

ART FOR THE PEOPLE

Citizens' Assembly on
Arts, Culture & Creativity
Recommendations

We wanted to find ways for Coventry people to have a say in how our city views, values and uses arts, culture and creativity, so we called the UK's first Citizens' Assembly on Arts and Culture.

Fifty residents were selected from across the city to explore the question: "How will arts, culture and creativity shape a better future for Coventry?"

The Assembly participants worked together over a period of six weeks. They listened to the varied opinions of expert witnesses, and they also listened to their peers - people they had not met before taking part in the Assembly. They debated together – discussing the issues, talking about change. They imagined a better future for our city and drew up, and voted on, a series of recommendations, which you can read in the following pages.

The recommendations made by the Citizens' Assembly clearly sketch a better future for Coventry: one which is green in every sense and offers a democratic, regenerative, generous, equitable and collaborative life for all its citizens; where there is a real democracy of access to the arts as creator, participant and audience; a city that is a pleasant place to live – verdant, green, welcoming and future-facing; and where the arts are fully integrated into all communities.

The big question after doing something like this is – what happens next? How do we move forwards and make the changes we want to see?

What happens next?

- The recommendations have been presented to Coventry's Cultural Compact and some of the ideas have been incorporated into the city's Cultural Strategy refresh.
- Talking Birds is now working with Assembly members, to create pilot projects that test out the recommendations in neighbourhoods across Coventry, and start the work of making the Citizens' vision a reality.

Have a read of the Citizens' Assembly recommendations, and imagine yourself living in the city they describe – how does it feel? We'd love to know what you think! And if you already know of something that sounds similar, or would like to add your energy to making these things happen, you can find ways to get involved at:

www.talkingbirds.co.uk/A4TP



We create
by ourselves, but
Collaboration
brings out
the best
in us.



Citizens' Assembly on Arts, Culture & Creativity Recommendations



Encounters with Arts and Culture

A city-wide scheme that provides an inclusive, accessible, rounded and easy to navigate menu of opportunities for every Coventry resident to encounter arts and culture close to home. These encounters (everything from deliberately programmed – eg into the school day – to total chance encounters in public space) encourage and allow people of all ages to discover, develop or pursue their interest in the arts as audiences, participants and/or creators. From entertainment and wellbeing through to training and career pathways, these encounters ensure that creative activity is normalised/demystified through increased access to arts, culture and creativity, local artists and industry creatives and knowledge.

Encounters should be easy to find/ stumble across and include:

- Opportunities to have a go and try things out; allowing people to get a better idea of the sorts of arts, culture and creative activity that exist in the city.
- Increase the visibility, enjoyment and championing of art, artists and creative activity; raise awareness of careers in the arts; and knowledge of the city's creative scene.
- The opportunity to learn or progress a skill and develop this to competent hobby level or beyond.
- Create/promote career pathways through apprenticeships or training schemes with locally-based organisations, as well as formal education routes.
- A local Artists Advice Bureau which signposts/connects emerging artists with more established organisations in the city, helps with developing project ideas, applying for funding and business start up.
- An outdoor stage in the city centre, available free of charge.

Encounters should happen across the city and in different settings in order to be as inclusive and accessible as possible, including:

- in school/within education as a core part of the curriculum at primary and secondary
- in school/within education as optional enrichment activity
- community venues, care and residential settings, and community hubs. (see 'Neighbourhood Creative Hubs')
- public spaces/informal community settings/parks & green spaces
- higher education venues
- cross-generational
- within cultural venues (recognising, and reducing, the barriers to entry)

Through Encounters with Arts and Culture, creative activity becomes woven into the fabric of everyday life, enriching the lives of all Coventry residents.

Cov Art Pass

A scheme that gives all young Coventry residents aged 15-25 a pass for free travel, and entry, to arts and cultural events in the city.

Make Something Happen Fund

A small funding pot available to Coventry residents to enable them to put on creative and cultural events in their neighbourhood. These might just be up to £200 and the application process should be very simple and transparent.

Neighbourhood Creative Hubs

Network of inclusive Neighbourhood Creative Hubs designed to connect, integrate and educate communities. Each individual neighbourhood hub is created by and for the local residents (and therefore does what its local community needs it to do) but all are safe, familiar, easily accessible, flexible, inclusive, multipurpose, empty but equipped, and have open access. They are networked across neighbourhoods to allow for even greater connection and exchange.

The hubs exist to provide opportunities, platforms and spaces to:

- **discover** creativity (your own, your neighbourhood's and beyond).
- **express** creative ideas.
- **showcase**, promote, learn and share skills, creative talents, outputs and knowledge.
- **learn** creative and connective/people skills.
- **share** skills, time, talent, information, materials, tools and equipment
- **connect** – promote neighbour communication, spark conversations, combat loneliness
- **meet** new people locally and across neighbourhoods (via networking of the hubs themselves)

Spaces might contain:

- exhibition/gallery/event space
- making/workshop space
- cafe/refreshments
- centralised tools and materials bank
- sensory garden attached
- regular pop up conventions
- Information/flyers/publications signposting to arts events and resources (see 'The People's Telegraph')

"It has given a sense of togetherness that I didn't realise was present in the city"

The People's Telegraph

There is a need for a new, efficient, co-ordinated, decentralised, people-powered channel for sharing information about events and opportunities that people can get involved in (as audiences, participants, artists) and getting information right out into communities/ neighbourhoods. It might be a Street Team network, 'local champions' or something that builds on the City Hosts network, but this recommendation is about how people find out what is on in Coventry, recognising that word-of-mouth is hugely effective – as well as giving people excuses to have a conversation.

"It's been nice to engage with different members of the community and understand different experiences – I've found the process personally enriching. I feel a sense of responsibility to represent the community to shape a better future for everyone in Coventry"

City Centre Garden

Establish an accessible, central Botanical Garden as a destination for locals and visitors alike, a place for people to get close to nature and a new green heart for the city centre. This might repurpose or adapt an existing space or form part of a new development, but should be free to access and within easy reach of transport links.

In addition to open green space and planting to support increased biodiversity and wildlife, the City Centre Garden should include:

- a cafe (it's important that this should be accessibly priced and big enough for people to feel they are welcome to linger)
- a platform for local artists to show/perform works (see 'Encounters with Arts & Culture')
- Climate change and sustainability education/advice hub with practical examples showing eg solar panels, rainwater collection, green energy, white roof, rooftop terrace veg growing, bee keeping, air quality monitoring etc
- garden should be free/cheap to locals
- venue could be hired for weddings/corporate events

“To me it is feeling like I am being seen and I matter and my opinions are worth something. Also feeling like I am useful to my community and I can make a change”

The Ring Road as a Work of Art

Use art to beautify the ring road, improve connectivity between the centre and outlying areas and create a more inviting environment by:

- creating murals and growing plants along the ring road to draw people into the city;
- improving pedestrian access (like the recent works at rail station junction and Abbots Lane to Belgrade Square);
- updating the underpass system (see ‘**Lighter & Brighter**’)

Green Ways

Create a network of pocket parks and green spaces – connected by walking and cycling trails throughout the city, incorporate art and sculpture, build new parks and incorporate existing ones.

Lighter & Brighter

We recommend adding bright, beautifully designed and environmentally considerate lighting to dark places across the city, to make us feel safer and improve the night-time economy;

- residents to choose the places by actively asking them;
- local people to co-design with creatives and lighting professionals;
- think about car parks, bus stops, subways;
- sensors that are activated as you walk to light the floor and art light boxes at bus stops;
- use of colourful lights that also takes into consideration people with disabilities;
- light colour paint on walls.

We need your help:

Coventry is a big and inventive city, full of brilliant people making fantastic things happen. We know that there will be people out there who are already working along similar lines to the ideas proposed here, and lots of enthusiastic people with time and energy who are interested in helping make things happen. Some we'll know about, others we won't.

If we can share what (and who) we know, and all work together – then we truly can start to shape a better future for Coventry. Whoever you are, we'd love to hear from you – there's a contact form online at www.talkingbirds.co.uk/A4TP so you can send us a message. You might be one of the people who are already working on something similar, or you might know about an existing project that we should connect to. You might have some time, energy or resources that you'd be willing to share in order to help get things off the ground. Or you might just want to thank the citizens who participated in the Assembly for putting together such an exciting vision for our city's future!

Our Citizens' Assembly participants:

Aiden, Andrew, Anita, Ashley, Bahman, Bilal, Cheryl, Christopher, Coleen, Ermias, Fausta, Gareth, Hannah, Harvey, Holly, Ian, Jake, Jeremy, Jill, Joshua, Kalsum, Kristina, Lakcon, Liam, Lily, Madison, Maxine K, Maxine T, Michelle, Mustafa, Nat, Nicholas, Noaman, Oana-Maria, Olivier, Paul H, Paul L, Paul S, Paula, Paulina, Pav, Rachael, Seyran, Shehla, Stanley, Surabhi, Terry, Tonessa & Tony.

About Talking Birds:

Talking Birds is a nationally-renowned, Coventry-based company of artists specialising in Theatre of Place. You might have joined us on an actor-guided *Walk With Me* walking tour, which tuned into the sounds of the past; played a sticky wicket at Fargo Village with our larger-than-life *Cricketers*; demonstrated exemplary queuing in the city centre with *The Q* at the Shopfront Festival; stepped inside the mouth of our submersive mini-theatre in the shape of a *Whale*; or celebrated Coventry City's FA Cup win with us in *We Love You City* at the Belgrade Theatre. We are also known for championing accessibility, particularly through the development of our in-pocket captioning system, *The Difference Engine*, and for our work supporting artists to develop greener practice at The Nest. 2022 marks our 30th year of making work in and for Coventry.

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