

# ALNWICK AND DENWICK NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

## Topic Chapter – ‘Heritage and Culture’

### CULTURE

#### 1. Context

##### 1.1 Definition of culture for ADNP

Northumberland County Council’s Cultural Strategy 2011-2016 (prepared 2010), takes a wide view of culture which includes 11 familiar cultural activities. By removing from this list those activities covered by other ADNP Topics currently being explored, we are left with just 6 activities. So for our purposes within this Culture Section, culture includes creativity, film, arts, libraries, events and festivals, ranging from leisure entertainment to personal inspiration and betterment. In addition, because this Topic is set within a ‘spatially based’ Neighbourhood Plan, there needs to be a particular emphasis on cultural infrastructure, both physical and organisational.

##### 1.2 Cultural significance of Alnwick and Denwick

Although Newcastle provides the high level cultural offer of a regional capital, Alnwick and Berwick offer the next cultural level down to the people of north Northumberland and its visitors. Although both country towns have a multiple-arts hub (the Maltings in Berwick and the Playhouse in Alnwick), a grand Town Hall used for cultural events and a local museum, Alnwick in addition has a Castle/Garden and Assembly Rooms (Northumberland Hall) of cultural quality appropriate to a Ducal town. Barter Books in the former railway station, which is a commercial book shop which hosts cultural events, also gives Alnwick further cultural significance. For annual festivals, cultural outdoor spaces and the provision of meeting rooms for local cultural events and learning, Alnwick may have some advantage too.

##### 1.3 List of Cultural Assets

- Cultural buildings –  
*Specialist Buildings:* Bailiffgate Museum, Alnwick Playhouse, Barter Books, Alnwick Castle, Alnwick Library, shops with art galleries (2);  
*General cultural use;*  
Mechanics Institute, Northumberland Hall, Town Hall, churches and halls, Costello Centre, ‘live music pubs’, etc.
- Cultural spaces – Market Place, the Pastures, Alnwick Garden, Hulne Park, etc.
- Major cultural events – Alnwick International Music Festival (August), Alnwick Food Festival (September), Heritage Open Days (September), The Alnwick Festival (a one-off event in June 2012 only);
- Minor cultural events – local concerts and entertainments;

- Local Broadcasting – Lionheart Radio;
- Cultural learning – public talks, learned societies, cultural classes and creative skills training.

#### **1.4 Key Players**

- Managers and volunteers of cultural buildings and spaces
- Organisers and volunteers of cultural events
- County Cultural Officer (NCC)
- County Education Department (NCC)
- Small specialist cultural-interest voluntary groups
- Local broadcasters

#### **1.5 Factors constraining the Plan’s response**

- Current (2012) lack of availability of public finance and staff
- Lack of information on the cultural situation and future needs in Northumberland and specifically in the Alnwick/Denwick area
- Undervaluing of cultural assets as economic assets too

## **2. Objectives:**

### **2.1 Future Aspirations for the ADNP**

- To ensure that the existing cultural infrastructure in Alnwick and Denwick has a viable future.
- To identify any cultural needs not served by the current infrastructure.
- To identify what provision should be made within the Neighbourhood Plan to accommodate these cultural needs.

## **3. Issues and Options:**

### ***Specialised Cultural Buildings Issues***

#### **3.1 Need to promote the cultural offer of the town in its entirety**

**3.1.1 Nature** – Promoting individual cultural assets is positive but promoting Alnwick as a single ‘resort town’ would do more for the cultural common good. ‘Show me a town in the North east that has as much to offer as Alnwick!’

**3.1.2 Scale** – Town-wide opportunity.

#### **3.1.3 Options**

- Improve signage from the A1 of the town as an activity hub.
- Websites and publicity to promote all Alnwick’s offer, especially its Heritage and Culture.
- Continue the ‘Town Ambassadors’ scheme.
- Each attraction to signpost to the others more effectively.
- Maintain uniform high standards of interest and presentation throughout the town equal to what the Garden, Bailiffgate Museum

and Barter Books already have.

- The more of Alnwick that is open at the start and end of the day, and in the cold weather, the better.
- Needs collaboration of attractions and the town for big festivals and events like the Torch festival and the Queen's visit.
- Build programmes of complementary events in Castle, Garden, Barter Books, Bailiffgate, etc.

## **3.2 Need to Maintain steady and continuous funding**

**3.2.1 Nature** – Pressures of maintaining funding create uneven delivery of services and soak up much effort in seeking funds from a multiplicity of sources under severe competitive demand at present.

**3.2.2 Scale** – More demanding for those organisations who have some dependence currently on public funds.

### **3.2.3 Options**

- Sound business planning and judicious use of sponsorship and what is on offer.
- Good fund-raising skills and experience in-house or raising funds for a professional fund raiser.
- Develop secondary activities – eg catering – to help to become self supporting of public funds.
- Broaden the offer especially to both residents and tourists like the Playhouse recently acquiring the capacity to screen live events from other major venues.

## **3.3 Broadening and increasing the audience**

**3.3.1 Nature** – The current demographic is that the audience for some attractions is too heavily 'concessionary' at the box office. Diversity of audience would help support the attraction.

**3.3.2 Scale** – Less concerning for attractions with a capacity to provide an offer to suit the demographics.

### **3.3.3 Options**

- Outreach to surrounding village populations and wider visitor area.
- Widen the demographic of volunteers to reach a younger audience eg more work-experience, better links with Primary schools, more links with groups of all ages and interests.
- Increase size and diversity of the town's population.
- Develop the number of tourists/visitors who are major consumers of Alnwick's attractions.

## **3.4 Better accessibility to the attractions**

**3.4.1 Nature** – Although none of the attractions interviewed identified any problems with access onto their sites, some identified problems of access TO their site.

**3.4.2 Scale** – Mainly those without their own dedicated car park.

### **3.4.3 Options**

- Improve the quality and frequency of public transport.
- Raise the quality of local internet broadband to increase 'intellectual' access.

## ***General Cultural Use Buildings Issues***

### **3.5 Rental charges and choice of rooms**

**3.5.1 Nature** – Concern was expressed about costs of bookable rooms and a lack of variety in sizes to choose from being deterrents to users.

**3.5.2 Scale** – Not easy to assess as expectation of what is a reasonable charge is individual and relative to markets. However, the establishment of standards in charges and sizes could be a stimulus to local cultural development.

### **3.5.3 Options**

- More scope for negotiable booking fees to make the market more sustainable for all parties.
- An accessible, up to date register of venues with a central booking point may also make the process more sustainable.

### **3.6 Poor condition and limited facilities**

**3.6.1 Nature** – The interiors and facilities, as well as the general building condition of publicly bookable venues are below standard.

**3.6.2 Scale** – This does not apply to every venue but mainly to two of the major ones in Alnwick.

### **3.6.3 Options**

- It is a matter of investment via sponsorship or grant-aid and/or new ownership.

### **3.7 Conflicts with surrounding uses**

**3.7.1 Nature** – Venues which include loud performances as part of their cultural offer and involve numbers of patrons arriving and leaving, can provide problems to other users nearby.

**3.7.2 Scale** – Although the main problems arise with live music venues associated with residential areas, this may be a more wide-spread problem of land use allocation. It also has an element of individual preferences involved too.

### **3.7.3 Options**

- Control through timing – ie loud sound after midnight is much more disturbing than before.
- Increased sound-proofing of the venue.
- Locational change or drawing of the boundaries of official town centre.
- Management through agency negotiation – eg via a Neighbourhood Watch.

## ***Cultural Spaces and Major Cultural Events issues***

### **3.8 Managing Demand for more events using our limited Cultural Space**

**3.8.1 Nature** – To date, the competing demands from markets and cultural events and activities for the use of Alnwick’s premier cultural space, the Market Place, has been managed through the calendar and by overspilling into the surrounding streets. Has the market therefore reached its capacity or could more cultural events be accommodated? And what about Alnwick’s other cultural spaces – could the use of them be satisfactorily increased if the out-door cultural offer of Alnwick was to be developed?

**3.8.2 Scale** – At present, it is the Market Place that requires the most management of all Alnwick’s cultural spaces.

#### **3.8.3 Options**

- Maximise the cultural use potential of the Market Place by avoiding continuous uses such as car parking.
- Explore the possibilities of increasing the use of the Market Place for more evening music events as were included in the Torch Festival; and with the surrounding Halls, for more specialist markets for food, antiques, books, crafts, etc.
- Review the stall rates to make stalls more accessible yet sustainable.

### **3.9 Managing pedestrian and vehicular traffic around events / festivals**

**3.9.1 Nature** – Events and festivals bring more people and vehicles into the centre of Alnwick, all of which need to be accommodated within its pattern of medieval roads and spaces, which in the summer, are already carrying the additional load of visitors and their vehicles.

**3.9.2 Scale** – These peaks of intensive use need to be managed, not just for safety or convenience, but also to ensure that the cultural experience of Alnwick at these times is not damaged or severely reduced.

#### **3.9.3 Options**

- Non-damaging traffic management solutions from other similar towns need to be explored for possible adaptation to Alnwick either in the longer term or for these times to avoid conflict and to retain the cultural quality of the town.

### **3.10 Weather management of Alnwick’s cultural spaces**

**3.10.1 Nature** – The effect of our northern weather on our out-door activities continues to be of concern, particularly as the country’s weather pattern now contains more and more extremes.

**3.10.2 Scale** – Regular events/markets and long festivals may be more at risk from the weather than individual one-off events or activities.

#### **3.10.3 Options**

- Review ideas from the past to provide permanent and temporary mitigations to see if there is any value in them for the future that avoids unacceptably compromising the heritage and cultural qualities of the town's historic core.

### ***Other general Cultural Issues***

## **3.11 Development of creative industries in Alnwick**

**3.11.1 Nature** – Other towns have taken the initiative to develop any local creative flair and experience they have to add creative value to their USP as well as new employment for residents and newcomers alike.

**3.11.2 Scale** – At present the town has no municipal gallery and only two private galleries, both associated with retail outlets.

### **3.11.3 Options**

- Need to assess and quantify the 'creative capital' of the area.
- Need a stronger focus on promoting local artists.
- Should dedicated studio space be created to encourage artist and designers to stay and work here, as the beginnings of an Alnwick creative industry?
- Local artist could work more with local tourists through offering demonstrations and sharing of skills.

## **3.12 Make use of the gaps in the events Calendar**

**3.12.1 Nature** – Although Alnwick has several major festivals, there is still space in the calendar for more.

**3.12.2 Scale** – Other towns have seasonal festivals which Alnwick could emulate.

### **3.12.3 Options**

- Seasonal events could be an Alnwick Christmas Market and a Halloween celebration, both of which could be accompanied by associated and appropriate cultural events.

## **3.13 Creative Learning could be better developed**

**3.13.1 Nature** – There is only a limited offer for formal creative learning in Alnwick.

**3.13.2 Scale** – Too little is known about the demand for such learning but local learning has recently suffered from cuts in public funding.

### **3.13.3 Options**

- Funding from sponsorship and assistance from practising local artists could supplement public funding.

## **3.14 Our 'way of Life' could be better explained and promoted**

**3.14.1 Nature** – Heritage and culture is about people and families and not just the built environment.

**3.14.2 Scale** – Opportunities to celebrate the distinctiveness of life in North

Northumberland should be made.

### 3.14.3 Options

- Through cultural activity, celebrate our 'gossip' and language, our local Memories (war memories), ancestry research, etc.
- Build on our cultural strengths – musical heritage, literature heritage, warrior heritage (Hotspur School of defence), local food and produce heritage.

## 3.15 Shortage of cultural facilities

**3.15.1 Nature** – As no study of cultural needs has been compiled before, there is only anecdotal evidence for what may be missing.

**3.15.2 Scale** – Only one facility (a dedicated cinema) was recorded as missing in the ADNP Survey.

### 3.15.3 Options

- Maximum support should be given to the Playhouse, the only regular access to culture including film there is.

## 4. Beginning the Cross Cutting Process

Having divided all that goes into the present life of Alnwick and Denwick into Topics for the purposes of research, now that this research has been done, it is necessary to 'put the bits back together again' into a viable plan for a better life in the Alnwick and Denwick of the future. The material below is offered as the first tentative steps in integrating the Culture Topic back into the wider flow of future life in Alnwick and Denwick.

### 4.1 Links with other ADNP Topics:

The Culture Topic has the strongest Links with the following Topics:

- Heritage
- Transport
- Economy and Employment
- Retail and Tourism

### 4.2 Priority Culture Proposals (within the plan period)

The lack of comprehensive and targeted information on Culture in Alnwick and Denwick makes it difficult to decide on specific proposals for the plan period of the Neighbourhood Plan. However, two basic Proposals are to first, make the most of what we have already in this Culture Section, and secondly, to get the information collection and development process underway, as follows:

- a Carry out an **Initial Programme** of limited information gathering and implementation based on the material in this Culture Section.*

This programme should cover the Options listed and could include the following themes:

- review better cultural signage off the A1.
- develop better branding and increased promotion of Alnwick/Denwick as 'cultural' resort town.
- develop more collaboration and joint programmes between the major attractions.
- development of Alnwick as 'Festival Town'.
- encourage more of the shops, attractions, cultural services, etc. to be open longer and through the winter.
- develop active programmes of funding support.
- improve the quality of local broadband.
- review rental charges of bookable cultural rooms.
- review general access arrangements for all attractions.
- seek investment to upgrade the facilities and interiors of the major public halls in the Market Place.
- consider improved pedestrian and vehicular traffic management for events.
- review the development of more creative industries in the area.
- review the provision of creative learning opportunities in the area.

**b** Carry out a single project to seek out information and prepare programmes of action that support the **Future Cultural Aspirations for the ADNP** listed in this Culture Section.

This project will, therefore, (a) look at and implement ways of making the present cultural infrastructure viable, (b) identify needs not yet served, and (c) identify what provision should be made in the ADNP as it is developed and refined over time.

### 4.3 Land Allocation (within the Plan period)

Cultural facilities that exclude sports and leisure do not generally call for much additional allocation of land. Certainly none of the major attraction managers interviewed indicated that they any foreseeable needs for additional land for expansion or consolidation. Also, none of the other evidence collected demonstrated that Alnwick needs the allocation of further dedicated cultural space, and the only new facility requested was for a 'proper cinema in the region' which could be outside the Alnwick/Denwick area. The only other spatial reference regarded the designated boundary of the Town Centre commercial area which could have implications for the conflict of loud music in a cultural building with other surrounding uses, particularly residential uses.

### 4.4 Priority Culture Policies (within the Plan period)

With only the limited evidence base of this Culture Section, it is premature to determine cultural policies for the ADNP at this stage. So, the only relevant statement to go into the Plan would be something like this:

*'Culture is a much valued and growing activity in Alnwick and Denwick. Its importance and future development of buildings, land and employment, as well as its importance as support for the local tourist industry in particular, must be registered in the ADNP as it is refined and developed over the coming years.'*



## 5. Consultation Questions

- **Should the Plan ensure that the existing buildings and organisations supporting cultural activities have a viable future?**
- **Should the Plan identify any cultural needs currently not met and determine what viable provision should be made to meet those needs?**

## 6. Evidence Base

Little information in the way of surveys and statistics is yet available that describes or analyses either the current cultural provision or the future cultural needs in Alnwick and north Northumberland. So, the content of this Topic Section relies mainly on what cultural information the general Neighbourhood Plan process itself has generated. Although this has turned out to be somewhat random and limited in content, it has never-the-less provided some useful pointers as to what to put into the Neighbourhood Plan

- *'Stronger Together Through Inspirational Culture'*, a draft Cultural Strategy for Northumberland, Northumberland County Council, 2010
- Culture comments from the ADNP Questionnaire (December 2011)
- Interview with Director of Bailiffgate Museum (February 2012)
- Comments from Paul Gee of the Alnwick Playhouse (February 2012)
- Letter from David Ronn, Managing Director of Alnwick Castle and The Alnwick Garden (10.2.2012)
- Interview with Wendy Scott, Cultural Officer, NCC (May 2012)
- Culture report from ADNP Forum Discussion (24 July 2012)
- Presentation ('Writing the Plan') from a talk by Dave Chetwyn of Locality (30 July 2012)

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