



Community
Foundation

Northumberland's

Vital Issues 2017

Arts, Culture and Heritage

1 Arts, heritage and culture

1.1 Overview

Northumberland has a rich history from the very earliest times and it is this historical context that contributes most significantly to the county's cultural appeal. It has an impressive range of heritage assets. These include more castles than any other English county, for example at Dunstanburgh, Berwick, Bamburgh, Alnwick and Warkworth. To this may be added the equally impressive Hexham Abbey, Lindisfarne Priory, Brinkburn Priory and Hadrian's Wall. There are also many stately homes and gardens, with Alnwick Gardens and Cragside being perhaps the best known. As impressive is the county's industrial heritage offer, with Woodhorn providing an outstanding example of how this can be developed. The latest development is The Sill National Landscape Discovery Centre.

The connection to tourism is strong with many towns and venues hosting a range of events and festivals many of which have enjoyed support from the Community Foundation. They include one-off events such as the Weeping Window poppies exhibition at Woodhorn, but also more regular events such as the Hexham Book Festival and the Berwick Film and Media Arts Festival. The Maltings, Queens Hall Arts Centre and Alnwick Playhouse bring performing arts, cinema and more to the county. While local employment in creative industries is low in the county its heritage sites are frequently used for film (Harry Potter), TV (ITV's Vera), performing arts and other events.

Northumberland's artistic assets include a great number of individual artists and musicians, and they underpin a rich tradition of community arts. There are a large number of artists' studios and galleries across the county with many taking part in The Art Tour run by Network Artists. Artists are attracted to the region by organisations like VARC (Visual Arts in Rural Communities) and Allendale Contemporary Arts. The latest addition to the contemporary art scene is Cheeseburn Sculpture, a new destination for contemporary sculpture. They have created the Gillian Dickinson North East Young Sculptor of the Year Award. Traditional music plays a big part in Northumberland life spearheaded in recent years by Kathryn Tickell and Magnetic North and celebrated at the Rothbury Traditional Music Festival.

Personal development through arts activity can be about building confidence, aspirations and skills. For communities it can be about creating and expressing shared collective identities, and enabling a diversity of voices to be heard within a community. The arts can also challenge and change perceptions, an important part of building community cohesion. While participatory arts groups tend to focus on urban areas, there is a case for their use in tackling the very different issues in the rural areas, like isolation and access.

1.2 Employment in creative industries

Here are over 155 commercial creative industries based in Northumberland. Nevertheless the proportion of employment in the creative industries sector remains modest. As table 6 below demonstrates Northumberland ranks relatively low for employment in the creative industries. However a major exception is medium-high and high tech, which covers computing, electronics and optics. It is possible that part

of the reason for this is the proximity of Newcastle where there is a concentration of creative industries.

Table 6: Proportion of employment in the creative industriesⁱ

	UK	Northumberland	NE rank	UK decile
Creative industries	3.1	1.41	5	4

1.3 Participation

As suggested above Northumberland is very well endowed with arts, culture and heritage assets. However whilst these offer great scope for developing the county's offer as a tourist destination, the extent of local benefit is also dependent on the extent to which the people of Northumberland engage with them.

Is there a need to extend participation amongst those resident in the county? The best statistics we currently have on this cover the North East. These may give an indication of the situation in Northumberland, although it is worth considering that the last survey covering the county in 2009 found higher levels of participation here than for the region as a whole.

In the absence of hard data we can make a reasonable guess at the factors that will limit participation. As suggested above, accessing services is a major issue in rural parts of the county and problems relating to the county's geography and transport links are likely to pose barriers to access. This points to the importance of touring provision, which can also breathe life into smaller venues and community buildings across the area.

A second factor is deprivation, which as we have seen is concentrated in South East Northumberland. In 2012 the Bait Consortium led by Woodhorn Charitable Trust and comprising of Northumberland College, Northumberland County Council Public Health, Active Northumberland, Queens Hall Arts and Wansbeck CVA embarked on a ten year mission to increase participation in the arts in the south east of the county. Funded by Arts Council England, Northumberland County Council, Active Northumberland, The Ballinger Trust and Garfield Weston Foundation, it works not just to increase engagement but to create long term change, improve wellbeing and social capital, encourage creativity and ambition, develop skills and invest in resources. Bait works with hundreds of partners many of which are able to secure funding with its support to work with the most vulnerable and marginalised people in south east Northumberland. This project illustrates the strong contribution that arts engagement can make to community cohesionⁱⁱ.

Potential roles for philanthropy

- Investment in Northumberland's arts, culture and heritage assets has long been a focus of philanthropic activity, and should continue to be so.

- Philanthropic support for events and festivals that promote Northumberland's arts, culture and heritage is essential, and can be used to help ensure that local people are fully involved both as contributors and beneficiaries.
- Engagement in the arts is good both as an end in itself and as a vehicle for personal and community benefit. Philanthropic support for community arts projects that reach out into communities is an essential part of the funding mix.

ⁱ **Nomis** - <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk> accessed 6/9/127

ⁱⁱ **Taking Part Survey**: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey>. For more on **Bait**, see: <http://creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/project/bait>