



Medway Cultural Strategy 2020-2030 Consultation Report

**Report produced by GJG Consultancy supported by
Ruth Melville Research and The Audience Agency**

Consultation Report

Introduction

Rightly, consultation lies at the heart of the approach of Medway's Cultural Partnership to developing the new Cultural Strategy for Medway. This strand of the work will thread through the whole process. This began with the earliest involvement of GJG Consultancy in November 2019, through the development and trialing of themes, the finalising of the strategy itself, and then the development of action plans into the review and evaluation of progress and outcomes on an annual basis.

Our approach is to develop a process that models good practice in consultation, which can then be taken forward into the implementation and regular review of the strategy itself.

Our model for consultation aims to include all stakeholders for Medway's Cultural Strategy. We identify the stakeholders as including the cultural sector (including creative industries) within Medway, external suppliers to the sector (including possible national and regional touring partners), the education sector, community organisations, residents who engage, residents who don't engage, sponsors and funders, tourists, local businesses, and housing developers.

In order to reach and engage all these different groups, we recognise three different 'tiers' of potential involvement with the Strategy process:

Tier 1: The most involved stakeholders, likely to understand what a Cultural Strategy could be and how they might engage with it. They are likely to be influential in the delivery of the strategy when agreed, and most likely to be members of the Cultural Partnership or key strategic players in the local and regional context. These people were our first route into the area and were asked to be a conduit to others who might be less aware of the potential value to them of involvement in the development of a strategy (Tiers 2 and 3).

Tier 2: People who engage regularly in cultural production and in using creativity for the development of Medway but might be less likely to get involved with strategy making and delivery. Their views are particularly important as these people and organisations are responsible for a huge proportion of the cultural and creative delivery for Medway.

Tier 3: People who live and work in Medway, who thus have a stake in the future of Medway and Medway culture, but may not see themselves in that light or realise the value of culture to them.

Our chosen approach is to mix in-person and online consultation, and to adapt the enquiry and approaches to the different groups. See below for further detail on each area.

The work will continue in late March and April with testing of the vision and the themes with all tiers using varied approaches.

Consultation approaches by Tier and time period.

	Developing themes (Nov '19-Feb '20)	Testing themes (March – Apr '20)	Sharing and embedding (May '20 –)
Tier 1	Strategic consultation Key stakeholder interviews and group discussions; attendance at key partnership meetings	Discussions with key stakeholders Workshop with Cultural Partnership	Discussions with key stakeholders
Tier 2	Open Space session and additional attendance at Cultural Partnership meetings	Town Hall Events Community consultation, online survey	Online sharing and feedback Attendance at events and other specific approaches where needed
Tier 3	Community consultation		

1. Strategic consultation

Who was involved:

Twenty nine interviews were carried out with key stakeholders. These came from the cultural, local government, health, voluntary and community, education, visitor economy, regeneration and economic development sectors, including both those located at SE regional (SELEP, ACE), Kent and North Kent sub-regional levels and those within Medway itself.

In addition, we held group consultation sessions in Medway Cultural Partnership main and executive meetings, the Voluntary Sector Leaders group and the Kent and Medway Cultural Transformation Board, reaching an estimated forty further stakeholders.

These stakeholders were reached using initial contacts provided by Medway Council and Medway Cultural Partnership Chair, our existing contacts, and suggestions from various stakeholders during interviews.

Overall experience

- Though coming from very different fields of interest and levels of concern, there was a remarkable coherence of message from all stakeholders over what was needed from a new Cultural Strategy for Medway.
- There was also a surprisingly strong willingness to get involved in the process, with several very senior people specifically requesting to speak to us when they heard we were involved in the process.
- This was linked to very positive hopes for Medway, and a belief that it has the potential to play a more strategic role on a regional and sub-regional basis, as well as a strong view that Culture has the potential to be the driving force for change.

Arising themes and issues for consideration

These are the summaries of the main views stated by stakeholders across sector and level.

Review of Medway Cultural Strategy 2014 to 2019.

- Of those that shared their views, it was felt that the previous strategy reflected a strong ambition and a series of actions.
- The sense from stakeholders was that the focus of the strategy was very much on what Medway Council should do or provide, with the ambition and achievements focused on the council's assets and resources. There was little sense of ownership or responsibility to deliver on the strategy from any stakeholders beyond Medway Council.
- Many of the actions were successful but delivered in mainly individual or bilateral partnerships. Where capital ambitions were not successful it wasn't clear there was any follow up as a group to consider what alternative steps could be taken.
- It was felt that a new strategy should be a true reflection of collective ambition and collectively used and reflected upon post publication.

Array of opportunities current and potential for Medway linked to culture and creativity

All stakeholders identified a range of opportunities in terms of investment, partnerships and initiatives which they felt offered potential for Medway to grow and reach potential. These were often linked to culture and creativity. Where not explicitly located in the cultural sector, they had clear links which were used and promoted by those sector players.

Changes taking place in Medway's relations within the sub-region

It was noted by most stakeholders who were not based in Medway, and several of those based locally, that relationships between Medway and the rest of Kent (and at times the rest of the region) had sometimes been problematic in the past. This was felt to be changing, with some significant steps towards working better together made by both sides over the last few years. This was viewed by all as nothing but positive and offering potential for future working.

There was some concern over certain initiatives feeling too exclusively driven by Medway Council and that this inadvertently caused others to feel less able to engage in them. For example, the UK City of Culture bid, whilst welcomed by all, was perceived externally as being totally 'owned' by the Council. Potential key partners felt that they lacked clarity as to how best to engage and support the bid. Although all were very keen and it was universally seen as a positive opportunity for the region.

Medway must maximise its strategic potential through clear identity and message

There was a general view – particularly at sub-regional and regional level – that Medway has great potential and now needs to maximise its strategic possibilities. It was described by more than one sub-regional or regional player as 'batting below its weight'.

Across a range of different sector areas, there is great hope for Medway and much potential is identified. Stakeholders hoped that the new Cultural Strategy could help develop the clear and shared vision and narrative Medway needs in order to lead and access strategic funds and initiatives.

This shared ambition and focus would identify priority areas for partnerships, and aid the building of honest and open relationships that together recognise the successes alongside the challenges.

Stakeholders also noted that Medway, as a unitary and larger player, had the position and

potential to take a real leadership role in key initiatives. This had perhaps been impeded in the past by perceptions of isolationism and inward looking approaches, but this was felt to be changing.

In particular, culture, the cultural sector, and key strategic cultural projects were felt to offer an opportunity for Medway to redefine itself, its role and its identity.

Resources and opportunities for the next generation

Stakeholders working with young people felt there was a challenge in the key narratives circulating in Medway. The narrative around adversity, industrial decline and historic links which dominate the cultural narratives do not necessarily reflect the reality of the opportunities that exists in Medway today.

In addition, many of the those working with young people identified that there are in fact an increasing number of opportunities for young people in Medway. However, these need to be more widely shared, and work undertaken to make it clear these are not just for the 'usual suspects' – ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to access them.

Challenges in ensuring equality of impact and access

There was a positive view that a great deal of capital investment was coming into Medway. However, responses showed that general understanding on how these will impact the social challenges present in terms of health, well-being, access and equality could be further enhanced.

With the investment in new infrastructure, there is now a need to identify and develop the sense of "Medwayness" along with a need to develop opportunities at a community level to support and develop both new communities and also those older communities whose profile is changing.

Conclusion:

Overall, we gained a sense of Medway as being at a crucial moment to make change. There is massive potential to benefit from the opportunities offered by investment, growth and its central location, both geographically and as a potential leader due to Medway's size and flexibility as a unitary.

With this, we feel there is now a need to define and share a clear vision and identity around which external and internal stakeholders can orient investment and delivery.

There is a willingness from everyone to make this happen with the new Cultural Strategy as one of its key mechanisms.

Community Consultation

This section outlines the consultation work with communities around Medway to date. This is an ongoing process, and further consultation will take place to develop the themes and to fill in any identified gaps in terms of reach.

Mapping approach and groups reached

We used a Medway Area Profile Report to understand the population distribution as it relates to likely cultural engagement. This shows where the most prevalent Audience Spectrum profiles¹, areas of the population that should be engaged as potential cultural 'consumers', are to be found in most numbers within Chatham, Rochester, Strood and Gillingham.

Dormitory Dependables	Trips and Treats
Chatham	Rochester (3 sectors including Strood)
Broadhurst	Lower Stoke
Gillingham	Chatham
	Snodland
	Gillingham x 4 sectors

Populations of least engagement, the Up Our Street profile which traditionally shows low engagement in cultural activity, are found in greatest quantity in Chatham and Gillingham. These towns also have higher counts of other low engaged Audience Spectrum profiles such as Facebook Families.

Up Our Street
Luton Road, Chatham
Gillingham

In each case, the whereabouts of the different profiles can be identified by specific postcode sectors. We used this knowledge to target key areas geographically, but did not exclude other areas of Medway. Using this information, we contacted potential gatekeeper organisations in these areas. These were identified either by cultural mapping, or by contacts within and via the Cultural Partnership – who were extremely helpful.

¹ Full information on the Audience Spectrum cultural segmentation system can be found at: <https://www.theaudienceagency.org/off-the-shelf/audience-spectrum>

We have so far met the following groups and members of the public (details include the area where they are located and the sector/interest group involved):

- MACA's Senior Domino Group in Gillingham – Afro-Caribbean seniors
- Creativity Club at 411 Hub, Chatham – mental health support for adults
- Rochester Healthy Walks group at Rochester Library/Community Hub – a Sport England initiative replicated throughout all Medway libraries – mainly retired, some unemployed
- The Medway Engagement group in Chatham - mental health support for adults, some with severe learning disabilities
- Volunteers at the Sunlight Centre in Gillingham - retired older women in this instance
- Rochester Grammar schoolgirls from years 7,8 and 9
- Dragon co-working lunch club, Chatham - a range of professionals, among them artists, creative industry practitioners, lawyers, and accountants
- A knitting circle at Walderslade Library - retired or unemployed

Additionally, we had occasional conversations with the general public in taxis, on trains and at bus stops.

Many of those we met have lived in Medway for thirty years or more, though few identify as coming from Medway but instead identify as from their individual town or village.



The geographical spread, as well as the nature of the groups, is purposefully varied. However, the next map (Fig 2) shows that there are areas in which consultations still need to be arranged, for example on the Hoo Peninsula and in Rainham and Strood. We have some contacts for these and are arranging further consultation.



Figure 2: Wider Medway area

We also plan to set up a range of consultations with further diverse communities, with students and with other young people.

Focus areas and arising issues and themes

The approach taken has been purposely informal, using a range of visual methods and prompts, and has been adapted to each group. Knowing that people might not identify or be confident to engage in talking about culture, we focused initially on their relationship with Medway and their area, and what they wanted for the future. Accessibility and appropriate language were very much at the forefront of our approach.

The outline questions explored were:

- How does Medway feel?
- What is great about Medway?
- What could be improved to make it a better place to live and work?
- How do you feel about Medway?
- What would you write in a letter to Medway?

We also explored people's awareness of and interest in cultural strategy.

Responses were full and frank, and, while there is a lot of affection for Medway both from those who have lived here all their lives and from newcomers, there has also been a sense that, in general, there has been some deterioration in certain areas. Rochester was seen by some as an exception to this.

I've lived here from 1972 – much more relaxed than London. Much less crime.

We're between London and the sea – what's not to like about that?

Medway is scruffy, messy, there's a lot of rubbish, it needs a makeover. Lived here about 30 years and find it upsetting – people have no pride. There are no little old ladies scrubbing the front step anymore. Either we're losing pride in ourselves, or it's the immigrants coming in, or the students from local colleges – rubbish thrown everywhere – discarded beds and mattresses just propped up in their gardens.

Things that are concerning in Medway included:

...the cost of activities for families – 'only' £10 a head could add up to £50

My main gripe is with the lack of local community officers who used to be able to keep the high street protected from the hooligan element found there now i.e. kids doing wheelies. Even the street is crowded, hence knocking the elderly over – other driving vehicles at speed to get to the ATM or the shop. Because the control of said kids should start at home. It's regretful that it [that control] has gone.

We don't make enough of what we've got – there's not enough advertising...

There was almost no awareness of the existence of a cultural strategy, other than from a member of the Cultural Partnership present at one session, and a social media expert at another. However, there was a place-making aspiration from one person, who said:

Medway is the next Folkestone or Margate, could even be 'the next Shoreditch'.

Another said

Make culture available to everyone – almost anyone can take an interest (even my dad)

The provision of the Healthy Walks programme scored highly, both as healthy exercise with like-minded people and as a catalyst for socialising:

People here today come from Rainham, Wouldham, Higham, Lordswood . . . We have social events, a Christmas lunch.

Another person was positive about their surroundings and the positive feelings they offer:

There are beauty spots in Medway – there's a whole Facebook page devoted to them – I look at it often, cheers me up – Lower Stoke, Rochester Castle, evening streets...

Other aspects mentioned as concerns were the need to improve the bus service to provide access to attend evening events, as they stop running early – and the general 'scruffiness' of

the Medway towns and villages – both of these are felt to be areas the Council could and should improve. There were also general concern which is raised in all towns we work in around perceived levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Cultural activity particularly mentioned and appreciated were concerts at the Dockside, art exhibitions, the installations at Rochester Cathedral, exhibitions in Rochester, jazz in pubs and the main festivals.

Those consulted so far have also been clear as to the benefits of the provision they are enjoying and aware that these are mainly of benefit to the retired and to unemployed older people.

Several people commented on the need for specific and timely provision for young people.

Open Space

Approach and Attendance

As we wanted to reach as many people as possible and to allow an open discussion which would elicit the widest range of themes and inputs, we chose to use Open Space Technology (OST) for our first large consultation event.

OST is a way for groups to think, talk and take action together. It can work for as few as five people, and as many as 5000. Participants self-organise to create their own agenda on the day, allowing a dynamic and immediate response to the issues at hand. The OST process allows free-flowing conversations about the things that really matter to the people in the room.

OST can shift cultures both towards a more responsible and more pragmatic outlook. Over the last 25 years, OST has been used across the world in an incredible range of contexts: to design aeroplane doors, resolve land disputes, address economic, environmental, social, political and artistic issues of every kind. Harrison Owen invented the process.

The Open Space event was held on January 18th at Rochester Corn Exchange. Invitation was completely open – via an Eventbrite link shared on the GJG Consultancy website: [Website Link](#) as well as We Are Medway, and promoted by facebook and twitter links by members of the Cultural Partnership group and others.

Attendance at the Open Space session included over 150 people - a wide variety of creative practitioners and representatives of interest groups.

These included artists, musicians, writers, dancers, fashion designers, members of heritage organisations, film-makers, educators (including representatives from the universities) social media experts, community arts workers, council staff, councillors, members of the public, charity workers (including faith organisations), retail organisations, developers and tourism consultants.

There was a notable positivity across the whole of the session, with many people noting how surprising the number and range of attenders was.

An email group is being set up for those who attended and have asked to be networked with one another. This is intended to be a self-moderated group.

Summary arising themes and issues for consideration

The following themes came through strongly from both sets of agenda sessions:

- A paucity of affordable spaces for artists/rehearsals/workshops – suggestions include using empty shops and churches.
- Join up the different towns ('make sure it's not all about Rochester') – with a cultural trail or using the river as a conduit and connector?
- Expand/extend/develop festivals: build on those that currently exist but make them more inclusive of local practitioners. Also, create some festivals with a more niche focus.
- Need for an open-to-all one-stop online database and 'what's on' site for all things

cultural, not just those run by the council.

- Access and diversity needs are of crucial importance and the feeling is that they are not currently being met as successfully or specifically as they should be.
- The 'green' agenda is important and some support should be offered e.g. to retailers who are trying to meet it. Some participants suggested that sustainability and reducing the carbon footprint should take priority over all other considerations.
- Better basic public services infrastructure is needed, especially in transport (the bus service came in for much criticism, especially evening services).
- How can 'culture' be used to build social capital and trust?
- Many expressed the need for support, subsidy or funding – some requesting guidance in making funding applications.

The final plenary session added the need to ensure that young people's voices are heard fully in this consultation, and that this 'unique opportunity' should not be the only occasion that so many concerned people come together to continue the conversation. There was also mention of finding somewhat more accessible venues for future occasions, and of creating a communication channel between those present.

The fully-documented session is available at [Open Space Report](#)

Next Steps for consultation

Consultation will continue throughout the development of the strategy. It should then continue onwards through the implementation phases, beginning with the development of the initial Action Plans.

Gaps in the consultation identified so far include:

- Need to reach some geographic areas (Hoo, Rainham, Strood) for the community mapping – these will be addressed through work specifically with groups based in these areas.
- Need to reach younger people – this will be addressed through themes testing sessions to be specifically organised through youth engagement groups and via the universities.
- Need to reach into some communities where English is not the first language and who may not have felt able to engage - approaches towards doing this are being developed in partnership with local organisations who currently work with these groups.

Themes Testing:

With a draft vision and themes, we will move into a second phase of consultation which asks people to think about how the themes we have identified work for them. It will ask where they can contribute, or where they can see gaps.

This will be carried out through a range of approaches to make it as accessible for the greatest range of people, including:

- An Online Survey open to all
- A workshop with the Cultural Partnership and with Medway Council officers
- Continued community engagement activities – using the same sort of methods as outlined above
- Town Hall events where people will be invited to come in and contribute to a rolling discussion on themes.

	Consultation period 1 (Nov 19-Feb 20)	Consultation period 2 (March – Apr 20)	Consultation period 3 (May 20 –)
Tier 1	Key stakeholder interviews and group discussions; attendance at key partnership meetings	Discussions with key stakeholders including Medway Cultural Partnership workshop	Discussions with key stakeholders
Tier 2	Open Spacesession; attendance at Cultural Partnership meetings	Town Hall Events Community consultation, online survey	Online survey Attendance at events and other specific approaches where needed
Tier 3	Community consultation		