

**NOTES FROM WEST SUSSEX CREATIVES WORKSHOP**  
**held on 20 October 2025 11-1pm in the Nest at Chichester Festival Theatre**  
**Attendance noted from Event Registration**

**Welcome by Dale Rooks (Chichester Festival Theatre), Facilitated by Louise Blackwell,  
Hannah Foley (Creative Crawley)**

## **1 WELCOME – Dale Rooks**

DR opened the meeting welcoming all to a workshop to collaborate on building a narrative on the culture & arts scene in West Sussex in order to develop a shared agenda of shared information, shared stories etc that could culminate in a shared document that could be presented in the wider devolution discussions.

LB summarised the strength of the East Sussex Cultural Offering, that Brighton & Hove had an established cultural case, noting that West Sussex did not have a cultural strategy or shared cultural prospectus to contribute to a devolution discussion. An output would be to develop a written strategy on West Sussex Culture/Arts to share with prospective mayors and other important figures in devolution.

DR noted it was as important to capture what West Sussex didn't have as well as what it did have.

## **2 MAPPING EXERCISE LED BY LB/HF**

The objective was to make a start on capturing the cultural initiatives and landscapes across the region: attendees could send in names later but as a prompt this might include:-

Places – Buildings & Outdoor Spaces

People – artists, leaders, commentators

Networks – groups of organisations

Resources – organisations that provided funding or training

Values – common values, were organisations led by their Values, alongside e.g. audiences

Important to capture the different art-forms

## **3 GROUP DISCUSSION FOCUSED ON THREE AREAS**

### **WHAT IS THE USP BEHIND WEST SUSSEX?**

### **WHAT CULTURAL EVENTS COULD ONLY HAPPEN IN SUSSEX - CAPTURE WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT WEST SUSSEX THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER REGIONS?**

### **WHAT MAKES THIS REGION SPECIAL, DIFFERENT OR VALUABLE?**

- Unique link between arts and culture and location – tourism, a beautiful place, cities/towns to downs, how to package the unique mix of arts, heritage, place and quality
- Unique mix of arts, countryside, coast and urban areas. Lots of places to visit, established arts offering.
- Sussex is a good “destination” with places of interest to visit, landscape and culture.
- Established events based and established calendar – rich cultural offering from grass roots to top-end culture. Events include Sea to Shore in Worthing, Roman Week, CFT Festival season, Cathedral 950, Goodwood annual calendar of events, South Downs National Park,

Worthing Museum & Costume Museum, Contemporary Circus, Seaside and pier entertainment...

- Place-based events – Goodwood, Worthing Circus, history & heritage venues of Arundel & Chichester Cathedral, Arundel Castle, Worthing Museum.
- Note unique: that CFT is the only producing house in the region. Strength of church-based venues and fringe.
- Place-based – heritage, history, arts – stories to tell.
- Landscapes – connection of art, country, developed by Pallant Gallery and artists.
- National Folk Centre, William Blake and Turner – Sussex based historical exports. Blake Cottage, BlakeFest festival.
- High end cultural jewels- how to leverage these? E.g. Chichester Festival Theatre is the only producing theatre in the region – Festival season creates and produces 9-12 new productions.
- Growing arts-led culture, not just institutions. So much arts-based communities/networks (but how to join them up), arts-based community work and reach, but not joined up.
- West Sussex can export its quality, excellence – of its creative output, whether theatre, art, community activities.
- Create a two-way street of importing creative talent. Bringing creative initiatives and people into West Sussex. There is much artistic capital within the region including big names.
- Sussex is a popular destination which people move to and bring experience, diversity.
- Creative environment could include the lead on e.g. Rewilding of the countryside – Knepp or the Seedbank
- Innovation is a unique area – tech, young people, investment in college facilities
- Education & Learning sector – pipeline of trained talent. Chichester College group has wide reach and big investment in digital technology, training and equipment in Chichester and Northbrook, Worthing – performing and creative arts are very strong in terms of Education at both the college and university, although Chichester University has dropped its Fine Arts degree.
- Opportunities for young people, e.g. largest youth theatre in the country at CFT. What else?
- Where do trained young people go onto – note work to support apprenticeships, placements, training.
- Many opportunities for young people but query/discussion about whether there was a strong and unique youth voice/offering. Are enough of these arts groups represented. Funding was key to funding initiatives and engaging with youth.
- Cross generational work, multicultural work – bringing in the facilities and opportunities at Chichester and Northbrook. Investment in digital technology. Education & Learning sector.
- Graylingwell as a centre – Graylingwell chapel as a venue and stories alongside. Unique model for how a new development can get it right. Developers so rarely get this right in offering a community/arts space for the community.
- Weald & Downland extending cultural experiences.
- Amberley Museum, Petworth House, Novium, Amberley Museum, Goodwood Art foundation, South Downs Festival of Poetry
- Bognor Arts & Music is an example of a local umbrella organisation.

## **WHAT DEMONSTRATES THE STRENGTH / VALUE OF ARTS & CULTURE IN SUSSEX?**

- Quality of the output – to London, national and international reach
- Economic Value that the Arts/Creative Sector can generate. Generates so much local revenue through sales, suppliers, employment, tourism, hospitality sector, local spend.

- Exports from West Sussex, e.g. from Pallant House and CFT in Chichester but alongside the richness of the arts, museums, sites and places.
- Local grit and determination – note the grass roots and grass roots festivals that happen. Energy and support for the arts in so many ways across the county.
- Open Houses – unites artists
- -ve: established artists come from London can overshadow the local professional artist base
- -ve: mid Sussex has no venues, base
- CFT is a powerhouse in terms of bringing creative groups together and leading the sector with no funding.
- Extent of Arts & Education opportunities for young people. Breadth of creative courses offered by the Chichester College group – extends to all levels of experience.
- Many youth groups - Audio Active, Dance Hub, youth work e.g. in Crawley.
- Unique initiatives like Theatre Inc.- inclusive theatre company based at Chichester College – only company in the country funded by College, Arts Council England and Educational Funding Agency. Ten years established.

## WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE THINGS ABOUT ARTS & CULTURE IN WEST SUSSEX

- Quality of the Arts & Culture offering.
- Variety – emerging artists, cinemas, theatre, music, festivals, Pride events
- Cultural appreciation of the Arts
- Lots of community-based work and effort and impact/benefit
- Opportunities for training and development
- How Arts & Culture is already linked into the history of the County – exploited by
- CFT – top-end work balanced by youth theatre and grass roots community projects
- Determination to develop the arts and events – local grit.
- Pop-ups, buskers, bandstand area – should do more.
- Funding allows free events, and allows the Arts to go out to the people.
- Funding is key – noted support of Chichester District Council.
- -ve: diversity needs careful analysis
- -ve: geographic and economic values

## Other Points to Note about West Sussex

- Exporting Talent – are we losing the creative talent from Sussex?
- Alumni – can we do more to use Sussex Alumni to promote the region?
- Youth Education/Voice – strength for some areas, weakness for others. Reflects the patchiness we face across the county.
- West Sussex may be affluent overall, but there are significant pockets of deprivation. It may have a reputation for affluence but there is much more to the area....there is much economic and other diversity that local groups work to reach. West Sussex is more diverse than you might think.
- Welcoming – Chichester hosted more Ukrainians than any other town in the country. There is a strength of welcome, warmth, liberalism, support that is unique.
- Could this be articulated in a summary of – Did You Know? Could be used to challenge the preconceptions of Chichester and the West Sussex region.
- Be upfront about the preconception that Chichester is the wealthiest area, and acknowledge the deprivation.

- Note that schools funding in Sussex is lower than in the rest of the country, perhaps reflecting the perceived affluence
- Places such as Worthing and Chichester do not promote themselves as they could – is Sussex too quiet to shout about success. Bang the drum louder!
- The bigger cultural institutions already do a lot but with funding could do more to broaden their reach and impact.
- Note local initiatives that do great things in their area but without any connection, involvement, awareness of other towns, initiatives, and activities.
- Opportunity to create a sense of being part of a bigger offering, not just a local initiative that just works in isolation. e.g. the Chichester Artists Network has played a big part in helping artists and bringing artists/groups together.
- Noted that Arts Council England (ACE) are aware of the pending devolution and impact on the region. ACE are engaged to ensure that West Sussex punches above its weight in contrast to the established regions of Brighton & Hove and East Sussex.
- We do not yet know where the centre of administration/operation will be. The Mayor would probably be Brighton-based and that could be the centre that needs to listen to its county voices.
- Devolution provides a catalyst for discussion and collective work. Creative Crawley and CFT have taken the lead in today, but there, but have no funding and do not want to speak for the sector.

#### **Themes emerging from the discussions:**

**Innovation** - e.g Knepp - Rewilding pioneers, Wakehurst - seed bank, pop-up spaces, Creative Crawley/AudioActive, tech (CCG)

**Cultural exporters** - e.g CFT producing theatre, Pallant House gallery

**Youth voice/talent pipeline** - e.g biggest youth theatre (CFT), AudioActive, Theatre Inc, Chichester College group

**Grassroots power** - strong voluntary arts and a sense of grit and determination e.g music festivals

**Historical embracing the new and vice versa** - Roman remains, cathedrals and chapels, museums, Weald and Downland and Goodwood Contemporary Art, Circus (Worthing) etc

**Landscapes (urban and natural)** – coastal, downs, urban towns

#### **4 WHAT DOES WEST SUSSEX CULTURE NEED? (one word post its)**

- Infrastructure & Support
- More local space, e.g. for exhibitions, multi-use for visuals, music, rehearsal, performance
- Availability of affordable space across the county is patchy – focussed in towns and city centres
- Money
- Funding for Arts & Culture – ensuring that organisations can thrive
- Funding – Education, Therapeutic Arts, Access (transport, timings, geography)
- Connected Youth Voice
- Connected communications and a better coordinated network across arts practitioners and organisations – a clear, accountable funded structure that is fed into and feeds up.
- An Arts & Culture hub – point of contact?
- Connectivity for Culture – would improve communication, mutual support, shared voice, sharing costs from Crawley to the Downs to the Coast
- Crawley needs a music venue!

- Better signposting of opportunities and output for artists and young people – so that artists do not miss out.
- Recognise the reach of the arts to provide opportunities to Young People, Third Age population, supporting youth, longevity, well-being and using the arts
- A West Sussex Creative Board?
- An agreed cultural strategy
- Money and a common Marketing strategy in terms of support post-devolution
- West Sussex Culture needs one voice, singularity of vision, and a singular personality
- A central website/information/ a database of arts opportunities and organisations
- A central point of hub/body for the West Sussex Creative sector instead of a siloed, place based approach with groups, committees and organisations
- Support fair representation and individuality

## 5 CLOSING

- DR was very keen that all voices were captured in this debate. She highlighted that there was no funding – Creative Crawley and CFT can offer space and support in kind, but writers/printers/designers could help with pulling this written output together. [Culture in West Sussex page](#) on Creative Crawley's website is a landing page for others to share.
- *Action Ideas*
- How to capture the established groups and join them up – email [coordinator@festivalofchichester.co.uk](mailto:coordinator@festivalofchichester.co.uk) who volunteered to create this listing possibly under an umbrella of a West Sussex Arts Forum
- Sign up to Eventbrite link – need permissions for GDPR to share details.
- Next meeting 19 November 2025 3-5pm in Crawley, [BOOK YOUR FREE PLACE HERE](#)

