https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jun/08/hull-works-towards-securing-its-city-of-culture-legacy

# Hull works towards securing its City of Culture legacy

**By Lanre Bakare, Saturday 8th June 2019**

"Change is happening." You can't miss the three-word slogan that is plastered over the bright green building hoardings near Hull's Humber Street Gallery. It feels like an apt one too. Modern townhouses are being built in the area next to the city's dockside, which is being sold as "Hull's new modern and exciting regeneration development". There are temporary gallery spaces, workshops and dance classes, and cheap artist studios are being built. It is the kind of arts-led regeneration that has come to urban areas like the Northern Quarter in Manchester, Williamsburg in Brooklyn and Chueca in Madrid.

But this is different. This is Hull. A place whose name alone supposedly conjures images of "unspecified post-industrial misery", king of the so-called "Crap Towns" and the bete noire of property expert Kirstie Allsopp – who deemed Hull the UK's worst place to live in 2005. But Humber Street is a sign of progress and a rebranded city: a place buoyed by successful, year-long City of Culture celebrations that happened in 2017. If Hull has its swagger back, there's good reason.

The numbers that surrounded Hull's City of Culture were impressive: £219m of investment, 800 jobs created and 95% of residents who said they participated in at least one event. The bid's volunteer scheme attracted thousands who continue to give their time at art events around the city.

And data released to the Guardian by the University of Hull's Culture, Place and Policy Institute suggests there has been a lasting effect: in 2018 and early 2019 there has been an 11% increase in attendance at culture events in the city and surrounding area. Tourism has seen a lift, a 15% increase in trips to the city compared 2016 figures.

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jun/08/hull-works-towards-securing-its-city-of-culture-legacy

Katy Fuller is the outgoing chief executive of Absolutely Cultured, the charity that grew out of the company which ran City of Culture and is now charged with securing its legacy. She says that after the high of 2017 – when more than 450 pieces were commissioned – there needs to be a readjustment. "One of the things we keep talking about is sustainability over the long term. And changing from the mindset of 2017 being this explosion of activity and it acting as a catalyst for change, to keeping that momentum going at a sustainable rate over the next 10, 20, 30 years."

One of the keys to that success will be money. Fuller admits that funding the arts after the legacy money from the City of Culture has run out will be difficult (Absolutely Cultured had an ambitious fundraising target of £11m, which has now been revised) but thinks 2017 helped local artists and groups learn how to access arts money.

"It's certainly hard, but one of the things that has changed now is there's been a huge leap in applications for Arts Council funding from individual artists and smaller theatre groups," she says. "They have the confidence now to go for that money."

Art Council bids have grown. There were 15 awards in 2013/14 for Hull-based National Lottery Project Grants worth a total of £151,305. In 2018/19 that rose to 24 projects worth £1,098,273, plus there was a 21% increase for Hull-based arts groups in the Arts Council's national portfolio funding between 2018-2022.

One group that has proved resourceful when it comes to making the arts pay is Back To Ours, which receives funding from Absolutely Cultured and the Arts Council. Focusing on taking live events to communities that don't traditionally have access to the arts in venues including school halls and social clubs, its founder Louise Yates moved from Leeds 12 years ago and fell in love with Hull's unpretentious arts scene. "It seemed like a bad boyfriend at first, you mention it to family and they'd say 'Ohhh … why are you going over there'," she says.

Inspired by the rural touring model, Yates has turned Back to Ours into a success story with soldout events that mix savvy commissioning (Black Grape playing in a council estate shopping centre, for example) with more challenging works of

experimental theatre. “They’re going to a venue that doesn’t really host acts so they’re taking a bit of a risk, and we’re aiming for new audiences,” says Yates. “They’ve got no idea how they’re going to react.”

But amid the progress and developments there is a sense of fear. A concern shared by many is that all this could be ephemeral. That once the City of Culture legacy funding runs out, the short-term boom could lead to mid- to long-term malaise, with the city’s residents expecting the big, mass-participation events that characterised 2017 but are expensive to host.

Situated on Beverley Road next to a Kurdish restaurant and down the road from a methadone clinic, Ground is a world away from the sheen of Humber Street. Founded 18 months before the City of Culture celebrations began, Ground sat outside the City of Culture bid’s orbit. Run by a group of former art students who are mostly from Hull, but also include a Londoner and a couple of Danes, they took over a charity’s old shop front and converted it into a gallery-meets-community centre space, with artist studios on its upper floors. A place like Ground, with its low running costs and charity-based beginnings, would probably always have existed with or without the City of Culture in 2017.

Ground-based artists Ella Dorton and Lilly Williams do share some concerns about the way the City of Culture focused on artists from outside the city. “It was really disproportionate how much was spent on artists coming in from outside of Hull and doing big spectaculars that last for half an hour, compared to money that was going into organisations that already exist and are doing good stuff,” says Dorton.

“There was a sense from a lot of locals that there wasn’t anything there for them really,” says Brian, who volunteers at Ground. “It was like a rebranding, marketing exercise – it’s not really about culture. The money they raised was around £30m, and they spent that in one year. They could have spent £1m a year and it would have lasted for a generation.”

If some of the grassroots groups did feel excluded from the City of Culture process, perhaps those dots are being joined up now. Dorton has a show at Humber Street Gallery, whose new

boss John Heffernan has put a focus on local artists and more experimental works, such as Cut – a sound and sculpture installation, which involves people's conversations with hairdressers being recorded.

According to Franco Bianchini, the director of the Culture, Place and Policy Institute, that is the kind of challenging commissioning and radical thinking the city will need to prosper artistically well beyond 2017.

"Hull has to do something special," says Bianchini, who says it has stiff competition from other culture-rich northern cities such as Leeds and York. "The school of arts and design has been cut significantly, and it's really important that new ideas emerge in the city and then stay in the city. Retention of creative talent is key."

With the Humber Street developments the infrastructure to support that talent exists, and Hull has proved it is up for a fight, but now it's not three-word slogans that people are starting to focus on – it's just one word: legacy.