



CULTURAL ACTION FRAMEWORK FOR GBSLEP

2020-2030



Cultural Action Framework for GBSLEP 2020-30

Contents:

section	details	page
Foreword	Anita Bhalla OBE, Board Director for Creative & Culture, GBSLEP	3
1.0	Executive Summary	4
2.0	Investing in Culture is about the economy and more	6
2.1	The role of Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership in cultural investments	8
2.2	What do we mean by 'Culture'	11
3.0	GBSLEP's Cultural Investment Approach	12
3.1	Supporting Innovative Cultural Investments and funding models	14
3.2	Supporting capacity building cultural organisations and cultural consortia	17
3.3	Developing and identifying funding for a pipeline of investible Cultural Action Zones	18
4.0	Next Steps	20
Appendix A	Culture Central Recommendations and GBSLEP's response	21

Foreword

Creativity and cultural activity enriches our human condition. It defines who we are. It changes and reshapes our world. It inspires us, helps us build stronger, more cohesive communities. It also drives placemaking and economic development. We know that an effective cultural and creative economy will reach *all* parts of the city and its region; bringing economic growth and driving the quality of life and wellbeing of our citizens.

Our cultural offer in Greater Birmingham & Solihull is life affirming, life changing and lifesaving. It is this intrinsic value of creative and cultural expression that sparks our imagination, drives innovation and provides opportunity. Creativity has a largely untapped role in delivering wider community solutions to many of the issues we face. Education, mental health, physical wellbeing and community cohesion all do better when our artistic, cultural and creative talents are engaged together.

But we face real challenges bringing the promise of these benefits to all of our citizens. Public funding for culture has been especially hard hit in recent years; with many organisations facing an uncertain future. Currently, the education of our children involves less mandatory creative activity than is arguably healthy for the future of our society. Careers advice doesn't always express the full excitement and potential of creative jobs to our children or their parents.

Fortunately, we are at a moment in time not to be missed. Our region is more on the map today for its cultural potential than ever before; with Coventry City of Culture in 2021, Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and the investments we are seeing alongside these, such as the first large-scale 5G network across an English region.

This then is the context within which GBSLEP launches its first 'Cultural Action Framework', setting out its approach to supporting culture across its geography and playing its part in reversing those recent challenges and capitalising on the huge potential that is ahead.

Anita Bhalla

Board Director for Creative & Culture, GBSLEP
Chair, Performances Birmingham

1.0 Executive Summary

GBSLEP's 'Cultural Action Framework' is the first time the LEP has set out its approach to investing in and developing culture across its geography. Previously, cultural projects were seen as 'one-off' capital interventions, usually with an underlying objective to enable greater sustainability by reducing dependence on grant funding. But these investments tended to be reactive rather than pro-active.

With the publication of this Framework, GBSLEP is now able to make its own strategic priorities clearer and work in more effective, long-term partnerships with cultural actors and our other stakeholders, as we enable change for the long-term good of economy and wider geography.

GBSLEP is making this change at a timely moment. Last year it published its 'Towns and Local Centres Framework' and this is now beginning to underpin master-planning and town centre development work, which always includes cultural, community and heritage considerations.

Central government have made the importance of placemaking and cultural development abundantly clear in recent years too. Local Industrial Strategies (LIS) are being rolled out first across three 'trail-blazer' regions, including the West Midlands. These plans include 'place' as a key theme. The West Midlands LIS includes a Creative Sector Action Plan, which has an action to develop long-term investment around place and develop existing and new 'cultural action zones'. The government currently has more than £4 billion available for place-based investments across the country. GBSLEP must ensure it is well placed to understand the opportunity and support regional bids effectively for our share of those resources.

To ensure GBSLEP's strategy is aligned with the needs and opportunities identified by our cultural and business sectors, Culture Cultural was commissioned to write a report that would present recommendations to the LEP and, more broadly, to other public funders with a similar economic growth remit. Culture Central are Birmingham's 'Development agency for culture'. A membership organisation, they are tasked to promote, advocate and develop new responses to the sector's challenges and opportunities. Whilst mainly Birmingham based at present, Culture Central is increasingly working across our regional geography.

Culture Central's report, 'A Toolkit for Smarter Cultural Investments in our towns, cities and regions' was published in November 2019¹. GBSLEP have adopted all of the recommendations within their report and have started implementation by adopting a 3-step cultural development framework:

1. Supporting innovative cultural investments and funding models
2. Supporting capacity building of cultural organisations and cultural consortia
3. Developing and identifying funding for a pipeline of investible Cultural Action Zones

GBSLEP will step up its activities by working with partners to test and develop new funding models involving, for example, asset transfers, community interest companies and new commercial approaches to culture.

It will adopt Culture Central's four cultural characteristics, ensuring that all new investments in cultural assets and projects incorporate a mix of all four of them, ensuring they:

- Build on regional distinctiveness
- Extend or create new 'class-leading' assets
- Take an innovative approach to cultural investment
- Contribute to a cluster/ecosystem-based model

As part of its responses, GBSLEP will launch a 'Cultural Capacity Development Fund', providing small grants to cultural consortia and will open a call for 'Cultural Action Zones' across its geography, both to identify where new zones should be and extend existing cultural quarters, such as the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham. Crucially, an important part of these actions will be to apply equal weight to smaller local centres, from Balsall Heath in Birmingham to towns like Solihull or Sutton Coldfield. We will celebrate the 'smaller and unexpected' as much as the large scale and high-profile.

GBSLEP will use its *modus operandi* of 'agitate, enable, commission' to work more effectively with central government, local authorities, partners like Arts Council England and cultural organisations to bring forward new projects and new funding into the region, extending the scope of what we can achieve together.

Over the coming months, GBSLEP will welcome further discussion and feedback on its new investment approach through its 'Cultural Action Framework'. The LEP regards this as a 'living

¹ <https://gbslep.co.uk/cultural-investments>

document', currently in draft 1.0, that can be tested through the coming pilots and funding calls and then refined into a publishable plan in 2020.

2.0 Investing in Culture is about the economy and more

Culture plays a crucial role in great places and is a vital part of a successful economy. Birmingham has the most diverse population in any of the UK core cities, with 40% of citizens 25 or under. This opens up huge potential to develop and grow our talented people. The city is also, arguably, the strongest cluster of major arts organisations in any English city outside London. It includes organisations such as the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Birmingham Royal Ballet and the Ikon Gallery.

A strong recognition of culture, in all its aspects, builds a clear sense of cultural identity, drives creative vibrancy, innovation and underpins well-being and an improving quality of life. It is an important factor for all of our citizens, from families and students to those thinking of moving into the area for work. It brings many other benefits too, such as giving us a sense of pride, enriching our lives and improving our mental health and wellbeing.

Central government have made the importance of placemaking and cultural development abundantly clear in recent years too. The government currently has more than £4Bn available for place-based investments across the country. These funding streams include; a Future High Street Fund, Heritage High Street Fund, Arts Council England Funding, Cultural Development Fund, Towns Fund, Libraries and Museums Fund and New Development Corporation Competition². GBSLEP must ensure it is well placed to understand the opportunities these funds can bring and support partners and regional bids to access our fair share of these national resources.

Many of these funding streams form part of government's local industrial strategies (LIS). These strategies have 'place' as a key theme aimed at helping region's drive growth and seize their unique opportunities for the future. The West Midlands is one of three 'trail-blazer' regions who are already implementing these locally developed plans. The West Midlands LIS includes

² £4.5Bn aggregate available funding at November 2019, not an exhaustive list

a 'Creative Sector Action Plan', which has a specific action to develop long-term investment around place, including developing 'cultural action zones' and a region-wide festivals strategy.

There is a big prize to be won just considering tourism and the visitor economy alone, which was worth a record £12.6 billion across the West Midlands 3-LEP geography in 2018, up 6.7% on the previous year³. Our visitor economy is already anticipating the huge boost it will get from two huge one-off events; as the country welcomes 'Coventry City of Culture' in 2021 and the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

However, our vibrant cultural offer goes far beyond the city centre, as it extends across our towns and local centres. Places like Kidderminster and Lichfield see the importance of their own cultural heritage, assets and offer as a vital driver of distinctiveness and activity. This helps underscore the value that culture brings, which includes:

- Shaping a distinct and desirable identity - which can stimulate investment, activity, sponsorship and media coverage
- Sustaining footfall and drawing visitors – which can re-invigorate high streets and stimulate business and retail activity
- Enhancing economic and social value – which can encourage developers, boost property values and invigorate local centres
- Stimulate knowledge transfer and innovation in business – which is often driven by the growth of our cultural and creative industries

To make the most of these opportunities GBSLEP published its 'Towns and Local Centres Framework' last year and this is now beginning to underpin master-planning work and future town centre development; which includes consideration of factors such as culture, heritage, community, diversity and inclusiveness.

But despite all the great work and abundant opportunities, GBSLEP and its geography is facing real challenges bringing the promise of these benefits to all of our citizens. Public funding for culture has been hit especially hard in recent years; with many organisations facing an uncertain future. This underscores an important emerging role for public funders like LEPS; to support cultural organisations and local authorities, helping them overcome capacity and

³ Source: West Midlands Growth Company – these figures relate to the 3-LEP West Midlands geography which includes the geographies of GBSLEP, Black Country LEP and Coventry & Warwickshire LEP

sustainability issues and build stronger long-term alliances and projects for the long-term benefit of the future of the city-region.

All of these factors together mean it's never been more important than now to make the most of culture across the region. This is why GBSLEP have a clear leadership role, making sense of what actions should be taken to overcome the challenges of the past and rise to the opportunities of the future.

It is within this context that GBSLEP has launched its first 'Cultural Action Framework', setting out its approach to supporting culture across its geography and beginning to play its part in reversing those recent challenges and capitalising on the huge potential that is ahead.

2.1 The role of Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership in cultural investments

The Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) is a partnership of business, public sector and further and higher education leaders with a mission to create jobs and grow the economy – and, in so doing, raise the quality of life for all of those that live and work here.

GBSLEP covers the nine local authority areas of Birmingham, Solihull, East Staffordshire, Cannock Chase, Lichfield, Tamworth, Redditch, Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest, which have a combined population of just over 2 million people, an economy worth £46.8bn billion and an estimated 1,038,000 jobs.

GBSLEP's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) sets out a vision and strategy for delivering smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive growth for the benefit of its geography, the wider West Midlands city region and the UK as a whole. It includes a target to 'Enhance and harness the potential of our cultural and creative assets' as well as its target to become the 'Leading Core City LEP for Quality of Life'.

GBSLEP's recent launch of its 'Towns and Local Centres Framework'⁴ underscores the importance of placemaking to the LEP and the way it's joining the dots between current high street issues, future opportunities and potential solutions, including the way that cultural investment can act as a glue in the mix, building a stronger, sustainable and brighter future for our cities, towns and local centres.

The West Midlands' Local Industrial Strategy⁵ identifies the importance of place and regional distinctiveness as well as proposing long-term investment into 'cultural action zones', not only as important placemaking investments and drivers of economic growth but also to make the region more desirable for people to live, work and study in - a key part of inward investment, wellbeing and quality of life.

Developing a strong talent and skills pipeline is also an important target for GBSLEP. Careers advice in schools doesn't always express the full excitement and potential of creative jobs to our children or their parents. Similarly, the school curriculum does not always provide appropriate levels of creative activity. So, part of GBSLEP's role is to advocate for change in schools to central government – as requested by our many cultural and business partners. We must also help develop a stronger and more diverse talent pipeline through our further and higher education institutions, ensuring that courses are fit for purpose and future proofed. We are also tasked to increase apprenticeship numbers and our work on creative sector specialist apprenticeships indicates that they require special structures to be effective, for example, by using multi-employer models.

GBSLEP has already invested significantly in culture. It has spent £28m of its capital funding on cultural projects, with a pipeline of further cultural projects under development. It already works closely with national government, the West Midlands Combined Authority, other regional LEPs and a wide range of cultural and other stakeholders. It understands the need to show leadership in the way a LEP can make a difference in developing and implementing innovative new approaches to placemaking and cultural funding. However, GBSLEP can do more by being more effective and focused in its approach

⁴ <https://gbslep.co.uk/news-and-events/news/gbslep-unveils-framework-support-regeneration-towns-local-centres>

⁵ <https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/industrial-strategy/> Major Market Opportunity: Creative Content, Techniques and Technologies p35-38

To improve the quality and effectiveness of GBSLEP's response to the opportunities and issues around culture and creativity it commissioned Culture Central⁶ (Birmingham and the region's 'Development Agency for Culture') to set-out the approach that funders of economic growth, like LEPs, should take in maximizing the value and impact of their cultural investments in both economic and social terms. Culture Central's report: 'A Toolkit for Smarter Cultural Investments in our towns, cities and regions', makes specific recommendations for GBSLEP and provides timely advice for other public funders too.

This 'Cultural Action Framework' is GBSLEP's response to their recommendations. GBSLEP proposes to adopt all of the recommendations, and over the coming months, will explore exactly what that means in the context of the prevailing political landscape and what can be achieved within available resources. This is a draft response, with current proposed actions set out in Section 3.0.

At this stage, the LEP is in a 'learning and piloting' stage – so further feedback and suggestions from cultural organisations or wider stakeholders will be very welcome over the coming months. In addition, the LEP has set-up an Industry Forum covering creative industries and culture. New members will be welcome. It is informal and ad-hoc, responding to issues and opportunities as they arise⁷.

⁶ <https://www.culturecentral.co.uk/>

⁷ To provide feedback to GBSLEP on creative & cultural matters or to request joining the forum please email hello@gslep.co.uk and mark the email 'attention cultural lead'

2.2 What do we mean by culture?

The word ‘culture’ means different things to different people. For some it conjures up something they regard as ‘high-brow’ – perhaps ballet or opera. For others it embraces the idea of family, heritage and background. In a very real sense culture *is* ‘everything we do and everywhere we go’⁸ – from a community art class to a walk in the park.

GBSLEP’s ‘Cultural Action Framework’ will use the Cultural Cities Enquiry’s⁹ definition, which does not seek to define the boundaries of culture:

‘Our remit has encompassed arts institutions, museums, libraries, the historic environment and cultural festivals, popular and grassroots culture. But we have been aware that culture is a social expression that will take many different forms and is ever evolving. We have been particularly interested in the relationship between culture and the wider creative industries, in the knowledge that distinctions between ‘cultural’, ‘creative’ and ‘digital’ enterprises are fast eroding.’ (Cultural Cities Enquiry, 2019)

Thus, GBSLEP’s partners, stakeholders and applicants for funding, can be flexible in their interpretation of culture and the value that proposals bring to GBSLEP’s geography; in terms of placemaking, inclusive growth and overall economic gain.

⁸ Cultures broadest definitions <https://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-culture.html>

⁹ <https://www.corecities.com/cultural-cities-enquiry/read-report>

3.0 GBSLEP's Cultural Investment Approach

GBSLEP's 'Cultural Action Framework' is the first time the LEP has set out its approach to investing in and developing culture across its geography. Previously, cultural projects were seen as 'one-off' capital interventions, usually with an underlying objective to enable greater sustainability through less dependence on grant funding. But these investments tended to be reactive rather than pro-active.

With the publication of this Framework, GBSLEP is now able to make its strategic priorities clearer and work in more effective long-term partnership with cultural actors to enable change for the long-term good of our economy and wider geography.

GBSLEP proposes to base its cultural approach on the recommendations within Culture Central's 'Toolkit for Smarter Cultural Investments in our towns, cities and regions.' These recommendations were proposed by Culture Central following a detailed analysis of best practice globally and consultation, nationally, internationally and across the Greater Birmingham geography.

As part of this approach, GBSLEP will use its leadership voice, and its investment capabilities, in a way that both amplifies and extends the existing cultural landscape in the region and is aligned with its core economic development purpose. It will do this in a way that complements and adds value to the other agencies and agendas in play, including the critical investments of Arts Council England, the historic and emerging agendas of local government, and the strategies of the sector itself, at both organisational and cluster level.

GBSLEP will maximise its impact using its role as 'agitator, enabler and commissioner' to build new thinking, new consortia and bring multiple funding sources together into new cultural solutions. In practical terms, this means working with grassroots cultural organisations, helping to build their capacity and find ways to bring their visionary thinking and future plans into reality. It will support them in the development of an investable pipeline of cultural projects within cultural action zones, some able to access immediate funding from different sources, others forming part of a longer-term ask for future funding from a variety of government and other sources.

GBSLEP will make its own strategic investments in place-making, capacity-building and individual project levels by adopting all of the recommendations within Culture Central's report. It has made a start by adopting a 3-step cultural development framework, this includes:

1. Supporting innovative cultural investments and funding models
2. Supporting capacity building cultural organisations and cultural consortia
3. Developing and identifying funding for a pipeline of investible Cultural Action Zones

There is one minor change to Culture Central's recommendations. This 3-step process is in a different order to that recommended by Culture Central. After careful consideration, the LEP felt that the above order was more logical in terms of implementing interventions that have the greatest capacity to achieve change.

However, this development framework will evolve over time. The actions and approach stated in the following sections should be regarded as our 'learning and piloting' stage, with this entire 'Cultural Action Framework' a living document, which will develop over time.

3.1 Supporting innovative cultural investments and funding models

GBSLEP will be an active participant in developing new thinking around future cultural funding and funding models. It will focus on culture in terms of new investment strategies, business models, innovative collaborations and the way cultural development drives placemaking, inward investment and wellbeing, and in so doing, can 'join-the-dots' across our capital and revenue programmes, which focus on interventions that drive economic growth.

GBSLEP has contributed to the Cultural Cities Enquiry¹⁰, Birmingham City Council's Cultural Investment Enquiry¹¹ and collaborated with Arts Council England¹², DCMS¹³, cultural organisations, third sector, developers and many more as new approaches are developed and pilots established.

GBSLEP's areas of interest include encouraging property and asset transfers into new investment vehicles, from Community Interest Companies to Endowment Funds. Successful implementation of these ideas across the country show the way cultural consortia and their activities can stimulate transformational change; often utilising Local Authority property assets in ways that empower and sustain cultural consortia whilst delivering significant impact and value across our towns and cities.

GBSLEP is also focused on the development of hybrid funding models that combine commercial monies with cultural and third sector resources to increase the impact and long-term sustainability of our cultural assets.

GBSLEP has also been supporting the understanding and exploitation of cultural intellectual property (IP) rights. We have brokered and supported the current collaboration between the Intellectual Property Office¹⁴ (IPO) with Arts Council England (ACE), who are together piloting how intangible value can be better understood and exploited across cultural organisations of all sizes.

¹⁰ <https://www.corecities.com/cultural-cities-enquiry>

¹¹ <https://greaterbirminghamchambers.com/latest-news/news/2016/7/21/report-into-funding-for-birmingham-culture-calls-for-collective-action/>

¹² <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>

¹³ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS)

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/intellectual-property-office>

GBSLEP will work with its stakeholders and partners, developing new thinking further and supporting pilot projects wherever possible. It will continue to seek out a greater understanding of cultural funding and investment models. It will support and participate – where resources allow – in pilots and new projects that can test the underlying mechanics and legal structures needed to deliver impact on the ground, both within cultural organisations and for the broader economy.

Four Characteristics of Cultural Investments

GBSLEP will adopt Culture Central’s four cultural characteristics, which ensure that every new cultural investment includes a mix of these and:

- Builds on regional distinctiveness
- Extends or creates new ‘class-leading’ assets
- Takes an innovative approach to cultural investment
- Contributes to a cluster/ecosystem-based model

These four criteria will complement and extend the generic project requirements for GBSLEP investment and not replace them. The normal project decision-making process (officer analysis followed by panel review and approval) will take these additional criteria into account as part of their project-scoring criteria. The four characteristics will be addressed collectively, rather than independently, to create a matrix of impact and innovation to support the full potential of future policies and interventions. These criteria - along with GBSLEP’s broader policies – will help to differentiate its investments from those of others (such as Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund).

Most funding from GBSLEP comes from The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy¹⁵ (BEIS) and is subject to economic ‘green book’ criteria from central government¹⁶. This means that cultural investments made by GBSLEP do not generally have the same funding criteria attached to them as, for example, Arts Council England, which gets funding from DCMS.

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-energy-and-industrial-strategy>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government>

The four characteristics in more detail will include the following:

Characteristic 1: Builds on regional distinctiveness

Successful projects will be able to articulate and demonstrate how they capture, reflect or create a strong sense of distinctive identity that contributes to a broader narrative about the qualities of a place.

Characteristic 2: Extends or creates new ‘class-leading’ assets

Successful projects will not just be seeking to copy an existing asset or ‘catch up’ with a similar project elsewhere, but rather seeking to learn from, and extend, best international practice. Project leaders will be able to self-determine the ‘class-leading’ nature of their proposal, whatever its scale or location.

Characteristic 3: Takes an innovative approach to cultural investment

Successful projects will clearly display an innovative business model, including an approach to sustainability that goes beyond that of merely extending or enlarging their existing business practice.

Characteristic 4: Contributes to a cluster/ecosystem-based model

Successful projects will contribute to an existing, or catalyse a new, geographic ‘cluster’ of cultural institutions, with a view to leveraging audiences, supply chains and future market growth.

3.2 Supporting capacity building cultural organisations and cultural consortia

There is a clear relationship between development capacity and the ability of a sector to progress, transform and realise its potential. But, across the board, this capacity has been seriously squeezed and under-invested in over recent years. There is also a clear recognition that building stronger ecosystems and clusters are key factors in enabling organisations to overcome the barriers that so many of them face.

Cultural capacity within the sector was traditionally the responsibility of local government in close partnership with government departments such as DCMS, but reductions in public funding have significantly reduced this provision and the model now needs reinventing.

GBSLEP recognises these challenges and understands that organisational capability needs to be restored so that cultural organisations can become the confident architects of their own future ambitions with a clear view of their role in shaping the future of their towns, cities and local centres. To help facilitate the restoration of this capability, GBSLEP will support capacity building within cultural organisations and consortia, in the first instance by running a pilot action with small revenue grants.

Capacity building (or capacity development) is the process by which individuals and organisations obtain, improve, and retain the skills, knowledge, tools, equipment, and other resources needed to do their jobs competently. It allows individuals and organisations to perform at a greater capacity (larger scale, larger audience, larger impact, etc). "Capacity building" and "Capacity development" are often used interchangeably. Community capacity building is a conceptual approach toward social and behavioural change and leads to infrastructure development. It focuses on understanding the obstacles that inhibit people, governments, international organisations, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) from realising the goals that will allow them to achieve sustainable results¹⁷.

GBSLEP recognises that 'capacity building' needs may vary considerably between different organisations, groups and places. Sometimes this work might be very much a 'first step',

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capacity_building

bringing a group of organisations together around a shared objective. Other times it may be building on considerable previous effort and resources where plans are well developed.

It is clear that success for cultural organisations in the future does depend on them thinking in new ways, being more commercial, more collaborative with partners and taking a sector led and often place-centred approach.

GBSLEP is very clear that we do not consider ourselves a new funder of artistic works and activities like the Arts Council or Cultural departments of local authorities. This means a simple proposal to fund a one-off festival or event – with no strategic thinking, multi-agency or collaborative future planning – will not be funded through this route.

3.3 Developing and identifying funding for a pipeline of investible Cultural Action Zones

GBSLEP has adopted the concept of developing ‘cultural action zones’, as recommended by Culture Central, included within the West Midlands Local Industrial Strategy and already recognisable in our many existing ‘creative quarters, from Digbeth to the Jewellery Quarter.

Each zone can have many component actions, interesting projects, and multiple outcomes. It is, in essence, a system change proposition, often involving social, wellbeing, heritage and inclusive growth criteria which, at first glance, may not appear purely economic.

These zones will be able to exist at various scales, from city centre to local high street, and can involve projects of all sizes, from major redevelopments to smaller community-led initiatives. They will enable the development of a ground-breaking approach to cultural infrastructure that looks at the entire ecosystem investment model to understand how each investment contributes to a wider system that is highly contemporary (in design, connectivity, cultural practice and business sustainability) and in so doing places equal value on small scale interventions, non-city centre regeneration activity, ‘meanwhile’ use, etc. at a local level. They should be as relevant to Redditch, Lichfield, Bromsgrove or Solihull as they are to Birmingham.

These Action Zones will be brought to life through the project activity they support. This is where the interaction between the place-making approach (cultural action zones) intersects with the decision-making criteria for individual projects and initiatives, and the new investment

cycle is initiated. The intention here is to move away from a project assessment approach that is artform- or location-specific, towards a set of criteria that ensure each project contributes explicitly to the wider intent of the Action Zone, and in so doing disrupts the cycle of atomised project proposals.

Examples of cultural action zone projects might include:

- Major development sites such as Smithfield in Birmingham
- Anchor project sites arising from other investments such as High Speed 2 or a town centre regeneration scheme
- Commonwealth Games delivery and adjacent sites
- Towns and local centres that have a current, or latent, set of cultural assets and organisations, such as Sutton Coldfield, Lichfield or Redditch
- Smaller local centres, such as Balsall Heath in Birmingham
- Unexpected places and ideas that disrupt our normal thinking

The role of cultural action zones in talent development

An important function of cultural action zones will be to facilitate the development of new talent and the reskilling of existing workers, ensuring more inclusive access to creative and cultural jobs and activities by a more diverse range of people.

The Future

Over time, GBSLEP will seek to develop its cultural action zone approach into a long-term investment programme that makes the capital assets of the cultural sector fit for purpose and act as ‘anchors’ for associated development activity in a clusters (ecology) based model.

To help facilitate this objective, as GBSLEP receives applications for cultural action zones and new ideas for existing ones, it will work with stakeholders to create an overview of the current economic development landscape for the region and begin to identify priorities for cultural development hotspots. In the long run, GBSLEP may develop a proposed set of preferred ‘cultural action zone’ sites.

4.0 Next Steps

GBSLEP will continue to refine its response to the cultural sector and the place agenda across its geography.

It will deliver its first pilot action by using small revenue grants to capacity build cultural organisations and consortia. Then, through discussion with the sector and tracking results as they emerge, will refine its revenue programmes and approach for the future.

GBSLEP will use its cultural action zone call to better understand where cultural investments can make the most economic difference across its geography. It will 'agitate, enable and commission' to maximise the LEPs connections and influence, with both central government and other key partners. Through this approach it will be able to step up its activities by working with partners to test and develop new funding models and new commercial approaches.

GBSLEP will continue to make capital asset investments into the cultural sector, but it will make them in a more strategic way, using the feedback and new understanding that this framework will enable.

GBSLEP will use the coming months as a test-bed and consultation period, to review all of Culture Central's recommendations in real world situations. This will lead to the LEP publishing a final version of its Cultural Action Framework later in 2020.

Appendix A: Culture Central Recommendations and GBSLEP's response

This table lists the recommendations around cultural investments that Culture Central made in the report that GBSLEP commissioned, 'A Toolkit for Smarter Cultural Investments in our towns, cities and regions'. The right-hand column then shows the response that GBSLEP has made or plans to make.

Recommendations from Culture Central	Response from GBSLEP
Step 1: Creating Cultural Action Zones	
GBSLEP should create an overview of the current economic development landscape for the region and begin to identify cultural development hotspots	<p>GBSLEP will put out a call to develop an investible pipeline of Cultural Action Zone projects. Both to create new zones and to extend activities in established creative quarters, such as Digbeth.</p> <p>In the process of developing and strategically prioritising this pipeline GBSLEP will carry out the suggested landscape mapping, understanding what zones we have and where the immediate priorities are for the future.</p>
GBSLEP should identify key ways to leverage projects that show evidence of serious attempts to address the barriers to entry into the cultural sector faced by new talent from BAME and other disadvantaged backgrounds	GBSLEP will apply its delivery plan actions within the creative sector and skills to enable change for the cultural sector within this framework document.
GBSLEP should consult with business/industry, including launching an 'Industry Forum' to include a mix of cultural players to take existing conversations further	GBSLEP has launched a Creative & Cultural Industries Forum, to learn more about this contact culture@gslep.co.uk marking the title of the email Cultural Industry Forum
Step 2: Building Cultural Development Capacity	
GBSLEP should facilitate the creation of appropriate cultural development vehicles within action zones, by providing capacity-building support for a range of project development, leadership and administration functions	GBSLEP will explore best practice around delivery vehicles during its cultural capacity call by monitoring all approaches submitted within applications and consulting with the cultural sector, Birmingham Cultural Compact, the Cultural Leadership Board of the West Midlands Combined Authority and other key stakeholders.
Step 3: Refining Cultural Investment Criteria	
GBSLEP should publicise and implement cultural investment criteria for new projects alongside explaining the value of strong collaborative clusters	GBSLEP has adopted the 4 cultural investment characteristics recommended by Culture Central, it will embed the use of these in all of its funding programmes, revenue and capital, that involve cultural projects and assets.