



TELL ME

**WHAT YOU
WANT**

**“ Growing Arts,
Heritage &
Cultural Engagement
In Bromsgrove ”**

PHASE ONE

Exploring the current offer &
highlighting gaps in engagement

AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Observations
& Recommendations

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

This report is made up of two documents.

- **Phase 1:** An executive summary, observations, and recommendations
- **Phase 2:** Research Report

The first of these (this document) provides a summary of our findings from this project, presented as ten observations detailing the 'needs' identified by this research and suggests groups to work with during phase 2.

The second of these details the five layers of research undertaken by Doink during Phase 1 and encompasses detailed findings of desk research to establish a baseline of Bromsgrove's current offer and an account of Doink's conversations with residents and local arts groups asking them 'what they want' from arts and culture in the district.

Please note several clarifications on language used in this report:

- Throughout both documents, the phrases Bromsgrove and Bromsgrove District are used interchangeably, both refer to the whole district and its many surrounding areas, villages and parishes. The phrase 'Bromsgrove Town' is used when referring specifically to the town in order to differentiate between the two where needed.
- The phrases 'arts, culture, and heritage' are used extensively throughout this report. For the purposes of this project the phrase refers to activities involving creative expression, either through creation of original work or through the performance of existing work or refers to activities which celebrate shared ideas and values, and to a celebration of communities and intrinsic parts of them, be that through exhibition or preserving or creating things which are important to people's collective identity. The phrases 'art', 'culture' and 'heritage' are used interchangeably in some places to make reference to a particular portion of the phrase, or for ease of readability.
- The phrase 'platform' is used throughout this report to refer to creation of spaces for people to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences, or to express their creativity. This point is clarified in order to avoid confusion with the possible use of the phrase to refer to specific physical 'platforms' utilized in certain art forms, such as dance.



TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT

Phase one: An Overview

What is ‘Tell Me What You Want’?

Commissioned by Bromsgrove Arts and Culture Consortium in partnership with Bromsgrove District Council, Tell Me What You Want (TMWYW) is an audacious provocation to the people of Bromsgrove, to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences of arts, heritage and culture in the district and to literally and figuratively tell decision-makers and key-holders what they want from the district’s arts offer; and how they want it. TMWYW aims to connect the vibrant and rich arts, culture, and heritage scene in Bromsgrove with audiences who might not be engaging at the moment; challenging local arts organisations to grow their work, but also to build new ways of thinking, new activities, new spaces and new ways of building those connections.

This report brings together all of the learnings and conversations of Phase One of a five-phase project and culminates in a series of observations and recommendations for future arts and cultural engagement in Bromsgrove and its surrounding communities.

How did Phase One work?

Phase One was all about understanding the current arts offer in Bromsgrove and to understand who is, and isn’t, engaging with it. To do that, the consortium commissioned Doink; a creative research organisation, to undertake desk research exploring the current arts offer locally and to host conversations on High Streets, in youth centres, on park benches, in skateparks and a whole range of other spaces across Bromsgrove District outside of arts, culture and heritage.

They spoke to young people and older people; people who were very engaged and people who shrugged at the idea of arts workshops. The research team also connected with large arts organisations, and many smaller groups and companies to understand who their audiences are, and who they would like to see join these audiences.

The research in Phase One was split into five ‘Layers’, each one building a picture of a different element of life in Bromsgrove District and its arts, culture, and heritage offer. The Layers moved through questions of ‘who lives in Bromsgrove’ (Layer 1) to understand what the current offer is and then who engages with that offer (Layers 2



and 3). The penultimate Layer (Layer 4) built on this through consultation with the public, groups and organizations, and Layer 5 brought all of that thinking together to identify who falls through the net and identify who is not engaging.

What did those conversations uncover?

This phase concluded in ten key observations and four key recommendations about the strengths and gaps in Bromsgrove’s cultural offer and references recurrent themes from conversations with groups and with the public, and patterns spotted through desk research in Bromsgrove. These observations raise questions, challenges, and opportunities which should be grappled with during Phase Two, and answered during Phase Three.

Bromsgrove residents are not calling out for engagement opportunities centred on specific art forms or heritage offers. Instead, this research uncovered a ‘need’ for physical and mental space to strengthen and grow communities. There is an opportunity for the arts scene in the district to position itself as a key player in helping that to happen by engaging with the need to ‘celebrate the importance of arts and culture locally’ and by ‘going where people are’. This means taking art and cultural activities into communities where engagement is low; areas of high socio-economic deprivation like Sidemoor or Charford where higher numbers of residents are identified as being ‘non-engagers’ and are one of the groups recommended for engagement during Phase Two.



**A ‘NEED’ FOR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL
SPACE TO STRENGTHEN AND GROW
COMMUNITIES.**

This is accompanied by a need to change how we speak about arts and culture, to ask questions about whether that language works and whether the definition of what ‘counts’ as arts and culture needs to grow to better reflect how and where people choose to express themselves, whether that be online, at home, or in a church hall, and whether that be through youtube, dance, baking, or any other cultural activity people are engaging with. Changing the definition of arts and culture in this way could lead to



new arts groups or spaces being formed to meet the needs of more residents in Bromsgrove.

This has to be balanced with a need to understand that growth might not come from some of the smaller organisations and groups working locally, especially voluntary ones who might not have the capacity to engage with whole new audiences, or might not want to. There is a need to help groups tread the fine lines between being small groups who meet for fun, and groups whose management amounts to a part-time job. In a related point, there is a need here to help smaller groups who do welcome growth to diversify their governance to help them engage with more young people aged 15-20 in their decision-making processes, doing so would help them engage with that demographic in a more authentic way. This forms part of the reason that 'young people aged 15-20' are one of the recommended groups for engagement during Phase Two.

COULD BROMSGROVE DEVELOP PROJECTS AND PROCESS TO STOP THIS DROP OFF?



This report recommends that younger families and isolated elderly people are potential groups for engagement during Phase Two (alongside young people, and people from low socioeconomic background). Engagement with young families is high in Bromsgrove, this drops off as children move into their teenage years.

Isolated elderly people are by their nature difficult to identify and many organisations spoke about a desire to grow engagement with them. Elderly people we spoke to talked at length about spaces to connect and meet people.

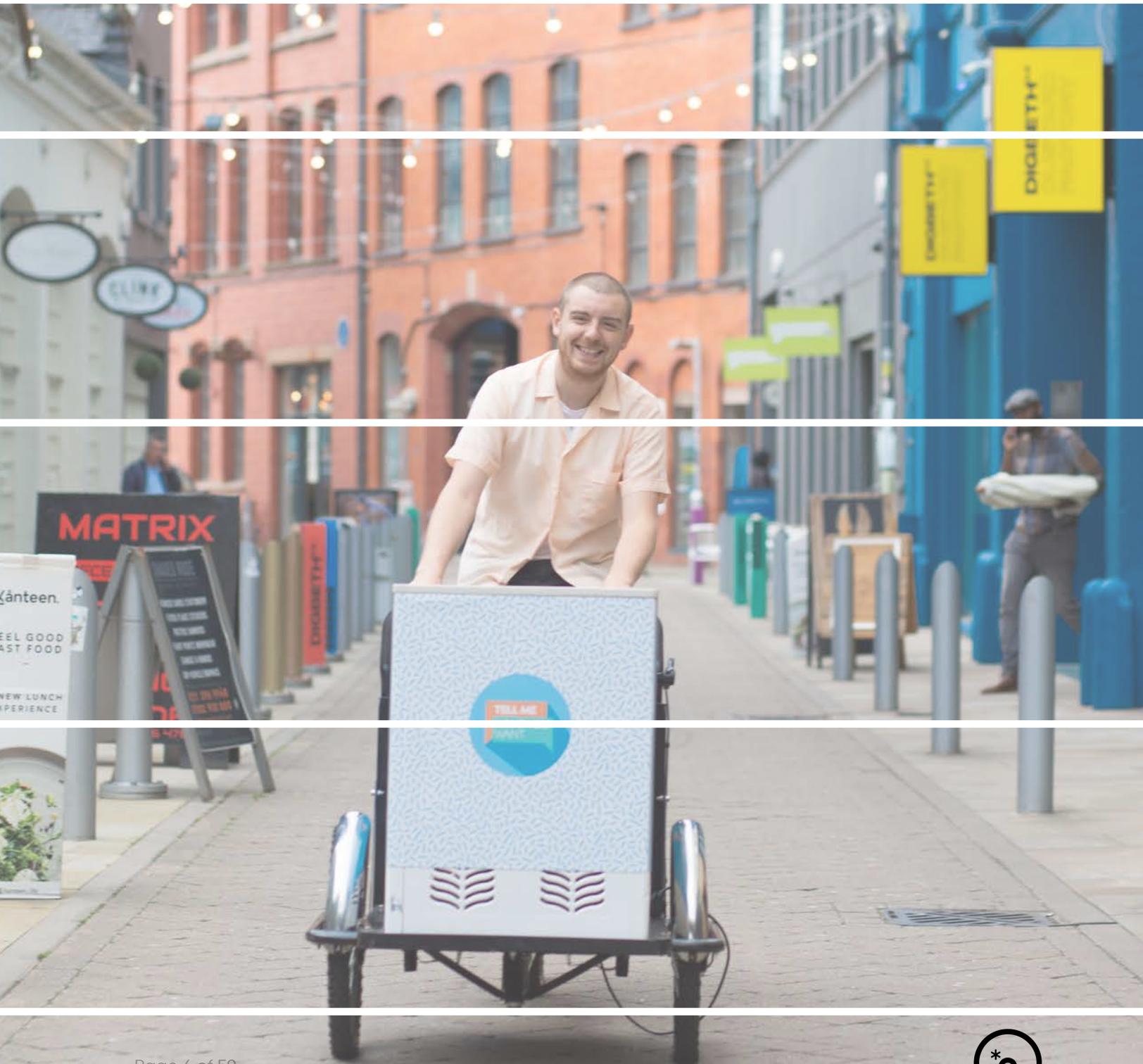
COULD 'ARTS AND CULTURE' HELP TO FULFIL THESE NEEDS?

There are successes and opportunities to build on too: Sports engagement is high, particularly amongst young people, this report challenges the consortium to align itself with this engagement, to build on it, and to bring arts and culture to audiences who might not ever have considered it before now. Bromsgrove is very close to Birmingham, and the town does good work in aligning itself with the cultural offer of the city, bringing smaller elements of big productions to Bromsgrove, this report poses questions around how Bromsgrove can build on this, and whether this could grow into a 'hook' for the district, complementing Birmingham's art scene, instead of competing with it.

All of these recommendations sit within a context of a need to re-approach how and what data is collected about audiences and participants, and how building a new data capture framework could galvanize the cultural community of Bromsgrove and bring groups together around common aims (to grow and widen engagement).



This report explores observations made in Phase One, as well as the needs that have emerged from them. It also recommends groups identified as being disengaged from arts and culture for the consortium to review ahead of moving into the exciting 'practice as research' during Phase Two.



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- For you
- For this project



WHO ARE DOINK?



Doink is a **'do and think'** tank which humanizes data to tell better stories and to facilitate better decisions.

We use creative approaches to research, and create spaces for people to share their thoughts and feelings, to build better, deeper, insights.

Doink forms part of the wider 'Beatfrees Collective', a group of companies and people using 'creativity to do the incredible'. This project aims to do exactly that, and as such we are incredibly excited to present this research to you.

One of the other companies within the collective are Free Radical who provide arts activism platforms helping people to explore how they connect with the world (or don't) using creativity and artistic expression. They will conduct the second phase of this project, an exciting period of 'practise as research', carrying out activities and programmes within the Bromsgrove District, with the observations and recommendations outlined in this report.



KEY OBSERVATIONS - A SUMMARY

What were the learnings from Phase One?

During conversations and through desk research some themes and patterns about arts engagement emerged. These patterns formed the basis of ten observations during this phase. It is these observations that will shape some of the projects developed during Phase Two.

1. A need for engagement data focused on demographics

The research team discovered big gaps in what information organisations and groups are collecting about their audiences and participants. If Bromsgrove wants to grow its arts and cultural engagement then there needs to be a fuller picture of who is engaging now and in the future to set baselines and to be able to continually ask 'who isn't engaging' far beyond the end of this project. This an opportunity to bring together all of the amazing organisations and groups working in the district using a shared goal of 'better data'. This would and should begin during Phase Two, and be built into the action plan during Phase Three and could begin with simple data capture frameworks to be built on later.

2. A need to understand that growth is not for everyone

Not all groups and organisations are actively seeking to grow their audiences and engage more participants beyond the demographics they currently engage. Sometimes this is due to capacity issues (some of these are voluntary groups), and sometimes this is due to a desire to 'keep things small'. This is not a bad thing, there is lots of strong and consistent engagement taking place in Bromsgrove and that should be celebrated, Instead this should be viewed as an important opportunity; if some organisations do not have the capacity to welcome new audiences then there is an opportunity to empower people to create new spaces and platforms for themselves to express and create with the support of Bromsgrove Arts and Culture Consortium.



3. A need for space and enfranchisement for citizens

The word ‘space’ popped up in conversations time and time again. Whether that be a space for young people to ‘hang out’ that wasn’t a fast food shop, or older people wanting somewhere to feel more connected to their communities, the need for space is a physical one, but it also speaks to a wider desire that people have to feel that they have ‘a place’ in Bromsgrove. This need presents a challenge to Bromsgrove’s decision-makers to look at how they use the physical spaces they control, and who has access to them. In opening those spaces up, Bromsgrove can facilitate the growth of the citizen developed platforms outlined in observation 2 ‘Growth is not for everyone’.

4. A need for space for organisations and groups

A desire for more ‘space’ was not limited to residents. Small arts organisations and voluntary groups spoke passionately about how easier access to free and/or cheap physical spaces would help them to grow as organisations, and engage new audiences as a result of that growth. This need presents questions; how can spaces be offered for free or at a low-cost and be sustainable for all involved? who is in a position to provide those resources? what assets are available already that could support this? These questions can be explored during Phase Two but answered through the action plan in Phase Three.

5. A need to celebrate the importance of ‘art and culture’

locally with under-engaged groups

People who were less engaged in arts and culture (either through choice or through lack of exposure) were less likely to talk about arts and culture being important, but those same people still had stories and experiences to share and as mentioned above they still have a desire to connect and have ‘space’. Arts organisations are perfectly placed to provide (or facilitate the building of) platforms for that to happen, and there is a challenge to arts and culture organisations to work with under-engaged people to help them recognise that.



6. A need to ‘move the goalposts’ and grow what ‘arts and culture’ means in Bromsgrove

People who reported taking part in no arts and culture activities were able to talk passionately about other things they do in their free time; things like spending time online, writing lyrics, cooking, and knitting were all some things mentioned by people we spoke to. All of these are creative outlets that are not being recognised as ‘arts, culture, or heritage activity’. Here is a chance for Bromsgrove to revolutionise what it means by ‘arts’ or to go even further and explore some more fitting language which could grow the offer in Bromsgrove not by bringing people into the existing arts scene, but rather by moving the goalposts and recognising how many ways that ‘creativity’ manifests itself in the district.

7. A need to go to where people are

People like to do things in their own neighbourhoods, even those who reported low engagement were more likely to do things on their own doorsteps, and there is evidence to support that from Bromsgrove Festival and Street Theatre events. Other observations talk about how important providing or building platforms and spaces is to growing engagement in Bromsgrove and this is a related point. This is not about ‘outreach’ but rather an opportunity for ‘inreach’; arts organisations and groups supporting people in Bromsgrove to build creative activities with which they want to engage locally, in spaces in which they are comfortable. There is precedent for this idea, with findings from Creative People and Places forming similar conclusions. This work can be explored further ahead of developing the action plan in phase 3.

8. A need to re-approach how decisions are made

Organisations talked about issues widening their engagement especially with ‘young people’. A little look at who governs or runs local organisations and groups shines a light on some very hard working dedicated people. However, they are all from an older demographic and this report identifies several reasons that this makes widening engagement more difficult. Existing organisations creating space for young people to



influence or help steer organisations would help them to connect with a whole new audience, importantly with an authentic voice; supporting young people to create their own spaces might be even better!

9. A need to complement not compete with wider

Midlands offer

Being as close as it is to a major city like Birmingham, Bromsgrove can find itself 'competing' for audiences. Some residents reported that 'they'd rather go to Birmingham to see a show' especially in some of the outlying villages in the district. Bromsgrove already responds to this positively; when large productions are happening in Birmingham, performers or elements of production might come to Bromsgrove (as happened with Warhorse). The challenge here is to build on this to develop a 'hook' for Bromsgrove, so that it is not in competition with a wider offer, but that the district strengthens its own offer by focusing it on key ideas or themes; the 'need for space for citizens' maybe?

10. A need to complement existing engagement

elsewhere

Many people we spoke to talked about engagement outside of arts and culture. Young people especially were likely to mention taking part in sports activities. Engagement and connection with any activity is important and useful, even if it is outside of arts. However, people need to have at least tried something before they decide it's not for them. There is an opportunity here for Bromsgrove's arts and cultural offer to connect with wider engagement platforms to introduce people to new ideas and activities in a setting with which they are already engaged and comfortable.



EXPLORING PHASE ONE OBSERVATIONS MORE DEEPLY

TMWYW has reviewed data from the six main consortium organisations (Artrix, Severn Arts, Bromsgrove International Music Competition, Bromsgrove Festival, Avoncroft Museum of Historical Buildings, Bromsgrove Arts Alive) and Doink identified a further fifty-five smaller groups, companies, and organisations engaging Bromsgrove citizens in arts, culture, or heritage. This makes for a total of sixty-one organisations identified in total. This list is not exhaustive and encompasses organisations identified through desk research and through Bromsgrove Arts Alive.

As part of this research, we conducted interviews (in person and via phone) with thirty-one of those organisations, accounting for 50% of all organisations identified. We were also able to include data returned to us by eight further organisations via various surveys and email requests for data, in total 63% of organisations identified having returned some form of data regarding their engagement locally.

61 and **200+**

**ORGANISATIONS
IDENTIFIED IN
TOTAL**

**CONVERSATIONS WITH
MEMBERS OF THE
PUBLIC**

The remaining twenty-three organisations are listed here following desk research on publicly available information.

This research was accompanied by conversations with over two hundred members of the public most of whom live in Bromsgrove District. This was accompanied by desk research exploring the wider picture context for this project. Through these



conversations and through research, Doink were able to recognise patterns and themes in engagement (or non-engagement) in Bromsgrove. These patterns formed the basis of ten key project observations which centred on the 'needs' of Bromsgrove's residents, large organisations, small groups, and of future infrastructure.

These observations and the needs highlighted within them raise questions, challenges and opportunities, and will form the basis of the 'practice as research' phase of this project, whereby Free Radical will respond with a series of work strands designed to tackle these needs through arts provision with identified groups.

During the development of an action plan and toolkit in Phase Three, the experiences and data gathered by Free Radical will help answer the questions, and put actions against the challenges and opportunities raised in this report

Please note, these observations are not listed in order of perceived importance.



1.

**A need for
engagement data
focused on
demographics**



During this research phase, it became apparent that there is a need to create more concise data sets related to engagement in Bromsgrove.

Of all the arts organisations and/or groups identified for the purpose of this report, the larger organisations and events (Artrix, Avoncroft Museum, Bromsgrove Festival, Severn Arts) were able to provide data pertaining to ‘who’ they are engaging with.

Largely this data was garnered from box office sales, and segmentation was limited to young people, older people, and some concessionary information.

We recommend that ahead of the development of the action plan for Phase Three, organisations be supported to collect more in-depth data on their attendees and participants.

Several organisations are currently collecting membership data but concerns over GDPR compliance meant that they were not happy to share this data. Any data capture methods devised will have to take that into account during development.

It is important to view this stat in light of how organisations view their own activities.

Of the fifty-five smaller organisations/groups identified in Layer 2, thirty-seven of them are reported as not operating for profit. Many groups and smaller organisations report that they are running their activities ‘just for fun’ and as such, it is understandable that they might not feel it necessary to implement a data collection process, or to expand their existing one.

Moving forward, and in order to measure the continuing success of a drive to increase engagement from non-engaged groups, it is imperative that groups work collaboratively to produce more detailed data sets.

This cannot and should not become a large or laborious task, otherwise, groups and organisations will not engage in the success of the process.

Better data can make for better insights, in their report into audience insights (2011), Arts Council England argues that segmentation is important because:

- Not all people are the same or share the same attitudes, opinions and motivations about the arts
- People’s differing attitudes, opinions and motivations shape behaviour: it can show how and why people are likely to engage with the arts



- From a marketing perspective, a person from one segment can be responsive to one approach, while the same approach can be wholly inappropriate for a person from another segment

The findings of this research have certainly shown that to be true within successful groups in Bromsgrove who have very good regular engagement but do so with people from very restricted demographics.

The development of a simple, easy to access, data capture framework to be employed during Phase Two will help to widen the understanding of who engages, and why they engage, ahead of action plan building in Phase Three.



2.

A need to
understand that
growth is not for
everyone



**“ This can take over your whole life if
you let it! ”**

— comment from a small arts organisation representative at an open session

Of the fifty-five smaller organisations/groups identified in Layer 2, thirty-seven of them are reported as not operating for profit.

Of the forty-seven of them who were able to contribute data on their organisation structures, eleven are operated as charities, and sixteen as voluntary groups, that accounts for 57% of organisations spoken to.

These are grassroots organizations, running small groups with their personal interests. They share them with friends, family and small extended networks. One group, for example, spoke about hosting play readings in each others living rooms, another talked about being “just a group of friends who like to play music together”. It is important to give consideration to groups who might not be compelled to increase or widen their engagement on the basis that doing so will create more work for them.

A very promising 45 out of 47 organisations welcomed new members, however, this came with several caveats, centred on concerns like “not wanting this to become unmanageable”. Some groups might welcome new members or attendees but are concerned about how this might affect their workloads, turning enjoyable hobbies into effectively “part-time jobs”.

This need to make sure organisations are resourced well enough to support new audiences and participants has more implications than just numbers of attendees. As discussed in Layer 2, to break out of ‘the usual’ engagement profile requires new marketing strategies, and as one attendee at a consultation session put it when talking about social media “you only get out what you put in”

If groups do lack the capacity for growth, then there is a question about where growth can come from, and who can facilitate that growth? This report hypothesized that the arts offer of Bromsgrove District can grow if we enfranchise people with their own spaces to test out and develop new ideas.



The next project observation makes reference to a need for space, and other observations point to a need to take arts, culture, and heritage and to where people are people (instead of people coming to come to where engagement is).

These observations complement each other. If all growth won't come through existing groups, then can Bromsgrove empower people (through space) to grow their own new engagement opportunities in their own communities, doing activities that resonate with them.

This theory should be tested during Phase Two through the provision of space and co-created engagement activities. The question of who is best placed to resource this support can be answered as part of the development of the action plan in phase three.



3.

**A need for
space and
enfranchisement
for Citizens**



“ We hang out on the high street because there is nowhere else to go.”

— under 16 year old: ‘What’s the Scoop’ conversations on Bromsgrove High St.

Something that came out of the earliest conversations, and was mentioned several times throughout the process was a desire for physical and intellectual space.

There is a strong narrative here of citizens feeling that spaces are not ‘for them’.

Conversations on Bromsgrove High Street were illuminating. Of the 79 under 25s who took part in ‘What’s the Scoop’, just over 1/3 of them made reference to a lack of somewhere to ‘just hang out’.

During the same consultation, young people joked about ‘hanging out in Greggs’ and during our youth focus group, several of the group joked about ‘going to subway’ for a day out.

These aren’t just young people who are fast food enthusiasts, these are young people looking for a space they can have ownership of, often to the chagrin of staff in these premises.

Conversations with young people in and around Sanders Park were more positive in tone than those with young people who ‘hang out’ on Bromsgrove High Street, The existence of a skate park is an intrinsic element of that fact. In feeling like they have true ownership of a space, people become enfranchised in it.

Similarly, some of the elderly people we spoke to spoke to us about the daily routines they had. One man’s day entailed “walking up and down and sitting on a particular bench”. He lamented that it would be nice if he had “somewhere to walk to” and “a place where [he] doesn’t have to buy very expensive coffee!”

As discussed in observation 2, these groups are calling out for ‘space’ and Bromsgrove arts and culture offer is well placed to provide that space to them. If we enfranchise people with projects and programmes happening in community settings, then it follows that they can be afforded space intellectually by using these community centred projects and spaces as platforms to talk about their experiences of life in Bromsgrove.



This hypothesis should be tested during Phase Two of this project, and if this assumption is correct then this should become a key part of the action plan to be developed during Phase 3.

WHAT EXISTING SPACES COULD BE UTILIZED?

WILL THIS MEAN THAT NEW SPACES NEED TO BE DEVELOPED?

IS THERE SCOPE TO BRING LOCAL BUSINESSES INTO THIS CONVERSATION?

If this hypothesis is found to be correct, then there will be a need to address the backdrop of divestment in the provision of space from local authorities and from central government as an ongoing concern.

In order to ensure that residents have better access to space in the long term, the consortium and its partners are encouraged to think about how they can resource this. What existing spaces could be utilized? Will this mean that new spaces need to be developed? Is there scope to bring local businesses into this conversation?

There is a precedent here, with the (now finished) “Somewhere_To” project which sought to connect people needing civic space with organisations who might be able to provide that space free or for very low costs on a digital platform.

The answers to the questions raised here as well as further reflection on the Somewhere_To model will be explored more fully during Phase Three when building the action plan for TMWYW.



4.

**A need for
space for
organisations
and groups**



In the open sessions for arts organisations, attendees were asked to list obstacles that they faced in hosting activities and growing or maintaining their participant base.

Close to 80% of organisations present included space on their lists. Later, when asked to rank obstacles perceived, availability of space ranked highest.

Nearly all of the voluntary organisations who connected with this project through conversation and surveys highlighted a need for cheap and/or affordable spaces

Currently, Bromsgrove's offer is largely supported by venue hire at Artrix, Avoncroft Arts Centre, and various church halls throughout the district.

There is a need to address accessibility to these, and other potential spaces, but crucially there is a need to identify processes or mechanisms related to how access to these venues is funded.

This could form a potential strand of working for Phase Three during the building of an action plan and toolkit.

Many groups and activities charge a cover price to their members, and for smaller groups, this fee is largely spent on covering venue costs.

As is observed elsewhere in this report, costs for services present a barrier to engagement, so this is a problem which not only affects organizers but possible audiences and participants also.

However, this needs to be weighed up with a business need for spaces to charge for their services. This point will be tackled when developing the action plan during Phase Three.



5.

**A need to
celebrate the
importance of
art and culture
locally with
under-engaged
groups**



People who were less engaged in arts and culture were less likely to talk about arts and culture being important, but those same people still had stories and experiences to share and as mentioned above they still have a desire to connect and have 'space'. Arts organisations are perfectly placed to provide (or facilitate the building of) platforms for that to happen, and there is a challenge to arts and culture organisations to work with under-engaged people to help them recognise that. This is also discussed in the recommendations for groups to engage.

When asked, many members of the public were not excited by, or interested in the process of growing Bromsgrove's cultural offer. Similarly, during the early consultation sessions, many organisations were unsure as to why they might need to grow their engagement other than to ensure the longevity of their groups.

This need underpins other observations centred on taking arts and culture into communities and providing spaces for people to share their experiences of life in the district. 'Celebrating the importance of arts and culture' begins with people being empowered to engage in civic life through space and co-creation of platforms and to fill those spaces with creativity, in whatever way suits them.

The next observation refers to a need to 'move the goalposts' on what 'arts and culture' means, and raises the question of whether the language we use needs to change. These two observations are intrinsically linked; coming together to call for a renewed 'celebration' of a new definition of 'arts and culture' using new language to describe it in Bromsgrove.



6.

A need to
move the
goalposts and
grow what
'arts and
culture' means
in Bromsgrove



During the What's the Scoop consultations, 82 out of 176 people stated that they do between 0-2 hours of arts and culture activity at home, but when questioned further, nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of those people told us about time spent online, or time spent creating arts and crafts at home.

This is in line with our findings elsewhere namely that what people perceive arts and culture to be is moving further away from what is traditionally thought of to be 'arts and culture'.

This is exacerbated by people not reflecting on activities they engage in at home (celebrations of culture such as cooking or dance etc) counting as arts and culture.

Ultimately, this points to a need to widen what 'counts' as art and culture to represent a quickly changing landscape and to ensure that we don't lose engagement with those groups. It also points to a need to change the language used when discussing arts and culture, perhaps focusing instead on 'creativity'?

Growing our understanding of 'creativity' in this way helps to enfranchise more people, something outlined earlier in these observations as a key need in Bromsgrove.

Moving the goalposts to encompass things such as digital engagement affords the arts offer in Bromsgrove some space to understand how it can complement online spaces and not compete with them. For example, if a young person reports enjoying story based online games, then could Bromsgrove respond with workshops around building narratives, or storyboarding?



7.

A need to
go where
people are



48.5% of respondents told us that they engage in arts or cultural activities at home as a preferred space, these findings are reflected in other research taking place, such as The Glass Heart project.

Events like Bromsgrove Festival saw greater engagement with families and young people at their community events, rather than with the wider festival.

Also, during conversations at Street Theatre events in the community, researchers were able to connect with people who had suggested that they do not connect with arts and culture opportunities, “but that we come here because it’s on our doorstep (quote from a young mum at Catshill Street Theatre)



If communities are excited for engagement to happen but are not able to, or willing to travel for that engagement, then this is an opportunity for arts and culture to come to them.

This was attributed to a number of different factors, but a prevalent one was ease of access to opportunities. That ‘doorstep’ engagement is key to this.

When asked if more localised events would positively affect what they engage in the vast majority agreed that it would.

This presents a huge opportunity to engage a whole cross-sector of society who are otherwise disenfranchised from arts provision in Bromsgrove.

The success of events such as Street Theatres, and other community events, demonstrates that communities in the district are thriving and that they are excited to



engage within their locales. The Street Theatre events, in particular, demonstrate how successful engagement can be when activities are locally run.

Our research team spoke to many people at the Street Theatre events. They spoke at length about inadequate travel services, especially to larger arts centres such as Artrix. If communities are excited for engagement to happen but are not able to, or willing to travel for that engagement, then this is an opportunity for arts and culture to come to them.

The 'need to go where people are' sits alongside a 'need to move goalposts' and a 'need for space for citizens' to shape a strand of work for the action plan focused on empowering people to grow their own engagement opportunities; not through outreach, but through 'inreach'. Bromsgrove's grassroots scene is strong, this is an opportunity to grow it into new parts of the district.

There are opportunities to begin this work during Phase Two, Free Radical could and should host activities in areas of low engagement, but change in this space will come during a longer period and can be explored more fully when developing the action plan during Phase Three.



8.

A need to
re-approach
how
decisions
are made



In conversation, most groups and organisations that were not operating as businesses referred to having a 'board' style set up, either as part of a charity or as a voluntary group.

This setup affords groups and organisations stability and accountability by way of clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the decision-making process.

Of the 33 organisations who were able to provide some information about their decision making processes, nearly all of them reported a set up entailing a Chair, Vice Chair, and a Treasurer. Many of these groups also reported specific roles for 'membership secretaries' and some for 'social secretaries' also.

Of the 13 organisations who were able to submit information for this report regarding their board demographics,

over half of the organisations and groups identified reported boards aged 50+

with the others reporting that their boards consisted of decision makers aged 60+ or 70+.

Only one organisation reported having expanded its board to involve roles related to engagement with particular demographics.

This lack of diversity is a problem

especially given that nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of organisations reported that their main marketing came from word of mouth and social networks. How can organisations grow their audiences if they are not coming into contact with them?

There is another issue here in that these setups make it difficult for groups and organisations to move quickly and respond to ideas/suggestions/things that are happening without going through lengthy decision making processes often involving AGMs and voting procedures.

Many of the representatives of organisations spoken to, explained that their organisations had been set up like this before they personally began engaging with



them and that this was 'how it has always been'. There is a need to review how organisations utilize their structures to their fullest advantage.

If they feel that these setups work for them, then maybe there needs to be more thought put into what the roles within organisations are and how they can be expanded through specific roles for people of specific demographic; could boards have 'regional' board members to tackle geographical areas of low engagement. These could be citizens living in those neighbourhoods.

This report has heard from several people who suggested that we should 'put power into the hands of young people', this is Bromsgrove's opportunity to do just that. People under the age of 18 cannot be trustees of organisations, this raises questions about other ways in which young people could be engaged in governance. This raises questions about the ongoing importance or suitability of current structures and how they affect decision-making processes, and it follows that during Phase Three there should be support and guidance available in the toolkit to help groups identify what will help them to achieve the engagement they desire.



9.

**A need to
complement
not compete
with wider
Midlands offer**



Being as close as it is to a major city like Birmingham, Bromsgrove's arts offer can find itself 'competing' with Birmingham.

COULD BROMSGROVE BECOME KNOWN AS A CENTRE THAT SUPPORTS AND NURTURES HOMEGROWN TALENT IN THIS FIELD?

A number of people we spoke to suggested that if they wished to engage in arts and culture they would go to Birmingham, to visit larger theatres, go to bigger gigs, or to engage in a wider variety of activities. As a big city with a cultural offer to match, this is inevitable. This poses questions about how Bromsgrove can develop its arts offer in light of this.

Bromsgrove already responds to this positively; when large productions are happening in Birmingham, performers or elements of production might come to Bromsgrove (as happened with Warhorse). The challenge here is to build on this to develop a 'hook' for Bromsgrove, so that it is not in competition with a wider offer, but that the district strengthens its own offer by focusing it on key ideas or themes; the 'need for space for citizens' maybe?

High quality and international work can and does thrive here, this is evidenced by Bromsgrove International Musicians Competition, which brings people from around the world to the town to celebrate classical music and singing. The founder talks excitedly about his plans to grow the platform too.

Could the future of Bromsgrove's offer lie in more homegrown platforms like this, homegrown platforms as discussed in observations about providing space and 'inreach'?

Attendees to the open sessions were in agreement that the cinema at Artrix could benefit from showing more 'blockbuster' type films. This would mean they are competing with an impressive showcase cinema in Rubery and with several large cinemas in Birmingham.



Could Bromsgrove become known as a centre that supports and nurtures homegrown talent in this field, with a comprehensive offer of training through to screenings, supporting local talent to produce their own art rather than simply consume it?

Other observations made by this report could feed into this, could Bromsgrove become known as a district which revolutionised the way Bromsgrove 'enfranchised its citizens mentally and physically' through a range of services designed to support people in need of a place to share their works?

It is important that Bromsgrove's involvement in Worcestershire's Cultural Partnership be taken into account in light of this observation. During conversations, engagement in cultural activity in Worcestershire did not come up, this is an issue that the consortium may wish to reflect on during the development of the action plan, but also during the evaluation during phase 5.



10.

**A need to
complement
existing
engagement
elsewhere**



In Layer 4, when speaking to the public, this research observed that there was a trend towards young people reporting that they take part in some sort of sporting activity during their free time, particularly young people, and boys within that, and was prevalent across all parts of the district (i.e was not affected by other factors such as socio-economic demographic).

This fact in itself is not surprising, that young people are more likely to engage in sports is not new information, however the interesting fact lies in the way that many people who reported engaging in team sports, or other organised group sports saw that as being 'the way they connected locally', and that they didn't have time to engage in arts and culture as well as maintaining their sports activity.

The age and gender demographics (15 - 20-year-old male teenagers) who were significantly more engaged sports than in traditional arts and culture were the same groups who were reported amongst the hardest to engage amongst the arts organisations working locally.

There is an obvious opportunity here to capitalise on this existing engagement to grow engagement with non-engaging groups in Bromsgrove, in Layer 4, this report reflects on the possibility of bringing together arts and physical activity locally, citing projects such as [MAD](#)¹ taking place in Birmingham, whereby Sport Birmingham provide arts activities such as dance or painting alongside traditional sports activities such as football. Young people can attend sessions to engage with whatever they are comfortable with, but crucially have been exposed to a range of experiences they might not have otherwise. In the case of Bromsgrove, this would mean working alongside existent sports provision to expose young people to arts activities that they might not have considered otherwise or might have already discounted due to their preconceptions about what 'arts and culture' is, as discussed in observation 6. If activities carried out during phase 2 find this to be a useful route to future engagement, Doink proposes further research to explore other projects utilizing this method as part of the the building of an action plan in phase 3.

¹ <https://www.sportbirmingham.org/madbirmingham>



EXPLORING PHASE TWO

Recommendations made here for groups to work with and where to find them will be considered by the Consortium and Free Radical. Free Radical will respond to these recommendations with a programme of activities to engage some or all of these groups.

There is a further recommendation regarding data collection, which Doink will support the development of, and will use as a way to galvanize the whole district around the aims of this project and of the consortium more widely.

Who to work with (who is not engaged)?

One of the key outputs of this phase of TMWYW was to identify groups, communities, and demographics who are not engaged and suggest groups for engagement during Phase Two.

Throughout Phase One, it has become apparent that there are several key demographics that are either not engaged, or that arts organisations have reported a desire to engage with more closely.

These groups are:

- People from lower socio-economic backgrounds
- Young people aged 15-20
- Isolated elderly people
- Young families with older children

Doink also suggests a further recommendation regarding the collection of engagement data during Phase Two.

Please note, these recommendations are not listed in order of importance.

People from lower socio-economic backgrounds

Throughout the Layers of this research we have identified that although Bromsgrove is generally an affluent town and a series of relatively affluent smaller villages and



communities in the outlying areas, there are significant areas of suffering from high levels of deprivation in the district.

Later in the research we establish that although the current arts offer in Bromsgrove is rich and varied, these opportunities are concentrated in more affluent areas of the district, this was compounded by findings from the public consultations which found that people reporting engaging in little to no arts engagement were more likely to be from areas which were less affluent.

Conversations with parents in Charford Park (an area of relatively low socio-economic background) focused on a perceived lack of cheap or preferably free opportunities. This point might seem obvious, but it is important to reflect on.



People from lower socio-economic backgrounds are not easily heard.

One young parent explained that “if [they’re] taking 3 children out and getting them all on the bus, and then something is ten pounds each, and then lunch might cost something similar, [they’re] looking at £100 day out, that’s my budget for the week!”

Other conversations with the public demonstrated a lack of interest in ‘arts and culture’, a point which is identified through the observations of this project.

This was a trend, it figures that those who report lower engagement see less value in participating in the arts, but it is important against a backdrop of relatively fewer opportunities being available to them locally, which feeds into a project observation regarding ‘a need to go where people are’.

There is an amazing opportunity here to celebrate the importance and value of arts and culture with groups who stand to benefit physically, mentally, and economically from increased engagement. This is discussed in the observation ‘A need to state the case for the importance of art and creativity locally’.

There is a wider point here: we know that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are not easily heard, but in the case of people from those backgrounds



living in towns which are generally more affluent (and in some parts very affluent) are doubly hard to hear from.

Could this provide an opportunity to engage those communities in dialogues about them and their circumstances using art and creativity to build platforms and spaces for them to do so, and in doing so amplify their voices and increase their visibility?

With increased visibility and a better account of their experiences, organisations working locally can be better empowered to meet their needs.

During conversations at events in Charford Park and Catshill, people stressed the importance of free or cheap activities. Addressing the funding and sustainability of any new activities will be key to ensuring their longevity, and should be tackled as part of the development of a TMWYW action plan during phase 3 of this project.

Engaging with young people aged 15-20

Some of the first conversations with organisations or citizens in Bromsgrove during the open consultation sessions highlighted a need and desire to engage with more 'young people'.

As this project dug deeper into what a 'young person' meant it became apparent that the group 15-20 were underrepresented in engagement data gathered from some of the larger organisations operating in Bromsgrove.

Deeper still, and our public consultation followed a similar pattern showing that older teenage groups were most likely to report no arts and cultural engagement locally.

As discussed in the observations, including more young people will be key to strengthening the offer of some smaller organisations, creating more capacity, widening their marketing opportunities and affording them longevity in the long run.

There is another wider point here; engaging more young people in arts and culture through participation, as audiences, and through governance in Bromsgrove will enfranchise citizens (and young people in particular) into civic life, and the (growing) prosperity of the town.



This project asks people what they want, and

very loudly people are responding that they want space, physically and mentally to connect with other people and to have some ownership over.

This is discussed in our observations.

Young people were one of two groups (the other being the elderly) who reported a wanting 'somewhere to hang out' and arts and culture provide the perfect platform to achieve this for them.

In the arts organisation session, one attendee commented that "young people don't want to be where we are" (we being older people). This is an important consideration, and it rings true to a drive to establish one's own identity during the formative years.

One gentleman in the room responded that "we should give them the power" to do it themselves. This feeds into observations around a need for enfranchisement but also poses interesting possibilities for the suggestion that Bromsgrove should have a 'hook'.

Could Bromsgrove demonstrate its commitment to enfranchising more young people by platforming them, charging them with responding to the needs this project identifies by empowering them to create their own platforms and spaces?

Perhaps these platforms and spaces could function as conduits to other organisations working locally, providing a space for, and by, young people offering 'inreach' to organisations (as opposed to normal 'outreach' organisations do to perceived 'hard to reach' groups).

Engaging with isolated elderly people in Bromsgrove

As is identified in Layer 1, there is a significant 'older community' living in the district, and these groups are well represented in engagement data, with 60+ residents reflected well on boards, as participants, and audiences.



However, through conversations with the consortium, arts organisations and with some older people interviewed as part of this research, there is a desire locally to engage better with those identified as being 'isolated' elderly people, that is, those who might suffer from a lack of mobility through illness or disability, but also those who suffer from loneliness and are isolated socially.

By their nature, this group are difficult to identify through the data available, many groups and organisations were able to comment on engagement with people aged 60+ but that group can cover a broad spectrum of people and experiences.

A need to support organisations to collect more data is listed in the observations and is a central recommendation of this report, and both would support the development of a better understanding of this group and their specific needs.

Older people who engaged with the public consultations during this project were more likely than all other groups to respond that taking part in an art or cultural activity afforded them opportunities to meet people. They were also likely to suggest that 'space' was a thing that was missing, as discussed in the observations at the start of this report.

This speaks to a desire for community and connection which runs through Bromsgrove, and the fulfilment of which could only be good for the district.

Older respondents were more likely to report walking, gardening, or some other light physical activity as a way of engaging locally. This could form a route to engagement, especially for those suffering loneliness.

For those suffering with physical health problems and lowered mobility, it could be useful to combine arts and culture activity with physical therapeutic services, connecting with existent services in an effort to 'take things where people are' as noted in the observations portion of this document.



Engaging with young families, particularly with older children

This recommendation explores the sustainability of engagement and is more long-term than the others detailed in this report.

Throughout this phase, it has been apparent that there is strong engagement with families (and young families in particular) in Bromsgrove. Of the 28 people spoken to at Street Theatre events 22 respondents reported that they engaged in arts and culture activities with a child or grandchild.

However, responses from smaller organisations and data made available by larger organisations point to a drop off in engagement for young people as they move into slightly older brackets (as discussed in the recommendation for working with young people).

There is an opportunity in this; could new projects and programmes focus more closely on the point just before this drop off of engagement by utilizing existing pathways to engagement?

The opportunity lies in engaging parents and more importantly their children (who are nearing the age of drop off, but are still currently engaged) in working alongside arts organisations in the town to build programmes and projects which suit their changing needs and maintain their interests beyond the normal age when young people appear to lose interest, this happens as they enter their teenage years and could relate to Bromsgrove's school tier system, with drop-offs related to progression through tiers with an identified dip as young people move into 'older school'

This approach brings together positive engagement already happening in the district, with a distinct push towards creating new and engaging programmes which work for their participants.



Where to connect with these groups?

Beginning engagement from scratch can be difficult, especially if non-engaged groups are the target audience. This report recommends connecting with several key engagement organisations and groups (outside of arts and culture) who have strong links with the groups highlighted in the recommendations for this project.

Connecting with isolated elderly people

In order to engage isolated elderly people, who by their nature are difficult to identify and connect with, this report suggests connecting with organisations and groups who have the specialist skills needed to cater to the specific needs of this group. We were also able to connect with Age UK who run some projects in Redditch bringing art activities to older people. Amanda Allen (Head of Services) indicated a desire to run more activities at Amphlett Hall (Bromsgrove) where “they run several projects but art is not one of them”, she has a personal interest in arts and culture too, so would prove to be an invaluable link for engagement in Phase Two.

Connecting with young people aged 15-20

During this process, the research team was able to make strong links with Sarah Mulhall who is a Youth and Community Hub Coordinator for the YMCA and was responsible for the arrangement of a focus group with young people at Starlight Cafe.

She oversees projects, programmes and events at Bromsgrove Youth and Community Hub which is attached to Bromsgrove Baptist Church. These projects engage the very groups identified as low engagers (particularly young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds).

Connecting with people living in areas of high socio-economic deprivation

The event at Charford Park was hosted by Bromsgrove District Housing Trust, during conversation with one of the event organisers, they commented that they were keen to continue conversations about possible future engagement opportunities with their residents, many of who live in districts or areas highlighted by this report and coming from areas with a low socioeconomic profile.



Further Recommendations

Continued data capture during Phase Two

As is apparent throughout this whole report, Bromsgrove's arts and culture offer is strong and vibrant and enjoys general consistent engagement.

However, there is a need to review how this engagement is recorded in order to be better able to shout about this success and to make this offer even stronger.

This is discussed in the project observations for this project in greater detail.

This report proposes that during Phase Two, organisations are empowered to take part in a collective data capture process. This process would entail the creation of a simple, standardized, GDPR compliant framework across all organisations who choose to be involved, requesting some deeper demographic insights into who their participants and audiences are, where they come from, and what motivates them.

Seeding this process during Phase Two will produce insights and evidence which can be used to shape strands of the action plan during Phase Three, particularly those related to ongoing evaluation against baseline data.

One problem that many organisations (not restricted to Bromsgrove) face is that people are wary of sharing their information. Also, asking for information or being asked for it can be something of an irritant.

This report proposes that process is framed as co-creation, involving organisation's participants and audiences in strengthening Bromsgrove's offer and investing in its sustainability through helping to shape a better (and ongoing) approach to data collection. Far from being an irritant, this is an exciting collective step to strengthening the arts scene locally.

This could also serve to test how collective change can be achieved ahead of the creation of the action plan in Phase Three.

Through conversation and interview with organisations, Bromsgrove Arts Alive was identified as key to the grassroots arts scene in Bromsgrove. This recommendation could serve as a testbed for whether convening organisation such as Bromsgrove Arts



Alive are the best places to coordinate collective change amongst their members or whether individual organisations could be empowered to create change independently.

There is some work already happening in data collection, the director of Artrix Arts Centre has recently reviewed the use and application of booking data through their box office system, and Avoncroft Museum has conducted audience surveys in the past, this opportunity sits in parallel to those systems and empowers groups to engage positively with data collection.

Doink proposes that our research team be involved in the production of a data collection framework during phase, and would seek to engage a focus group to facilitate the process.



What next for you?

Pick up the accompanying document in this report which contains the detailed research which lead to our conclusions to learn more about the current cultural offer in Bromsgrove, who is (and isn't) engaging with it, and to learn more about 'what people want'.

What next for this project?

The research during this Phase has highlighted a series of 'needs' in Bromsgrove and has raised a host of questions, challenges and opportunities for Bromsgrove Arts and Culture Consortium to grapple with to grow arts, culture, and heritage engagement in Bromsgrove. Doink and Free Radical look forward to working with the Consortium to build answers for those questions, and new ideas in response to those needs, opportunities and challenges.

During Phase Two, Free Radical will launch an ambitious series of engagement opportunities encompassing new engagement activities and processes with new audiences and bring together their learnings ahead of the development of an action plan during Phase 3.

During Phase Three, Doink will work alongside the Consortium, Bromsgrove residents, and local organisations to design a practical, co-created action plan to grow engagement in Bromsgrove, built on the experience of people living in the district, data gathered from Phases One and Two, and an exploration of innovative work taking place elsewhere. This will bring together as much learning as possible to ensure that this project truly gives people 'what they want', culminating in a launch event during phase four, and the implementation of the plan during phase five.