



# ARTS & CULTURE STRATEGY 2019 – 2024

## Foreword

I have great pleasure in writing this foreword to Maidstone's Arts and Cultural Strategy 2019-2024.

I have always been passionate and an advocate for the power of the Arts to bring people and communities together, and to provide a platform where everyone's life experiences can be enriched by meeting with other people's culture and art forms.

I first came to Maidstone when I worked for the now University of the Arts at their Maidstone Campus.

This Strategy represents the realisation by Maidstone Borough Council that revitalising arts and culture across our town and borough can help us all achieve a sense of place and pride in Maidstone.

The Arts is also a well proven sector which can lead to not only cultural revival but also economic regeneration, and as the Chair of Maidstone Borough Council's Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee, I look forward to the implementation of our action plan and to a brighter future for the Arts in Maidstone, so we can rightfully aspire over time to become the arts and cultural capital of Kent.



Cllr Paul Harper

## Introduction

### What are arts and culture?

Arts and culture mean different things to different people, making them hard to define. They can include but are not limited to: museums and historic buildings, libraries, galleries, theatres, cinemas, music, dance, drama, visual arts, crafts, digital media, photography, literature and festivals.

For the purposes of this strategy, we have adopted a broad definition that encompasses the professional, community and voluntary creative sectors.

### Why do we need arts and culture?

Arts and culture have the potential to deliver wide-ranging benefits to our economy, our society and the health and wellbeing of our residents.

### *Our economy*

According to research carried out by Arts Council England (ACE), the Creative Industries is the fastest growing sector of the UK economy, with art and culture contributing £10.6 billion.

Culture brings around £850m to the UK, through tourism, each year. Maidstone attracts over 4.5 million visits per year, with over £284 million spent in the local economy.

In 2017, within the Maidstone borough, there were an estimated 4,319 full-time equivalent jobs created by the tourism sector, or 5,909 including those jobs indirectly supported by tourism - around 8% of total employment.

A thriving arts and cultural offer enhances the image of an area, helping to attract inward-investment.

### *Our society*

Participating in arts and culture can:

- help develop skills, knowledge and academic achievement, enhancing employment prospects and offering a highly skilled workforce for local businesses
- increase a person's confidence and self-esteem, helping them realise their potential
- help promote cultural cohesion by developing a shared sense of local identity and pride in communities
- encourage inter-generational and inter-cultural learning by acting as a window to other people's lives, fostering greater understanding and more tolerant communities, helping to reduce racism and unintended discrimination
- break down barriers between ethnic, religious and other minority groups
- help to reduce crime/fear of crime by providing meaningful activity and strengthening community networks

Secondary school pupils engaged in arts and culture are twice as likely to volunteer in the community and are 20% more likely to vote as young adults (ACE research).

Children from low income families who take part in arts activities at school are three times more likely to get a degree (ACE research).

### *Health and wellbeing:*

A lot of health and well-being benefits are only just beginning to be recognised and understood, but there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that access to, and participation in arts and culture can have a positive influence on both our physical and mental wellbeing.

- Almost 60% of people are more likely to report good health if they've attended a cultural place or event in the last 12 months (ACE research)
- Singing, dance and drama can improve physical health through increased exercise, better breathing techniques and posture
- Dancing can help with falls prevention in the elderly

- Singing has been shown to have positive effects on those living with dementia, Parkinson's and depression
- Participation in arts and cultural activities can reduce social isolation
- Social prescribing is becoming established as an acceptable alternative to medical interventions for some conditions, with more GPs now choosing to prescribe participation in arts and culture for certain patients

## **Why do we need a strategy?**

This is a working document which outlines our aims and priorities for arts and culture in the Maidstone borough over the next five years.

We need this plan to:

- set priorities and timeframes for developing arts and culture in a clear, strategic way
- identify and challenge the main barriers to local people taking part in the arts
- build new partnerships that will help us reach more people
- ensure that provision of arts and cultural activities is sustainable in a future with less public funding
- ensure that arts and culture support the delivery of Maidstone's Strategic Plan
- highlight and promote arts and culture as valuable tools for social, economic and health benefits

## **Scope of Strategy**

This strategy focuses on the delivery of cultural and arts activities and events in our borough over the next five years.

Maidstone Museum is the subject of a separate Transformation Plan and is therefore not included in the scope of this strategy. But there are clear synergies between the development of the museum and arts and culture in the borough.

Maidstone Borough Council has responsibility for the operation/management of a small number of facilities and venues in the borough, including the Hazlitt Theatre, Kent Life, Mote Hall and certain community centres. However, most venues are independent, and we will therefore need to develop strong partnerships with all providers of arts and culture. We will also need to work with colleagues across the Council to deliver the action plan. Other key partners will include the NHS, Kent County Council and our parish councils.

This strategy sits within a wider national and regional framework, as well as the Council's own Strategic Plan.

It is also informed through an audit of cultural and arts organisations that are currently active across the borough, carried out in February/March 2019 (Appendices 2 & 3).

## National context

In December 2019, Arts Council England (ACE) will publish its next 10-year strategy, covering 2020-30, which will come into effect in April 2020. The current draft highlights three key outcomes:

**Creative people** - *Every person can develop and express creativity throughout their lives.*

ACE will work to help communities design and develop more opportunities for creativity, and better signpost those that already exist. They will encourage more museums, libraries and arts organisations to use their collections, knowledge, skills and resources in their work with communities to provide more activities that allow people to develop their creative potential.

This outcome includes a particular focus on young people, and specifically early years. Therefore, ACE will support libraries and cultural organisations, community partners and the public to co-design and deliver an improved programme of creative activity for young children and their families.

**Cultural communities** - *A collaborative approach to culture helps villages, towns and cities across the country to thrive.*

Over the next decade ACE will work with a wide range of partners, including local government, business, further and higher education and schools, healthcare providers, the criminal justice system, the commercial and voluntary sector and other funders, to ensure that culture continues to help build thriving communities. They want to see communities that are more socially cohesive and economically robust, and in which residents experience improved physical and mental wellbeing as a result of investment in culture.

**A creative and cultural country** - *England's cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international.*

The cultural sector already acts as an incubator for the commercial creative industries: spotting and growing talent and undertaking early development of new content and services. ACE intends to deepen those connections, supporting the creative industries to build our international reputation for creativity and act as an ever-more-important engine for our country's economy.

ACE wants to work in partnership with further and higher education and the commercial sector to strengthen training opportunities so that more people working in the cultural sector become ready adopters and developers of new technologies. They believe this will increase the adaptability of people coming into creative careers, supporting them to move back and forth between the publicly funded cultural sector and the commercial creative industries, circulating knowledge and skills as they do so.

## Regional context

Kent County Council's cultural strategy *'Inspirational creativity: transforming lives every day – our cultural ambition for Kent'* sets a regional context and Maidstone Borough Council will contribute to its three intentions:

**Create** – *supporting and enabling the presentation of excellent work and the growth of world class creative productivity.*

"The creation of excellent cultural product is at the heart of everything we do. Bold and experimental art encourages people to take part and helps us to build a reputation as a dynamic county that provides rich cultural experiences for every person as part of their everyday lives.

"A strong cultural infrastructure is vital to the production and presentation of excellent work and has a number of essential elements, which go beyond our networks of venues, heritage locations, natural environment and technology. It includes people, collaboration, creativity and networks, which collectively form an ecology that supports delivery of high quality arts and cultural experiences.

Creating the right kind of workspace is also critical – from artists' studios to large-scale production hubs."

**Innovate** – *developing original and creative ideas, encouraging creative leadership and supporting skills and learning*

"Success is dependent upon initiating and embracing innovation and creating the space for experimentation. With the growth of new communities and creative clusters throughout Kent, it is vital that we encourage and nurture creative ideas.

"Facilitating experimentation and linking with Kent's world class research institutions and universities will support growth and skills development. Leadership and learning are key to innovation and we will nurture new talent, new ideas and a highly skilled workforce."

**Sustain** – *delivering access to finance, support for businesses, smarter ways of working, and empowering entrepreneurship*

"We know that a substantial proportion of the creative sector in Kent is freelance. We will review established business models and explore ways of working together to shape the sector to become more resilient. It will be a journey that realises potential, encourages collaboration, supports development, enables growth and works towards financial stability to support a mixed economy of skilled freelancers, micro-businesses and larger companies."

Other regional stakeholders have also produced plans that will inform and influence our own strategy, including the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), the South East Creative Economy Network (SECEN), Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP), the Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission and the Thames Estuary Production Corridor.

## Local context

Maidstone Borough Council's Strategic Plan (2019 – 45) provides a clear vision for the borough:

*"Maidstone: a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community at the heart of Kent where everyone can realise their potential."*

It also sets out the Council's priorities for the coming years and the table below demonstrates how arts and culture can contribute to each of these.

Priority	Outcomes	Role of arts and culture:
Homes and communities	A diverse range of community activities is encouraged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for people to try new things and learn new skills</li> <li>• Co-create activities and events that address specific local needs</li> </ul>
Homes and communities	Community facilities and services in the right place at the right time to support communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovative use of cultural and community venues to engage different audiences</li> <li>• Identify new types of community infrastructure to support the arts</li> </ul>
Embracing growth & enabling infrastructure	Key employment sites are delivered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop skills, knowledge and academic achievement, providing a highly skilled workforce for local businesses</li> <li>• The arts and cultural sector can contribute to economic regeneration</li> </ul>
Safe, clean & green	People feel safe and are safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote inter-cultural learning to foster greater understanding and more tolerant communities</li> <li>• Provide opportunities to learn and be enriched by other cultures</li> <li>• Engage people in meaningful activities</li> </ul>
Safe, clean and green	An environmentally attractive and sustainable borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural place-making increases local pride and gives people a sense of place. The environment is respected, and anti-social behaviour is reduced (e.g. littering)</li> <li>• Public artworks can enhance public spaces</li> </ul>

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Role of arts and culture:</b>
A thriving place	A vibrant leisure and culture offer, enjoyed by residents and attractive to visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain/develop high quality arts /cultural venues, accessible by all</li> <li>• High quality events to attract diverse audiences</li> <li>• Wide range of community arts events</li> </ul>
A thriving place	Skills level and earning potential of our residents are raised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop skills, knowledge and academic achievement, enhancing employment prospects</li> </ul>
A thriving place	Local commercial and inward investment is increased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A strong arts and cultural offer enhances the image of an area, encouraging inward investment</li> </ul>
<b>This strategy will also contribute to the four cross-cutting objectives:</b>		
Heritage is respected		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural place-making</li> <li>• Raise awareness of history/heritage</li> </ul>
Health inequalities are addressed and reduced		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce social isolation</li> <li>• Deliver improvements in physical and mental health for target groups</li> </ul>
Deprivation is reduced and social mobility is improved		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote events/projects designed to address barriers to participation</li> <li>• Develop skills, knowledge and academic achievement</li> </ul>
Biodiversity and environmental sustainability are respected		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote events/activities that encourage greater understanding of the natural environment and how to protect it</li> </ul>

Other Maidstone Borough Council strategies and plans that impact on arts and culture include:

- Economic Development Strategy
- Town Centre Development Programme
- Festivals & Events Strategy
- Destination Management Plan
- Community Development Strategy
- Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy
- Biodiversity Strategy

## Local Analysis

*In drawing up this strategy we undertook desk research including a full SWOT analysis (Appendix 1); an audit of local arts and cultural organisations (Appendices 2 & 3); and a number of interviews with arts groups, individual artists and creatives (Appendix 2).*

Maidstone is the County Town of Kent. It is the seat of local government and has a strong and growing economy, with a wide range of shopping and leisure facilities on offer. It has a rich history and impressive heritage assets; there is a substantial number of active arts and cultural groups, and a thriving music scene.

Despite this, public perception of the town is quite negative, with comments such as 'it lacks identity' and 'it doesn't feel like the county town' being commonplace, particularly in discussions with arts groups and creatives.

In the 2017 Residents Survey, respondents were asked about their local neighbourhood and whether people treat each other with respect and consideration. The most common response was 'tend to agree' with 47%. The BME groups had the greatest level of disagreement at 31.4%.

In terms of overall satisfaction with their local area as a place to live, 70.5% of respondents were fairly or very satisfied. However, there were higher levels of dissatisfaction amongst the 18 – 24 years group.

If we are to build stronger, more inclusive, communities and make the borough a place where people want to live, then we need to increase overall levels of pride and satisfaction, and challenge negative perceptions. We aim to do this by creating a more distinct identity, particularly for urban areas, and developing a sense of place for the people within them. The arts are also a known method for breaking down cultural barriers.

We want the borough to be a place where everyone can take an active part in their community and reach their full potential. Ensuring a diverse range of community activities are available and fully accessible is key to this.

In order to better understand the current arts and cultural offer in the borough, an audit was carried out to identify as many existing arts and cultural organisations as possible. The full results of the audit are given at Appendix 3.

118 culture and arts organisations were contacted, including commercial enterprises, community groups and voluntary organisations (full list at Appendix 1). Respondents were asked to complete an online questionnaire, and 56 meaningful responses were received (47% response rate, which is a statistically high response).

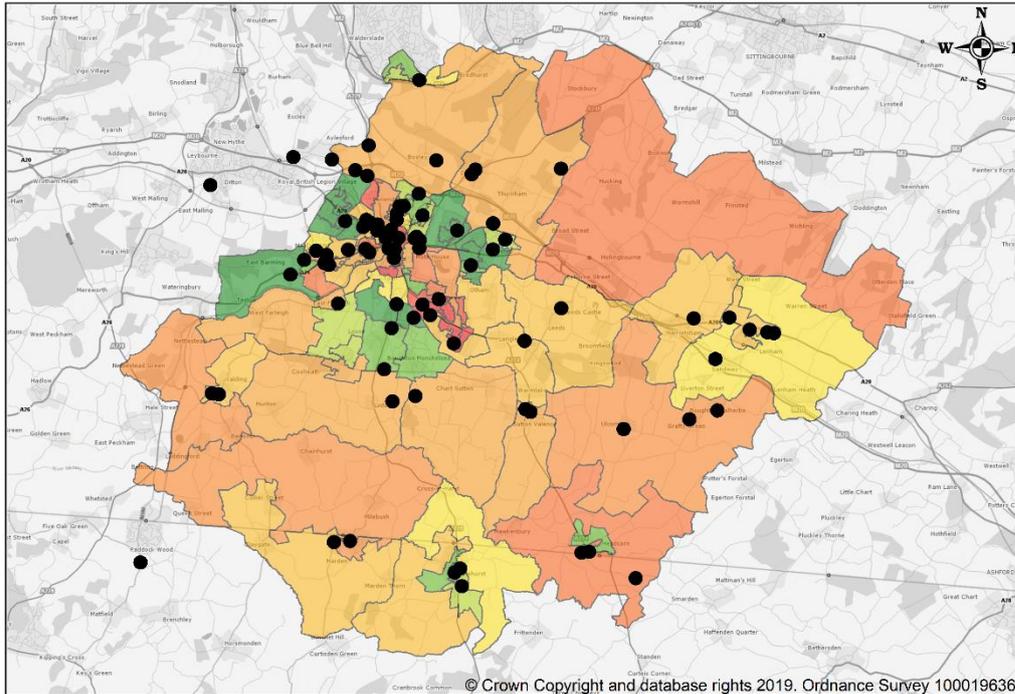
The results can be summarised as follows:

- There is a slightly higher concentration of arts/cultural groups within the town itself, but a variety of activities are also available across the wider borough, with particular strengths in music and dance.
- Numbers of members/regular attendees vary from several hundreds (e.g. Kent Archaeological Society, certain dance schools) while others are made up of just a dozen or so people. On average, dance and theatre groups have the highest participation rates.
- The age range of participants varies depending on the activity with children and young people (aged 18 and under) tending to dominate in the theatre (performing arts) and dance categories (60% and 77% respectively). There are significantly higher proportions of older people (aged 50+) in the music (53%) and arts and crafts (82%) categories.
- Females dominate across all categories, but especially in dance and arts and crafts.
- A limited number of respondents provided information on ethnicity, with the results indicating the majority of participants are white. According to the 2011 Census, this is the largest ethnic group in the Maidstone borough at 94.1% of residents. This comprises 89.3% British and 4.8% non-British (predominantly European). The remaining 5.9% of residents are from a Black Minority Ethnic (BME) group.
- It was not possible to obtain accurate data on the number of participants living with a disability (physical or mental health) as the majority of groups do not keep detailed membership records or do not collect this type of information about their members.

While the audit results indicate there are a lot of arts and cultural activities for residents to engage with, based on the number of members reported by respondents and weighting for non-respondents, it would appear that only around 4% of the total population of the borough is currently participating with an arts/cultural group.

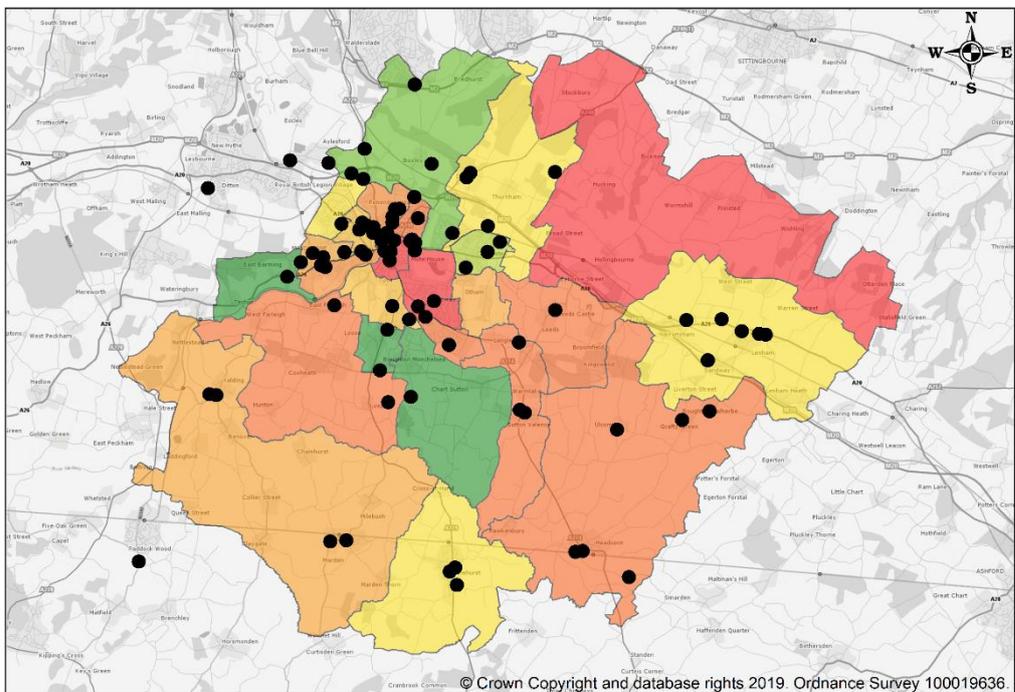
We are fortunate that the borough as a whole is relatively prosperous, but there are areas that are less affluent, where there are higher levels of unemployment, a higher proportion of low-income households, and health inequalities.

Map 1 below highlights areas in the borough which are classed as being in the most deprived, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), overlaid with the locations of existing arts/cultural organisations. The areas in red have the highest levels of deprivation.



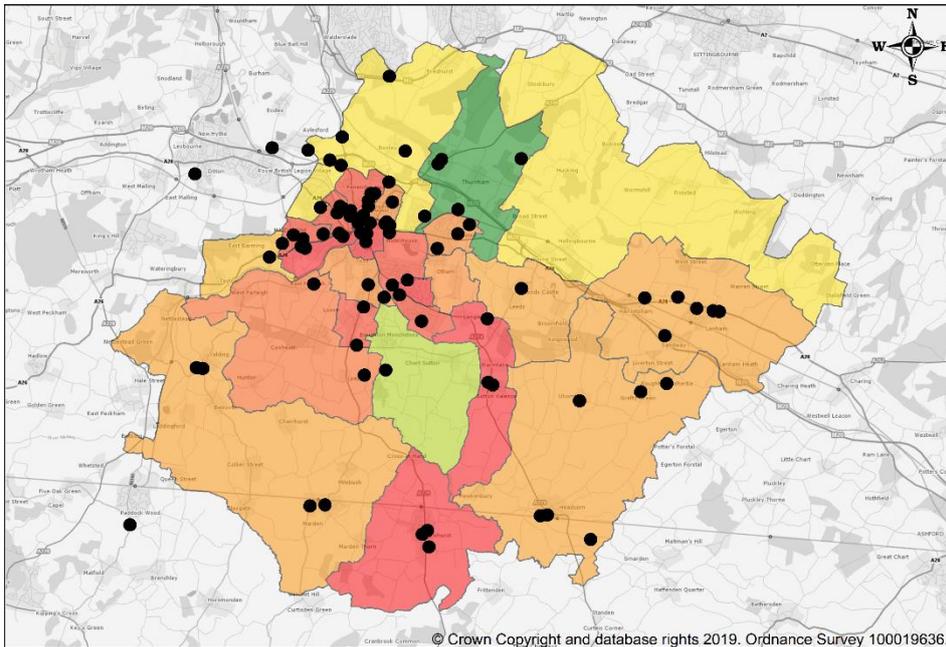
Map 1: Areas of highest deprivation in Maidstone borough

There are a number of wards within the borough which have significant health inequalities. Rates of childhood obesity are particularly high in Shepway North, Shepway South, East, High Street, Heath and North Downs. Map 2 below highlights these areas (in red) against the locations of existing arts/cultural organisations.



Map 2: Levels of childhood obesity (Year 6)

There are also discrepancies in life expectancy across the borough. These are indicated in Map 3 below, with the red areas having a lower average life expectancy rate.



Map 3: Average life expectancy

These maps indicate that some opportunities for participation in arts and culture are available within or very near to the highlighted areas, but it would seem residents are not engaging. There are likely to be a variety of barriers, both real and perceived, that limit the accessibility of these activities.

A wider public consultation will help to provide a more detailed picture of individual levels of engagement, including attendance at festivals and events and other forms of activity not covered in the audit (e.g. visits to art galleries, attending gigs/music events, trips to the cinema, etc). It will also help us to identify what the main barriers to participation are for our residents, so we can work on overcoming them.

Arts and culture have a role to play in the economic success of the borough. The creative industries is the fastest growing sector of the UK economy and Maidstone is currently home to 625 creative industry enterprises, the 4<sup>th</sup> highest percentage in Kent (excluding Medway)\*. However, this figure is down by 10 since 2017, and Kent overall has a slightly lower percentage of creative industry enterprises than the national average.

In order to capitalise on the potential of this sector, and to compete with the creative hubs in Medway, Canterbury and Folkestone, we need to support our existing businesses and arts/cultural groups, while continuing to attract and retain new talent. We have a strong base with the Maidstone Studios and an opportunity to benefit from the Thames Estuary Production Corridor.

\*ONS data compiled by Kent County Council

Respondents to the audit were asked to rank their top priorities for the future. The number one priority for each category is as follows:

Arts and crafts groups – finding suitable exhibition space  
Music – growing/keeping your audience  
Theatre – marketing events and accessing funding  
Dance – attracting new members  
Heritage – attracting new members

Facilitating training workshops and networking opportunities that address these issues will help groups to grow and develop, ensuring our arts and culture offer is sustainable.

Arts and culture are also significant drivers for tourism. The borough is home to several high profile attractions, such as Leeds Castle and Kent Life, and hosts a number of annual music festivals and large-scale events, including Ramblin' Man and the Kent County Show. These help to draw in over 4.5 million visitors each year, who spend over £284 million in the local economy.

The tourism sector supports a substantial number of jobs, both directly and indirectly, accounting for around 8% of total employment in the borough in 2017.

The Destination Management Plan (DMP) sets out the Council's ambitions for developing and promoting the borough as a tourist destination. It recognises that arts and culture can contribute to improving the visitor experience and provide additional reasons to visit.

This strategy is therefore closely aligned to the work of the DMP, but its primary focus is on engaging residents and encouraging their participation in cultural and arts activities.

The above national and regional context, together with the local analysis, has provided the evidence to propose the following vision, priorities and action plan.

## **Vision:**

This arts and culture strategy contributes to achieving Maidstone Borough Council's overall Strategic Plan Vision:

*"Maidstone: a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community at the heart of Kent where everyone can realise their potential."*

The vision for arts and culture is:

***'To make the borough of Maidstone a vibrant multi-cultural hub where everyone can experience great arts and culture, and to enrich all residents lives.'***

## **How can we deliver the vision?**

Maidstone has a rich history, with impressive heritage assets and a good cultural offer. But we believe there is potential to achieve much more; to make a real difference to the lives of those who live, work and visit here.

To help us realise this vision, we have identified three key priorities:

### **1. Cultural place-making** – *increase pride in our communities and change negative perceptions of the town*

We will achieve this by:

- 1.1. commissioning a 'Sense of Place' project which will help us to celebrate and expand Maidstone's identity, recognising the diversity of its people, the quality of place and its role as the County Town of Kent
- 1.2. working with One Maidstone and other stakeholders to challenge and change the negative image and perceptions of the town
- 1.3. promoting, developing and protecting the borough's existing cultural strengths and heritage assets (linked to the Museum Transformation Plan)

### **2. Accessible by all** – *ensure arts and heritage are culturally inclusive, being accessed and valued by everyone in the community, and are a major asset for tourism.*

We will achieve this by:

- 2.1. increasing opportunities for people to experience great arts by reducing local barriers and widening participation by under-represented groups
- 2.2. working with local communities to co-create affordable and inclusive arts opportunities that address local needs, with a particular focus on areas of higher deprivation and health inequalities
- 2.3. supporting artists and organisations to inform, inspire and enable delivery of arts activities and events that celebrate Maidstone's identity, diversity and cultural heritage

**3. Sustainable** – *support new and existing creative talent and cultural organisations; raise awareness of the benefits arts and culture can bring to our society, economy, health and wellbeing*

We will achieve this by:

- 3.1. developing the provision of affordable workspace for creative businesses, artists and makers
- 3.2. supporting existing creative businesses, arts freelancers and community organisations
- 3.3. raising awareness of the impact of arts and culture, highlighting how they contribute to health and wellbeing, society and the economy
- 3.4. maximising the use of digital technology to:
  - 3.4.1. promote work and opportunities (including volunteering);
  - 3.4.2. reach new audiences;
  - 3.4.3. deliver innovative new arts and cultural experiences

The action plan at Appendix 4 outlines how we will work to realise these ambitions, setting out specific actions and timescales for implementation, as well as clear targets to measure our performance.

# APPENDIX 1: SWOT Analysis

## STRENGTHS

- County Town of Kent
- Seat of local government
- Strong and growing economy
- Good transport links to London and channel ports (roads better than rail)
- Rich history and heritage assets:
  - nationally significant complex of Grade I listed buildings – All Saints Church, Archbishops’ Palace, Tithe Barn, College of All Saints
  - Len House - Grade II listed Art Deco showroom
  - 2,000+ listed buildings in borough
  - Maidstone Museum - internationally significant collections, over 600,000 artefacts
  - Kent History & Library Centre - 14km of historic material
- Over 100 active arts/cultural groups
- Key visitor attractions: Leeds Castle; Kent Life; Kent Showground; Mote Park
- Thriving music scene:
  - Kent Music; community choirs; choral societies; orchestras
  - regular music festivals - Proms; Mela; Ramblin’ Man; Leeds Castle Classical Concert; Fringe; Vicar’s Picnic; Music on the Green etc.
  - strong folk/rock scene - regular gigs in many pubs; jazz at Pizza Express
  - nightclubs host international DJs
- Active night-time economy
- Hazlitt Theatre: platform for local amateur dramatics, dance/drama schools
- Business Terrace: growing number of creative businesses
- Maidstone Studios: hosts UCA courses in TV production
- Maidstone Area Arts Partnership
- Cohesion Plus: links to minority groups

## WEAKNESSES

- No cohesive strategy for arts and culture in the borough
- Maidstone lacks identity:
  - no unique offer
  - history not celebrated
- Lack of cultural diversity in arts provision
- Key heritage assets are under-utilised: Archbishops Palace complex, Town Hall, Gabriel’s Hill
- Riverside under-utilised:
  - poor pedestrian links from town
  - not well sign-posted
  - little to engage visitors once there
- Amphitheatre under-utilised:
  - problems with anti-social behaviour
  - public footpaths limit use for ticketed events
  - not well-known or promoted
- No central database to access information on arts and cultural groups/activities in the borough
- Creative people and businesses are very isolated – no forum for artists/makers and creatives
- Lack of exhibition space for artists, makers and community groups within town centre
  - costs of exhibiting at Maidstone Museum can be prohibitive to up-and-coming artists and smaller community groups
  - Hazlitt Arts Centre has closed down
- Lack of studio/workspace for ‘messy’ artists and makers
- No dedicated large-scale indoor venue for live music and other performances:
  - Hazlitt Theatre only seats 350 people
  - All Saints Church has good acoustics but uncomfortable seating, poor sight lines and lacks toilets;
  - Mote Hall at Maidstone Leisure Centre has the wrong ambience

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Maidstone Museum Transformation Plan
- River Medway:
  - utilise riverside and amphitheatre
  - River Group seeking CIC status
  - Old Boat Café – hub for activities
- Cobtree Manor Park, parks and open spaces: utilise for smaller events
- One Maidstone: partnered projects
- Lease of Archbishops' Palace expires in 2020 - rethink use and access.
- Potential to create a cultural hub around Archbishops' Palace, Stables, All Saints Church and Len House
- Powerhub/Granada House/Len House: options for redevelopment - messy workshops, exhibitions, rehearsal/performance space
- Increasing awareness of importance of arts and culture:
  - on health and wellbeing (particularly mental health and dementia)
  - for an ageing population – reducing social isolation
  - aiding learning and educational achievement
- Social prescribing:
  - Maidstone already has a network of link workers in place
  - Involve are actively engaging arts and cultural providers to deliver activities
- Medway Council bid to become UK City of Culture in 2025
- Thames Estuary Production Corridor
- Population growth: potential new audiences/participants for arts/cultural venues and events
- Digital technology:
  - reach new audiences through digital platforms and distribution channels
  - create new forms of art and cultural experiences
- Climate change: increased awareness of environmental issues, recycling, etc. - potential to engage new audiences

## THREATS

- Brexit:
  - access to EU funding
  - reduction in in-bound tourism
  - damage to social cohesion
- Medway Council bid to become UK City of Culture in 2025
- University for Creative Arts has relocated – centres at Rochester and Canterbury draw students away from Maidstone
- Lack of central funding to support ambitious arts and cultural plans
- Shifting levels of political support for arts and culture, and local will to deliver
- Lack of understanding of importance of arts and culture
- Growth in housing development:
  - increased demand on existing facilities and providers
  - new communities may feel disconnected
  - resentment from existing communities
- Climate change:
  - greater risk of severe weather events (flooding, heatwaves, unseasonal storms)
  - impact on festivals and events, local infrastructure, housing, heritage, etc.

## Appendix 2: Arts and cultural groups contacted for audit

The Arts Society (Mid Kent Branch)  
Maidstone Area Arts Partnership  
Maidstone Wind Symphony  
Maidstone Symphony Orchestra  
Maidstone Choral Union  
Maidstone Singers  
Headcorn Bell Ringers  
Sutton Valence Music Society  
Sutton Valence Choral Society  
Kent Music School  
Kent County Junior Choir  
Kent County Junior Singers  
Society of Recorder Players (Kent)  
Bearsted Choral Society  
Detling & Boxley Church Choirs  
Energize Community Choir  
Friends in Harmony  
Harmony Variety Group  
Old Barn Orchestral Society  
Thomas Clark Quire  
Maidstone Tuneless Choir  
Maidstone Rock Choir (Morning)  
Maidstone Rock Choir (Evening)  
Invicta Jazz Orchestra  
Kent Police Band  
Staplehurst Music Centre Community Orchestra  
Headcorn Ukulele Group  
Marmite Ukulele Club  
Pop Choir Voiceful  
Changeling Theatre  
Hop Shed Theatre Company  
Detling Players  
Willington Players  
Chandeliers Drama Group  
Maidstone Amateur Operatic Society  
Maidstone Film Society  
Headcorn Film Society  
Razzamatazz  
East Sutton Community Youth Theatre  
Airbrush Productions

Contrafusion  
Kent Artistic Roller Dance Club  
Kettle Bridge Clogs  
Maidstone Baton Twirlers  
Lynwood Dance Academy  
Stardust Studios  
Margaret Preedy Dance Studio  
Mandy Ellen Performing Arts  
Space 2 Be Me (Dance Stars)  
Maidstone Dance Studios  
Amelia Appleby School of Performing Arts  
Cobtree Scottish Country Dance Group  
Jack Davidson Dance (Children's Classes)  
Lucy Robins School of Dance  
JAG Dance Academy  
Sharon Kennard School of Dance  
GDC School of Dancing  
Lenham Ballet School  
Cascade Dance (Lenham Youth)  
Hilton Hall Dance Academy  
AACTS Dance  
Dance Dynamics  
Directions Performing Arts  
Flair School of Dance  
Dance Mode  
Loose Women Morris Dancing

Weald School of Dance  
Maidstone Embroiderers' Guild  
Kent Wildlife Trust  
Yalding Art Group  
Invicta Photographic Club  
Kent Potters Association  
Kent Woodturners  
Maidstone Flower Club  
Staplehurst Photographic Society  
Headcorn Flower Arrangers  
Headcorn Art Group  
The Hop Yard  
Blooming Green  
The Seasons Art Class

Marden Theatre Group  
Theatre 2000 Maidstone  
Hollingbourne Pantomime Group  
Lenham Players  
Pauline Quirke Academy (Maidstone)  
Shining Stars Musical Theatre Class  
Detling Watercolour Group  
Maidstone Historical Society  
Maidstone Area Archaeological Group  
Medway Valley Countryside Partnership  
Barming History Society  
Kent Archaeological Society  
Kent Family History Society  
Loose Area History Society  
Maidstone & Mid Kent Philatelic Society  
The Staplehurst Society

Maidstone Art Society  
Brenda Burgess Arts  
Into the Drift (Artful Codgers)  
Harrietsham Craft & Chat  
The Art Class  
Vanguard Contemporary Design Group  
Bearsted & District Local History Society  
Detling Local History Society  
Marden History Society  
Teston History Society  
Kent Geologists' Group  
Boughton Malherbe History Society  
Harrietsham History Society  
Hazlitt Youth Theatre  
Hazlitt Choir  
Headcorn Local History Society

### **Artists/Creatives consulted:**

Maidstone Area Arts Partnership  
Maidstone Youth Music Society  
Maidstone Visual Arts Network (now officially disbanded but still meet as an informal collective)  
Rob Forknall, Changling Theatre  
Laura Thomas, Art Moves  
Lucy Farrell, Bower House (live music venue and art studio)  
Síle Joyce, theatre workshops  
Nicola Barker, artist

# Appendix 3: Arts & Culture Audit Summary

**118** culture and arts organisations were contacted and asked to complete an online questionnaire (full list at Appendix 2).

**56** meaningful responses were received (**47%** response rate).

## Key Findings

### Geographical spread

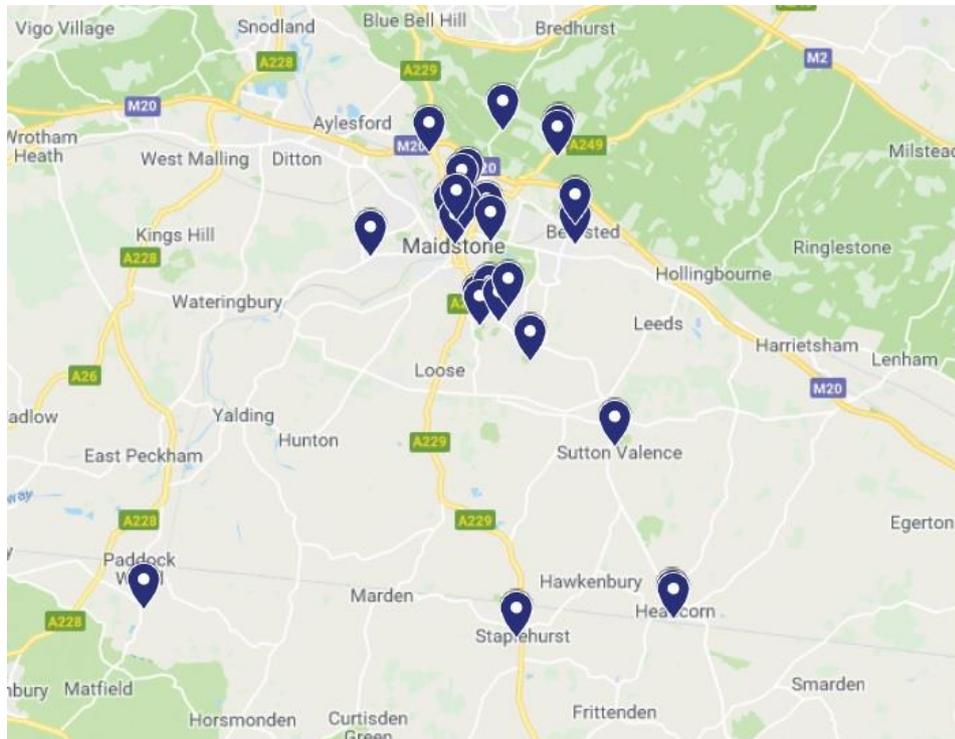
There is a higher concentration of activities within Maidstone town centre, as expected, but there is a reasonable mix of activities across the wider borough too.

It should be noted that not all groups marked on the following maps responded to the survey. Where a group did not respond, the location has been taken from other sources (e.g. website/ Facebook).

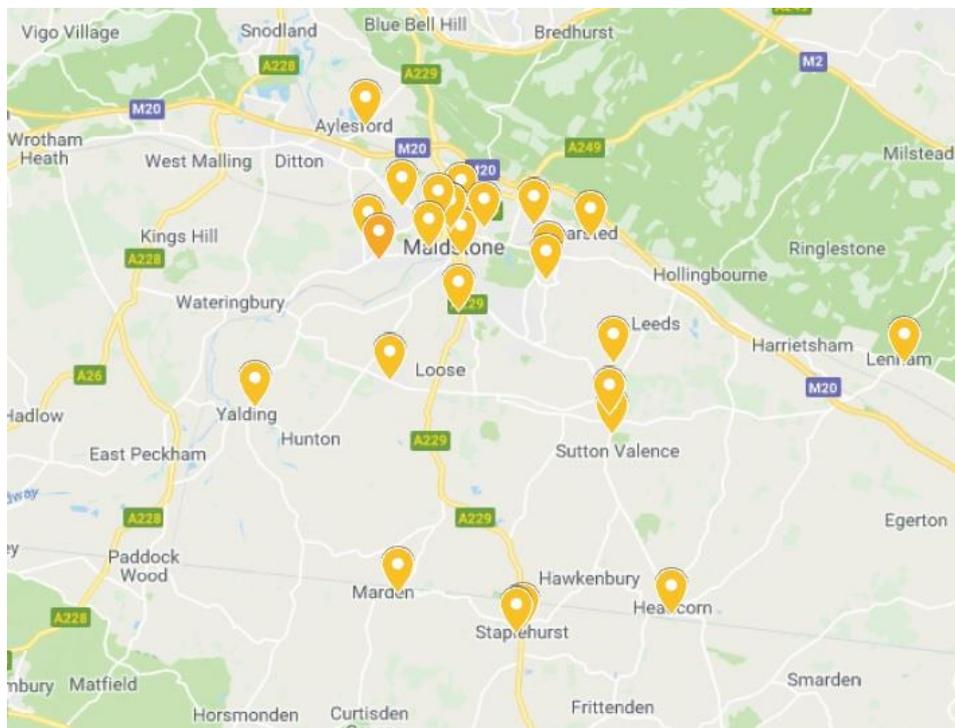


## Geographical spread by category:

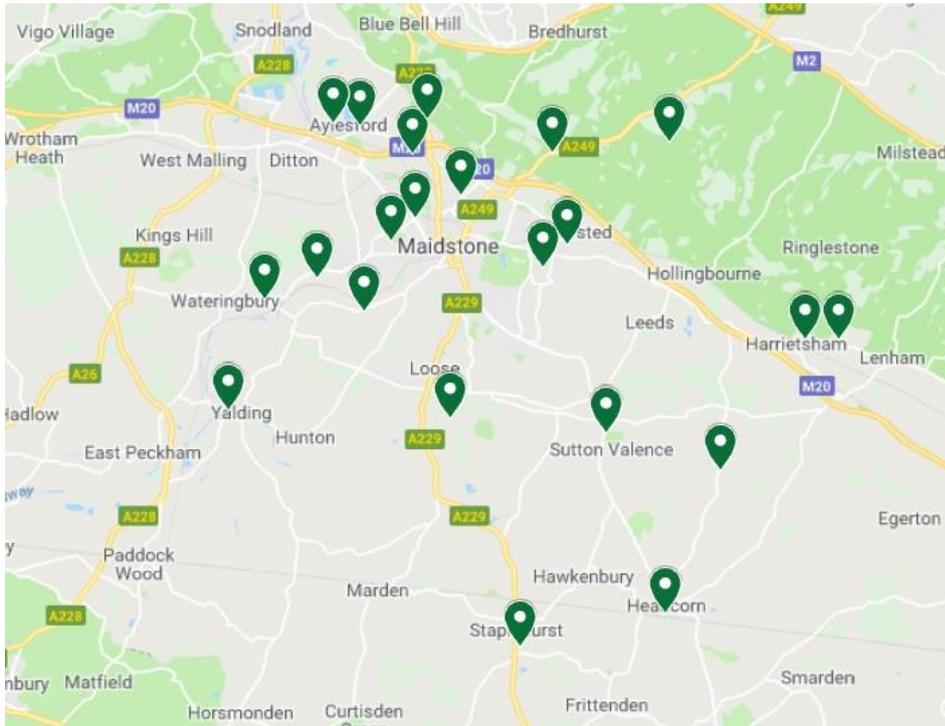
### Music Groups



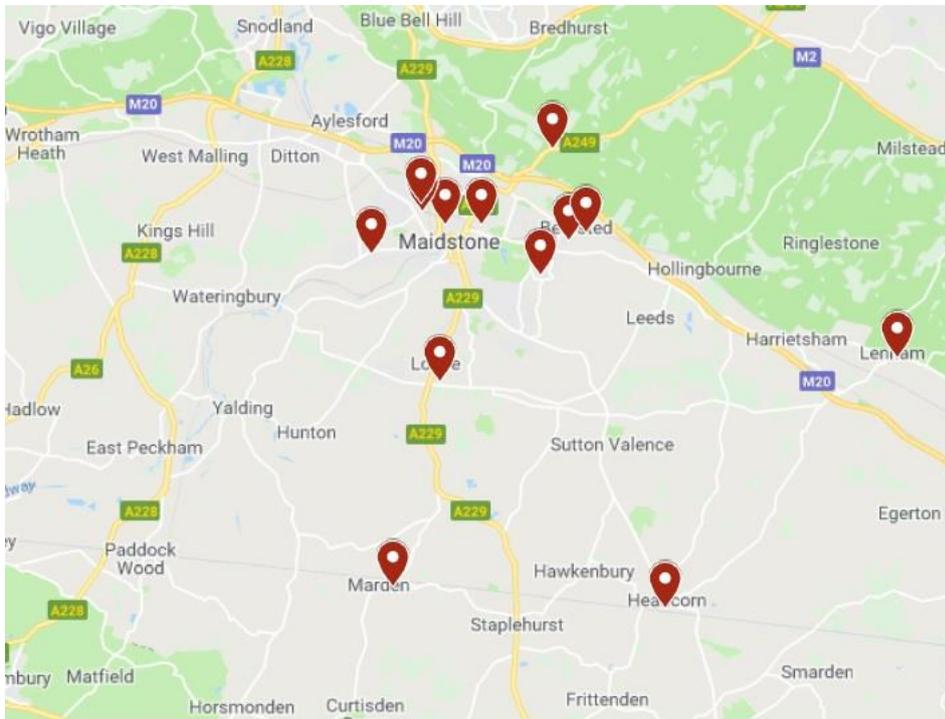
### Dance Groups



## Arts & Crafts Groups



## Theatre Groups



## Heritage Groups



## Number of members/participants per organisation/ group:

Some groups numbered their members in the hundreds (such as Kent Archaeology Society and several dance schools). These figures show the *average* membership for each category:

**Overall = 101**

Music = 54

Theatre = 86

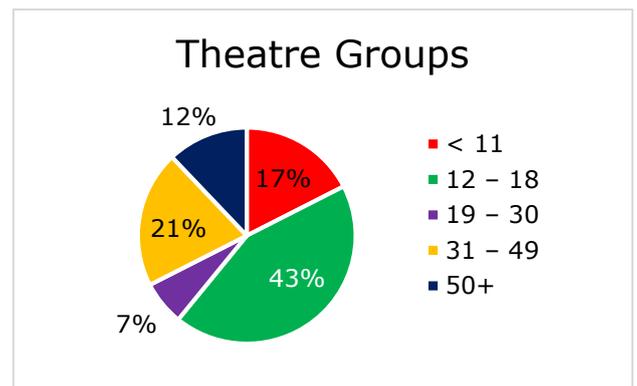
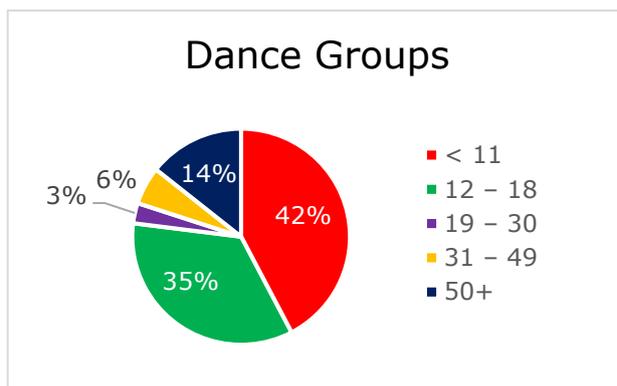
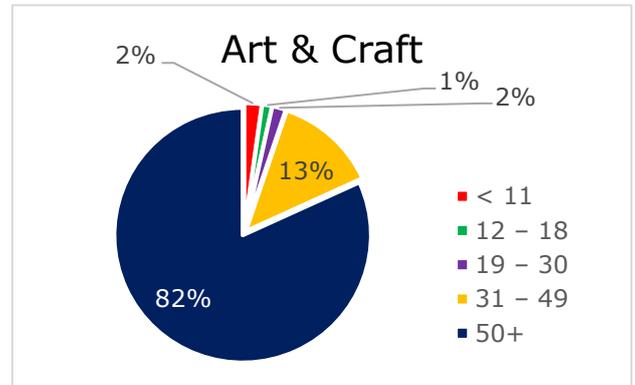
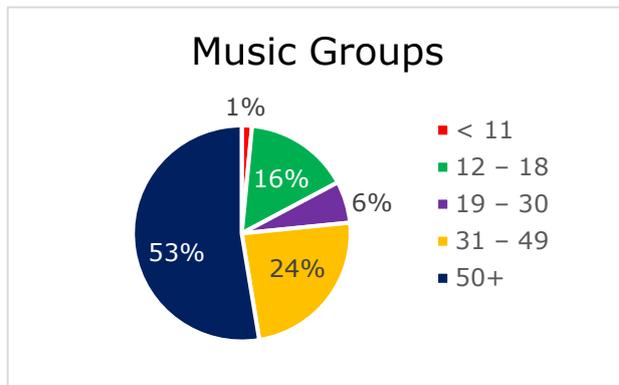
Dance = 104

Art & Craft = 76

Heritage = n/a (lack of data)

## Age Range of participants

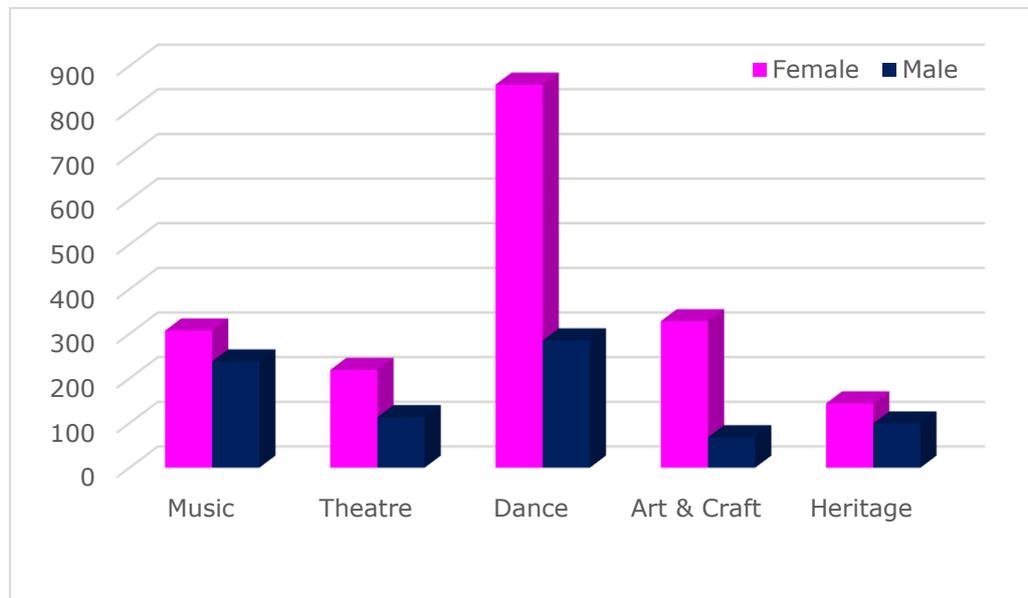
Children and young people tend to dominate the theatre (performing arts) and dance categories while there are significantly higher proportions of older people in the music and arts & crafts categories.



There was insufficient data from the Heritage groups to compile a chart but, of the results that were received, the older age ranges dominated.

## Gender Diversity

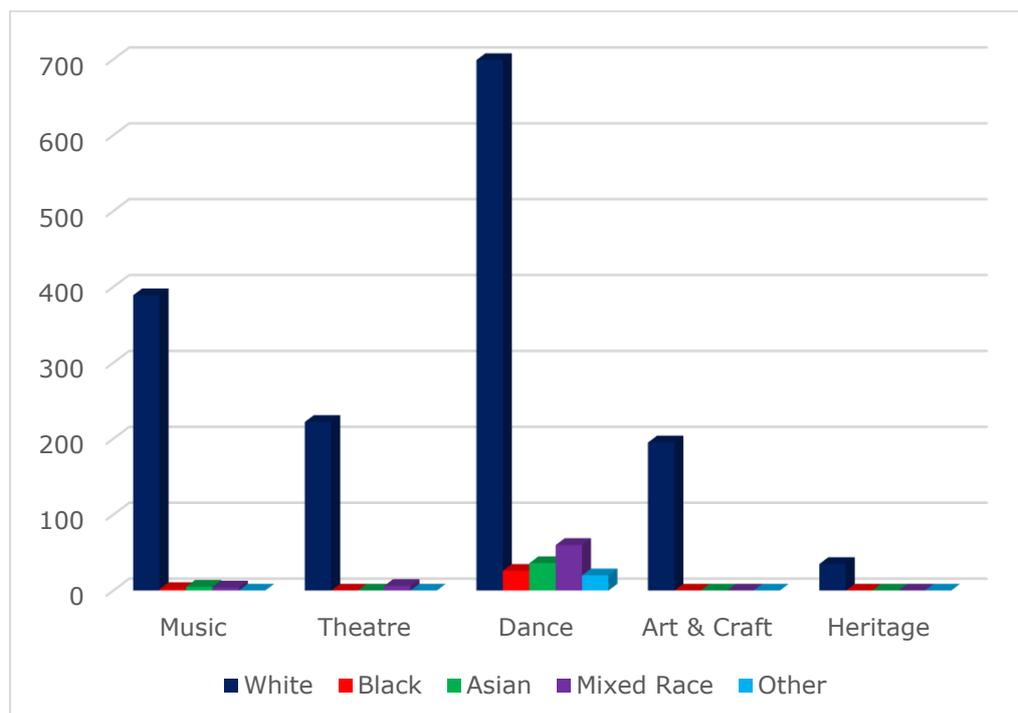
Females dominate across all categories, but especially in dance and arts & crafts.



## Ethnic Diversity

According to the 2011 Census, the largest ethnic group in the Maidstone borough is white. 94.1% of residents belong to this ethnic group which comprises 89.3% British and 4.8% non-British. The remaining 5.9% of residents are from a Black Minority Ethnic (BME) group.

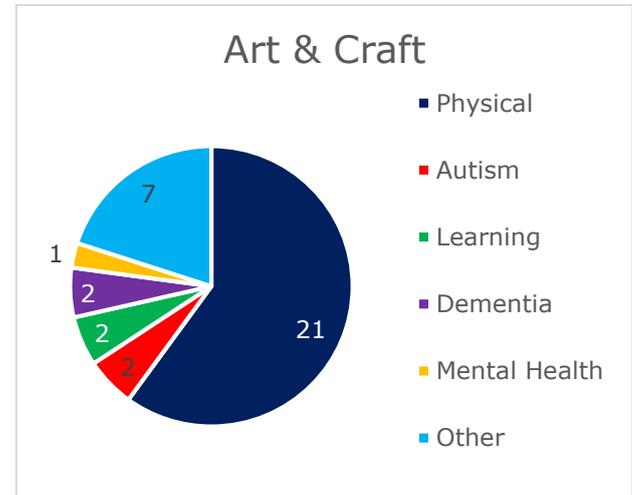
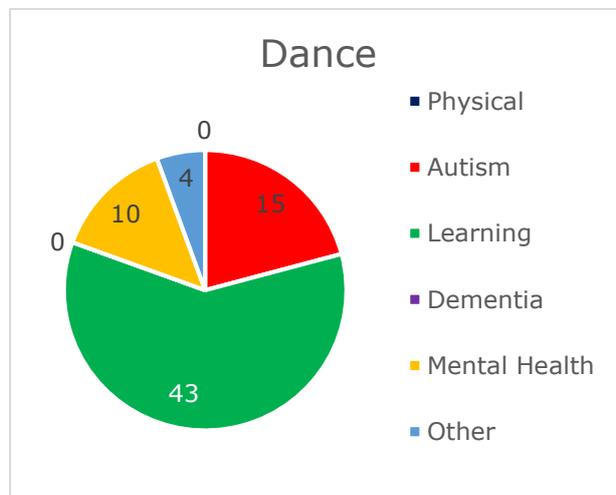
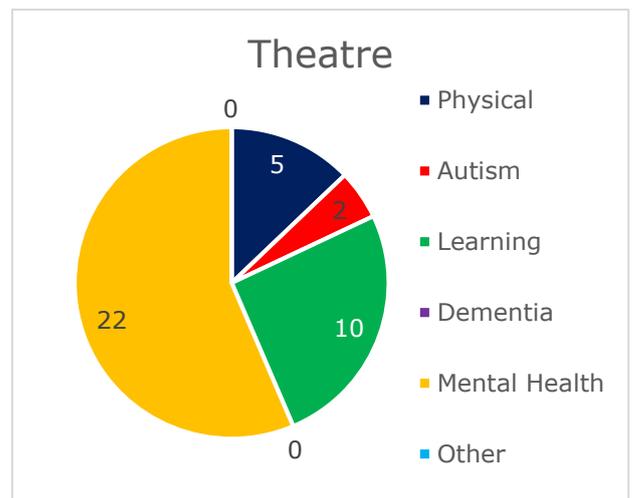
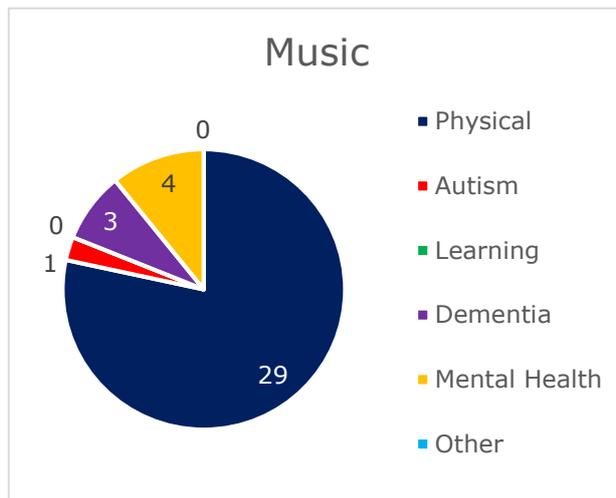
A limited number of respondents provided information on ethnicity which is reflected in the results shown here.



## Participants with a disability

Very few of the respondents were able to give accurate data on this as the majority do not keep detailed membership records or do not collect this type of information about members.

These charts are based on the figures reported but should not be taken as a true picture of participation by those living with a disability.



## Priorities for the future

Respondents were asked to rank the following in order of priority for their organisation/group (1=most important; 10=least important)

- Attracting new members
- Attracting a more diverse membership (*older/younger, disabled, hard-to-reach groups, etc.*)
- Growing/keeping your audience (for your events, exhibitions)
- Marketing your events (maximising web and social media)
- Accessing funding
- Finding suitable meeting/exhibition/performance space
- Connecting with other arts/cultural groups in the area
- Financial planning and management
- Strategic planning
- Partnering with the commercial sector

Type of group/organisation	Attracting new members	Attracting a more diverse membership	Growing/keeping your audience	Marketing your events	Accessing funding	Finding suitable meeting /exhibition/performance space	Connecting with other arts/cultural groups in the area	Financial planning and management	Strategic planning	Partnering with the commercial sector
Music	3	2	1	4						
Theatre				1	2			3	3	3
Dance	1	2	4	3						
Arts & Crafts	4	3		2		1				
Heritage	1		3				2	3	3	
<b>Overall</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>						

# APPENDIX 4: ACTION PLAN - 2020-2022

Cross-cutting objectives key:

-  Heritage is respected
-  Health inequalities are addressed and reduced
-  Deprivation is reduced and social mobility improved
-  Biodiversity and environmental sustainability are respected

Priority: Cultural Place-making						
Objective	Action	Target	Timescale	MBC Strategic Plan priority	Cross-cutting objective	Approx. costs
1.1	Arrange meeting with 'Thinkingplace' to discuss options for a 'Sense of Place' project	Initial meeting with Thinkingplace	Feb-20	Thriving Place; Homes & Communities		Travel costs
1.1	Subject to initial meeting – commission 'Thinkingplace' to deliver a 'Sense of Place' project	Increase in positive responses to residents' survey question on pride in the borough	Feb-21	Thriving Place; Homes & Communities		£22,000 - funding from 'Financial Sustainability Fund'
1.2	In conjunction with One Maidstone, work with local artists and youth groups to install murals in empty shopfronts (street art and photography)	At least 2 empty shops fitted with murals	Mar-20	Thriving Place; Safe, Clean & Green		MBC contribution £1,500
1.3	Develop a new 'historic plaques' walking trail for digital download	New trail is available for digital download	Nov-19	Thriving Place		Officer time
1.3	Work with the tourism team to support and promote venues taking part in Heritage Open Days	At least 6 venues take part in HODs.	Annual (Sept)	Thriving Place		Officer time
1.3	Support the museum team in the establishment and running of a 'Local Cultural Education Partnership'	Partnership established and board appointed	Mar-20	Thriving Place		Officer time
1.3	Commission a piece of public art for the redevelopment of Maidstone East station to sit in the new concourse	New artwork created and installed	Jul-21	Thriving Place		£23,400 – funding from M&S s106 monies

1.3	Commission a piece of public art for the lower end of Gabriel's Hill as part of the Public Realm Phase 3	New artwork created and installed	Jul-21	Thriving Place		<£20,000 - Funding from Public Realm Phase 3
1.3	Work with Economic Development team and One Maidstone on a shop front enhancement programme focusing on Gabriel's Hill	Refurbishments carried out on identified shop fronts	Dec-21	Thriving Place; Safe, Clean & Green		£276,600 – funding from M&S s106 monies

**Priority: Accessible by all**

Objective	Action	Target	Timescale	MBC Strategic Plan priority	Cross-cutting objective	Approx. costs
2.1	Carry out an online public consultation to identify the main barriers to participation in arts and culture	Consultation completed	Mar-20	Thriving Place; Homes & Communities		Officer time
2.1	Work with events team to develop a checklist for new events/projects to identify target audiences and address potential barriers, based on consultation results	Produce checklist and apply on all new events	May-20	Thriving Place; Homes & Communities		Officer time
2.1	Work with Heart of Kent Hospice to encourage wide/diverse participation in 'Elmer's Big Heart of Kent Parade' and their linked events	>100,000 participants in trail and linked events	Aug-20	Thriving Place; Homes & Communities		Officer time
2.1	Support museum team and environmental services team to deliver an arts event in Brenchley Gardens as part of 'Elmer's Big Heart of Kent Parade' to promote recycling and environmental awareness	>250 people take part in the event. Photo/video footage of the event	Aug-20	Thriving Place; Safe, Clean & Green	 	Officer time Funding from Env. Services
2.1	Work with Kent County Council on delivery of a 'Heritage and health' project in Mote Park, including geophysical survey of the old Mote House. Primary focus on improvements to physical health - active outdoors, reducing social isolation, etc.	Completion of geophysical survey in Mote Park. Participants report improved health outcomes	Sep-20	Thriving Place; Homes & Communities		Officer time
2.2	Work with Fringe Festival organisers to encourage more venues/performers to take part, particularly in daytime (more family friendly)	At least 2 new venues and timeslots for 2021 Festival	May-21	Thriving Place		Officer time
2.3	Support Maidstone Area Arts Partnership (MAAP) to deliver an extended programme of summer concerts in Brenchley Gardens	6 concerts with a variety of music styles	Aug-20	Thriving Place; Homes & Communities		£8,000 – external funding required
2.3	Participate in the Diversity Arts Network as they look to establish a consortium (museum may join as a member venue)	Attendance at network meetings	Ongoing	Thriving Place		Officer time

2.3	Work with the River Group, local residents' association and local musicians, theatre schools and poets to improve usage of the amphitheatre through co-creating a programme of performances	At least 4 events held at amphitheatre	Sep-21	Thriving Place; Safe, Clean & Green		£4,000 – external funding required
2.3	Work with Cohesion Plus and the Maidstone Cultural Group to promote ethnic minority and black culture and provide support to widen participation in arts by these groups	Increased diversity in arts provision and participation	Ongoing	Thriving Place		Officer time

**Priority: Sustainable**

Objective	Action	Target	Timescale	MBC Strategic Plan priority	Cross-cutting objective	Approx. costs
3.1	Work with Economic Development team to assess the feasibility of providing affordable workspace, both clean and messy, with a view to providing at least 3 messy units for artists/makers plus additional office space for creative businesses	Feasibility report produced and potential site(s) identified	Sep-20	Embracing Growth & Enabling Infrastructure; Thriving Place		Officer time
3.2	Develop an online directory to promote existing arts and cultural clubs and organisations (commercial & voluntary), accessed via the MBC website	Online directory is live. At least 50 clubs/societies listed in 1st year	Dec-19	Thriving Place		Officer time
3.2	Explore potential opportunities for local creative businesses within the Thames Estuary Production Corridor (e.g. Maidstone Studios)	Regular contact with Production Corridor team	Ongoing	Embracing Growth & Enabling Infrastructure; Thriving Place		Officer time
3.2	Investigate options for establishing a forum/network for artists and creatives	Network established and meetings scheduled	Ongoing	Thriving Place		Officer time
3.2	Work with museum team to organise a 'local history day' for local history societies to network and showcase their work to a wider audience.	At least 6 clubs/societies to attend local history day	Mar-20	Thriving Place		Officer time
3.2	Facilitate a networking/training workshop for local arts/cultural groups - potential themes to cover are marketing & fundraising (assisted by Voluntary Arts/Involve) Further networking/training sessions to be developed based on feedback from initial event	Initial workshop held in Business Terrace Further workshops developed	Sep-20	Thriving Place		£750 per workshop
3.2	Investigate options for creating new exhibition/gallery space in town centre	Feasibility report produced	Sep-20	Embracing Growth & Enabling Infrastructure; Thriving Place		Officer time

3.3	Work with public health and museum teams on an engagement programme with Hazlitt Youth Theatre investigating what makes a 'safe space'. Working with Canterbury Christchurch Uni and Aesop Institute to investigate links between arts and health	Results of research shared with arts organisations and venues	Dec-19	Thriving Place; Safe, Clean & Green		Officer time
3.3	Support Kent Arts & Wellbeing with their proposal to deliver an arts and health project in West Kent	Attendance at networking meetings	Ongoing	Thriving Place		Officer time
3.4.1	Support MAAP to expand membership and develop website to host details of events/activities and volunteering opportunities OR develop an arts micro-site on MBC website	MAAP or Arts Micro-Site is live and offers up-to-date info	Dec-20	Thriving Place		Officer time
3.4.2	Work with Comms and tourism teams to improve use of social media to promote civic and arts/cultural events (e.g. swan upping, museum events, etc.)	Increased engagement on social media and increased attendance at events	Ongoing	Thriving Place		Officer time
3.4.3	Investigate options for working with a local digital creative business to develop an urban arts orienteering app to appeal to teenagers	Feasibility report produced	Jul-20	Thriving Place; Homes & Communities	 	Officer time