## Consultation Issues – What you told us

The Council has been consulting across the district on a number of different issues but there are some cross cutting themes that have been prioritised.

### Safety

Although Rochford District has been constantly below the national and county average for crime, during consultation community safety has become an important issue for local residents specifically in relation to nuisance crime.



Canewdon Primary School winners of Yellow Woods competition.

### Environment

Surveys also suggest that the people of Rochford are keen to see continued and extended facilities for recycling, waste disposal and that environmental issues were seen as a priority.

### Leisure, Culture and Heritage

Through consultation it is clear that the arts are seen as an area that needs to be developed further, with specific interest in music and visual arts events and initiatives for the whole community.

Consultation has also highlighted the community need for continued and expanded out of school hour's activities for children and young adults, as well as developing opportunities for older members of the community to participate in leisure activities.

There is a desire to develop and promote activities for the under 8 age group, with Council's and schools requesting that activities/initiatives fit in with the curriculum.



Dance holiday activity



St Mark's Community Mural

Lack of cultural facilities in the district was also highlighted, including no specific museum or live music and performance focused space, as well as a frustration regarding the lack of cohesive communication about all opportunities in the district.

## Transport

Although 84% of households in the district have access to one or more cars, the rural nature of much of the district means that transport remains a concern for many of the residents, particularly the young and the elderly.

## What we've done so far

These are just some of the initiatives that the Council developed to address the consultation issues and promote cultural activity across Rochford District.

- Arts and Sports database holds over 2000 names of individuals, organisations, and professional working in and enjoying cultural activity.
- Annual Battle of the Bands for new young musical talent;
- Development of The Mill Arts and Events Centre.
- Gallery space within The Mill Arts and Events Centre.
- Establishment of Music Week as a week when a number of professional musicians visit schools around the District.
- Essex on Tour is a county run initiative organising professional entertainment for isolated and rural areas in Essex.
- Welcome Back to Sport is an initiative to encourage many adults to return to sport on a regular basis.



Brekete African Drumming and dance part of the Essex On Tour



Family Discovery Day

- Holiday sports and arts activities are run every school holiday throughout the district.
- A Disability Play Scheme operates during school holidays, enabling social development through encouraging children to play and explore at their own level. We have also launched a Disability Sports Forum.
- Schools, colleges and sports clubs are all encouraged attending coaching courses run through Essex Active Sports. This acts as a vehicle to develop the high standard of coaching currently available within the District.
- Established a community transport scheme in partnership with RAVS and Essex County Council
- Walking the Way to Health.
- Bodycare Roadshow involves a trained tutor visiting primary schools. This initiative fits in very well with the new National Curriculum, meeting most of the HRE Learning Outcomes for key stage two.
- Community Sports Day.

- TRAX is an opportunity for young people to learn the skills to become a successful DJ, as well as the issues and dangers surrounding substance misuse and anti social behaviour. The initiative has been piloted throughout 2003 and is set to be rolled out across the district in the New Year.
- St Mark's Arts was a highly successful community developed project to reduce vandalism and antisocial behaviour in the Rochford area. Young people and their families took an active role in designing, painting and celebrating a mural in the heart of the community.
- Rubbish Riot activity day is for the whole community, highlighting the importance of waste management, recycling and responsible use of resources through games, arts activities and quizzes.
- Support community groups to develop projects e.g. Sutton with Shopland Music Festival.



Norman House creating part of The Mill Mosaic

# Respond - Future developments

The following is a list of aims and objectives that we aim to have actioned over the next five years.

- Increase the opportunity for people living in rural and isolated communities to participate in sports and cultural activity.
- Increase opportunities for social excluded groups to participate in cultural and sports activities.
- Improve successful external funding bids for bringing arts and leisure initiatives into the District.
- Continue to work effectively with Holmes Place to facilitate the further development of the District's leisure facilities.
- Promote healthy living and a better quality of life for all members of the community, with particular focus on youth and the elderly.



Time of Our Lives Theatre



Painting by  
Lisa Temple Cox

- Continue to develop links with educational facilities within the district and surrounding districts to offer opportunities for cultural activity, training and personal development.
- Research into the potential for partnerships with adjoining authorities and the use of their facilities.
- Advocate and encourage the development of professionals and voluntary groups working in the district.
- Reduce nuisance crime through diversionary activities.
- Promote citizenship and responsible communities through cultural activities.
- Promote the district's heritage through innovative partnerships and activities.
- Promote new cultural facilities.
- *Research and develop links with local businesses for future partnership work.*
- Explore the possibilities of creating cultural business and facilities development in the district.



Music Week activities

# Reflect and Refine

## Evaluation

This plan aims to focus Rochford District Council's direction for the next five years. However, it is essential that over that time the plans are reviewed and adjusted to reflect the changes in the district.

On a yearly basis action plans for each service area will be developed to implement the priorities stated in this document.

A major review of the strategy will be completed in 5 years in preparation for the development of the new strategy 2009-2014.

## Continuous Consultation

We want to keep up to date with the wants and desires of the people of Rochford District, so if you would like to be added to our database or would like further information on our services and/or give your opinions on this document, please contact :

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