

# We are Ipswich

## Our commitment to cultural, social and economic growth in Ipswich

*“... we need to start shouting about the things we are good at. Top of the list is arts and culture.”*

Andrew Clarke, East Anglian Daily Times, June 2016

## Introduction

**We are Ipswich** is a self-organising, collaborative group of nationally significant, locally cherished arts organisations, working in and beyond the town. Working together to promote the arts and culture at the heart of the town and to make Ipswich proud of the range, richness and excellence of its culture, **We are Ipswich** has developed this paper to:

- Highlight the wealth and distinctiveness of the arts in Ipswich.
- Demonstrate how they collectively contribute to personal, social and economic health and well-being.
- Identify the benefits, values and ambitions that Ipswich can expect of its arts sector.

**We are Ipswich** is: DanceEast, Eastern Angles, Gecko, New Wolsey Theatre, Pacitti Company and SPILL Festival, Red Rose Chain, and Tilted Productions.

## Ipswich

Ipswich is the county town of Suffolk, an area that has inspired great artists, thinkers and musicians for centuries. It enjoys a rich legacy of artistic innovation which thrives in the creative energy of contemporary artists living and working in and around Ipswich today.

The arts give Ipswich a sense of special place, a distinctive local identity and contribute to a buoyant creative economy. The excellence and diversity of the arts in Ipswich is shown by the town having one of the highest concentrations in the country of organisations receiving regularly funding from Arts Council England. As a town with a remarkably extensive and exciting artistic life, Ipswich’s growing confidence and ambition can be encouraged, promoted and represented by the success of the arts. The town is ideally placed to nurture and celebrate talent, to build ever more diverse and dynamic communities of artists, and be proudly known by businesses, residents and visitors for the energy and quality of the arts and culture.

## Arts and culture thrive in Ipswich

The arts matter. They shine a light on who we are, where we live, and how we relate to each other and the wider world. They challenge how we see and think about things. They intrigue, beguile, fuel our curiosity and make us laugh. The arts ‘open our minds and stir our hearts’<sup>1</sup>.

Ipswich can celebrate its proud tradition of artistic innovation. It boasts one of England’s oldest choral societies, formed in 1824. The Ipswich Institute was founded the same year and continues to provide a range of arts and cultural opportunities. The Ipswich Arts Society was founded in 1873, and local people established the Ipswich Film Theatre Trust in 2009. Christchurch Mansion, built on the site of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Holy Trinity Priory and dating from the 1540s, houses the biggest collection of Suffolk artists Thomas Gainsborough and John Constable paintings outside London. The Ipswich Arts Association, uniquely in East Anglia represents over 50 orchestras, choirs, theatre groups; arts, crafts and photographic societies;

---

<sup>1</sup> Arts Council England, ‘Why Culture Matters’ [online]. Available at: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk>

galleries, venues and festivals. It provides lectures and concerts, commissioned the Ipswich Charter Hangings to celebrate the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the granting of a Royal Charter to the town, and campaigns for libraries, concert venues and arts in schools.

The arts and culture thrive in a wide range of festivals held in iconic parks and sites across the town. In 2016, the Waterfront hosted the first PhotoEast festival and the Town Hall was the location for the first BooksEast festival. Ipswich Borough Council supports and promotes some 40 events each summer, the Regent Theatre, and the Town Hall and Corn Exchange which is the home of the Suffolk Craft Society and the Ipswich Film Theatre. Christchurch and Holywells parks provide venues for the Ipswich Music Day, Open Air Theatre, Global Rhythm and Indian Summer Mela. The University of Suffolk hosts contemporary arts exhibitions at its Waterfront Gallery and is home to a permanent collection of 21<sup>st</sup> century practice. Ipswich Town Football Club and Holywells Park host Open Air Cinemas.

Colchester and Ipswich Museums look after six venues, permanent collections covering social and natural history, a wide range of outreach work with schools and community groups and special exhibitions and events at Ipswich Museum, Christchurch Mansion, and Ipswich Art School. Suffolk Libraries brings together over 40 local libraries across the county, mobile and on-line services, literacy resources for teachers, and information and events to promote health and wellbeing.

Ipswich is passionate about the arts and culture. Its major arts organisations engage people of all ages, interests, backgrounds and abilities as participants and creators. The town buzzes with people making, showing and enjoying all kinds of theatre, dance, music, film, literature and visual arts and crafts.

*Ipswich is a town of culture. It has one of the world's finest dance studios, a well-maintained Tudor Mansion, a number of theatres, art galleries, and festivals that are planned across the calendar year to keep you engaged and entertained, and coming back for more.*

Ipswich Town and Waterfront website

### **Making Ipswich a great place to live, visit, work and invest**

Local authorities, politicians and businesses recognise the arts make a better place to live, visit, work and invest. Arts organisations across and beyond the town work in partnership with Ipswich Borough Council, Suffolk County Council and the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to promote an integrated, ambitious approach to artistic, cultural, social and economic development in which *“the culture sector’s place-making skills”*<sup>2</sup> play a key role.

Ipswich exemplifies the interplay between professional artists and their local communities, and between making, participating and experiencing artistic activity and healthy personal, social and civic lives, by:

- Creating great art
- Connecting and empowering diverse communities
- Raising educational aspiration and achievement
- Promoting health and wellbeing
- Driving regeneration
- Contributing to economic buoyancy

*“Ipswich is a regional centre for the arts and the Borough Council, in partnership with our NPOs and other organisations, is committed to building on our offer. That is what this Arts Manifesto is all about. The great variety of events, festivals, concerts, dance and theatre continues to expand and we will ensure our programme is accessible to our diverse community and to people who think, wrongly, that they cannot afford*

---

<sup>2</sup> Culture Drives Growth, New Anglia LEP Cultural Strategy 2016 - 2022

*the arts. In Ipswich, many of our events are free and others provide a West End experience without the cost. As one of our leading arts journalists has said, we need to start shouting about our arts and culture achievements. Together, we can do that and provide even more to shout about."*

*Cllr David Ellesmere, Leader of Ipswich Borough Council, January 2017*

### Creating great art

Great art creates a dynamic reputation for the town, providing reasons to visit, return and stay longer, and for businesses to relocate and invest. Great art builds the profile of Ipswich regionally, nationally and internationally and a vital legacy for future generations. Ipswich is ambitious to be a place where "... *creative talent comes, stays and makes things of cultural and economic significance happen*"<sup>3</sup>.

Ipswich is an artistic powerhouse of extraordinary dimensions. DanceEast and New Wolsey Theatre regularly commission and premiere new work from world-class artists. Eastern Angles creates theatre with a sense of place and tours new writing to over 50 venues across East Anglia. Red Rose Chain has developed a reputation for new interpretations of Shakespeare at their annual Theatre in the Forest productions at Jimmy's Farm where *The Tempest* reached 8,000 people in 2016, and artistic director and playwright Joanna Carrick's work has brought history to life for local audiences as well gaining critical acclaim at The Tower of London and other national venues..

Pacitti Company commissioned 14 new works for the SPILL festival in Ipswich in 2014, many of which are now touring internationally and the 2016 programme was expanded to focus on kids and families, heritage and place, and sound and music in addition to performance art. Gecko was commissioned by the BBC, Arts Council England and Battersea Arts Centre to create *The Time of Your Life* which was watched by 100,000 people; and celebrated the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's death with an international co-production with Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre inspired by Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Peony Pavilion* by his contemporary Tang Xianzu who also died in 1616. Co-produced by four European arts organisations and supported by four national arts organisations, Tilted Productions researched and performed its outdoor promenade piece *BELONGING(s)* at the Ipswich waterfront in 2015 before touring the work nationally and internationally in 2016.

A vibrant arts landscape attracts great art and artists who enhance the artistic diversity and innovation of the town. Ipswich-born Sir Trevor Nunn gifted his production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the New Wolsey Theatre, while Royal Ballet principle character dancer and ballet master Gary Avis has gifted gala performances at the Regent Theatre to Suffolk charities. Ipswich-born Robert Pacitti relocated his company in 2012, from London to the specially refurbished Victorian Wing of the Ipswich Museum where events include salons, feasts, an alternative public library, artist surgeries, mentoring, publishing and more alongside Robert's own ongoing studio based practice and that of Think Tank Associates. The relocation has been artistically inspiring with the Company finding new ways of engaging local people and families with experimental live and performance art.

Ipswich is nurturing future generations of artists. Examples include the SPILL New Producer scheme and Wolsey Theatre's youth theatre companies. Tilted Productions offers apprenticeships and sector development opportunities for local, regional and national artists of all ages. DanceEast runs one of only nine Department for Education funded national Centres for Advanced Training for exceptionally talented young dancers, a competitive Choreographic Development Fund, and the internationally renowned Rural Retreat for aspiring artistic leaders from across the world.

---

<sup>3</sup> Culture Drives Growth, New Anglia LEP Cultural Strategy 2016 - 2022

### **Ipswich can expect its arts community to:**

- Create world-class works that are experienced first in Ipswich
- Enhance the diversity of the arts made, shown, seen and experienced in Ipswich
- Increase the international profile of Ipswich as innovative, creative and dynamic

### **Connecting and empowering Ipswich's diverse communities**

Ipswich has a diverse population that speaks over 70 languages and 17% of residents are from non-white British ethnicities<sup>4</sup>. The arts are enriched by difference and the arts play a vital role in connecting and empowering diverse communities, fostering empathy, understanding and tolerance of other views and cultures.

Ipswich arts organisations are leading national initiatives to promote engagement and inclusion. Eastern Angles has told the story of the arrival of Black-American GIs in 1942 and pioneered a project to introduce writers from diverse ethnic backgrounds to touring in rural communities. Red Rose Chain has secured Arts Council funding for creating sensory plays for audiences of disabled young people and their families. New Wolsey Theatre is working with 6 theatres across the country to increase awareness and participation of D/deaf and disabled actors, artists and audiences, *Ramps on the Moon*. It received the 2012 TMA award for Most Welcoming Theatre, was nominated as The Stage Award's Regional Theatre of the Year 2014 and has received the Trip Advisor Certificate for Excellence three years running for their customer service. DanceEast leads the MOKO partnership producing and presenting world-class dance for young and family audiences that commissioned Akram Kahn's award-winning *Chotto Desh*, and DanceEast's recent programme has included Ballet Black, hip-hop company Avant Garde, integrated dance company CandoCo, a celebration of dance by older people and a conference about work produced by disabled artists.

Festivals and events across the town bring people together to share stories and experiences, while creative projects empower diverse communities to use the arts in ways that matter to them. Regular participatory and other experiences sustain artistic momentum and help create a sense of shared identity and communities of interest.

### **Ipswich can expect its arts community to:**

- Prioritise diversity in creative, performance and participatory arts experiences
- Share innovative and effective ways of reaching, connecting and empowering the town's diverse communities
- Provide forums and platforms for diverse communities to meet and foster understanding

### **Raising educational aspiration and achievement**

The arts foster creativity, deepen understanding and develop skills in communication, problem solving and team working. Engagement and achievement in the arts spurs ambition to excel across other disciplines.

Schools in Ipswich have access to extraordinary cultural resources which support and promote campaigns such as Suffolk County Council's 'Raising the Bar' which has recently resulted in 80% of the County's schools rated as good or outstanding. Gecko collaborated with DanceEast to create site-specific dance films with 7 primary schools and a filmed joint performance with all 360 pupils in Ipswich's Christchurch Park and all the films were shown as part of DanceEast's Move Be Moved festival.

A wide range of activities in and beyond school encourage young people to follow their passions and realise their dreams through creating and presenting art. Annual *Creative Choices* reveal the breadth of options for

---

<sup>4</sup> Ipswich Borough Council, 'State of Ipswich Annual Monitoring Report' June 2013

working in the arts, while training, work experience and placement opportunities enable young people to gain the necessary insights and skills for a meaningful career.

The University of Suffolk has a thriving arts and humanities department with courses in fine art, graphic design, interior architecture and design, photography and curation. It collaborates with professional arts organisations across and beyond Ipswich, including as visiting professors and in the delivery of innovative learning and arts practice to power the next generation of artists, teachers and active audiences. Achieving independence in 2016 gives the University of Suffolk new momentum and potential to pioneer leading artist education programmes. Tilted has delivered workshops in Suffolk secondary schools and worked with students from University of Suffolk who had the opportunity to perform alongside the professional cast in Ipswich in 2015.

Beyond formal education, Ipswich hosts a wealth of young artists' programmes that provide young people with life-long interests and equip them to deploy creativity and artistry in all spheres of their lives. For those that wish, such programmes also equip young people across Ipswich to establish careers as entrepreneurial artists.

### **Ipswich can expect its arts community to:**

- Work with teachers and school managers to promote the role of the arts in whole school improvement, celebrating success, and building peer networks
- Collaborate to raise the aspirations of young people, to inspire their curiosity and give them the confidence to succeed
- Work hard to ensure that social and economic disadvantage is no barrier to young people's ambitions or realising their talents

### **Promoting health and well-being**

Whether as audiences, makers, supporters or participants, engaging with arts and culture can inspire, challenge and intrigue. It promotes physical, intellectual and emotional health and well-being, social interaction and community cohesion.

Ipswich's arts organisations enrich local health provision by working in care settings and winning additional funds and support for this work. Gecko won funding from The Wellcome Trust to examine stress and mental ill health in men, in association with their production *Institute*, and will be working with MIND in their new Waterfront venue. DanceEast was one of three national arts organisations funded by Children and the Arts to work in Children's Hospices, and is pioneering dance for people living with Parkinson's disease with English National Ballet and dementia with New Adventures/Re: Bourne. Creative and participatory activities take place in a range of venues including care homes and community centres, for example Eastern Angles' Elders project includes reminiscence groups, oral history collection and care home touring.

Ipswich's wealth of choral, arts, heritage and other groups encourage older people to be active, engaged and connected, and the town's arts organisations provide a range of volunteering opportunities. The arts also raise awareness of health and well-being issues, for example Red Rose Chain has created over 50 short films and plays to explore mental health issues, engaging with young people in care, young offenders and many other groups through commissions from Suffolk County Council, Department of Health and the Child Poverty Unit.

### **Ipswich can expect its arts community to:**

- Continue to provide arts activities for, with and in health and wellbeing contexts
- Lead pioneering initiatives of local, national and international significance that enhance and enrich health and wellbeing through the arts

- Collaborate to increase understanding of the values of the arts among health providers and the wider public, challenging inequalities along the way

### Driving regeneration

*“The strength of the cultural offering in Ipswich is at the forefront of the destination strategy being led by the Ipswich DMO. Looking for ways to engage with wider audiences and delivering compelling reasons to visit is key for any successful tourism strategy. Ipswich is now developing these core messages around the culture and I am sure this will help deliver real growth in the value of the visitor economy in the coming years. This initiative is very much part of the Ipswich story and contributes to those compelling stories we must deliver.”*  
Alex Paul, Chair of Ipswich DMO, January 2017

Arts organisations are well-placed to lead the way in regenerating areas and communities. In Ipswich this is exemplified by DanceEast, built as a flagship for the regeneration of Ipswich’s waterfront and one of the best dance houses in the world, and public art as diverse as the iconic Giles and Wolsey statues and the Pigs Gone Wild trail.

Ipswich has a wealth of historic buildings, but many have lost their purpose. Since the Ipswich Theatre opened in the 1740s, various theatres and music halls have opened, closed and changed purpose. In recent years it is the town’s wealth of medieval churches that are being re-purposed as arts centres, concert halls, the tourist centre and, most recently, the wellbeing centre Quay Place. The arts are animating redundant spaces and buildings with the 2014 SPILL festival taking over the old police station and plans for 2016 including unusual sites across the town. Red Rose Chain attracted over £1m from Heritage Lottery Fund for its ground-breaking Avenue Theatre at Gippeswyk Hall which brings together new writing, heritage and community work under one roof.

Ipswich’s arts leaders are proactively engaged in campaigns to deliver an improved, cohesive vision for the town driven by the power of the arts. The arts in Ipswich convey the innovation, energy and dynamism needed for the town to attract and grow new businesses.

#### **Ipswich can expect its arts community to:**

- Continue to collaborate with other civic leaders to raise the profile of the town nationally and internationally and drive its regeneration
- Animate and find new purposes for unused and no longer loved buildings and spaces
- Add their voice to campaigns designed to make Ipswich a better place to live, work and visit

### Contributing to economic buoyancy

*“Truly successful places are much more than economic powerhouses. Their high levels of performance are always underpinned by a sense of creative vibrancy, a manifestly strong quality of life, and a clear sense of cultural identity.”*

Culture Drives Growth, New Anglia LEP Cultural Strategy, November 2016

The arts make financial sense locally, nationally and internationally. Statistics from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport show cultural sector service exports grew by 14% to reach £5.4billion in 2015/16.

The ‘We are Ipswich’ organisations had a combined turnover of almost £9 million in 2015/16, which included inward investment of almost £4 million from Arts Council England regular and strategic funding, local, national and international Trusts and Foundations, co-productions, and international touring.

The arts are significant employers, users of local services, and drivers for tourism. An economic impact study<sup>5</sup> of the Regent Theatre, Corn Exchange, New Wolsey Theatre, DanceEast, Eastern Angles, Red Rose Chain and SPILL Festival found they annually generate over 330,000 visits, over 24,000 of which are staying visits. They sell tickets worth almost £6 million, provide 250 jobs worth well over £4 million, and over 12,000 hours of volunteering.

The arts are great cultural diplomats. They can define and enhance the reputation and profile of a place that, in turn, impacts on its ability to attract business and international investment that drives economic growth. 10% of the audience for the SPILL festival was international and Gecko has toured widely countries including Mexico, China, Kazakhstan, Korea, Romania, Malaysia and Georgia. In 2016 Gecko created its first international collaboration with Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre; and attracted inward investment from partners in China for its show *The Wedding* in 2016/17.

### **Ipswich can expect its arts community to:**

- Share data and intelligence to grow and retain new audiences and supporters whilst increasing engagement with existing audiences, generate increased income, and provide skills training and meaningful jobs
- Celebrate Ipswich as artistically innovative and vibrant, and encourage more local people to be proud of Ipswich and its artistic riches
- Contribute to building national and international awareness and curiosity about Ipswich

### **Realising ambition**

Ipswich's professional and community artists, audiences, participants and arts organisations have the passion, commitment and imagination to make the town a better place to live, work, visit and invest. Realising this ambition needs:

- Articulation of civic and political ambition for the arts in Ipswich
- Consistent messages about the value of the arts and culture in Ipswich
- More joined up working and greater ambition across various public and private authorities and agencies to ensure ease of access to, and wider appreciation of, the arts in Ipswich

---

<sup>5</sup> Shared Intelligence, Economic Impact of Ipswich Cultural Sector for Ipswich Borough Council, January 2014 updated August 2016