



# A Great and Curious Future

Warrington's vision for  
Cultural Growth 2020-2025

1 year review (January 2021)

This document has been produced with thanks to the following:

Accent Music Education Hub  
Blooming Art  
Castlefield Gallery  
Community Objectives  
Creative Remedies  
Culture Warrington  
LiveWire  
Ludovico  
Lymm Heritage Centre  
Not Too Tame  
RAF Burtonwood Heritage Centre  
Score Creative Education  
Stepping Stones Creative  
Technically Brilliant  
Walton Hall and Gardens  
Warrington Borough Council  
Warrington Disability Partnership

**Front cover:** In October, Pyramid took part in the Light It In Red Campaign when Arts venues around the country highlighted the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on the theatre and live entertainment industry around the world by lighting their venues in red.





# Introduction and background

**'A Great and Curious Future - Warrington's vision for Cultural Growth 2020-25'** was collectively produced by a group of public, private, voluntary and community sector partners following the recommendations of Warrington's Culture Commission in 2018. Warrington's Culture Board, re-established in 2019 was the lead body for the development of the visioning framework. Its sister board, the Culture Consortium, made up of key cultural partners in Warrington, has been key in ensuring a joined-up approach to the delivery of the framework across the borough. Our cultural framework aims to embed arts and culture firmly within the borough's regeneration framework, creating a cultural scene for Warrington to be proud of.

***Side panels:*** River of the World Exhibition - Accent Music Education Hub were part of a national and international partnership with Thames Festival Trust. Some Warrington schools created river themed artwork under the guidance of professional artists during the lockdown. The work was exhibited on the Southbank, London, in September.

***Top right:*** Cardinal Newman High School.

***Bottom left:*** Beaumont Collegiate Academy. Both with artist Kirsty Hall.

## Recap - 2020

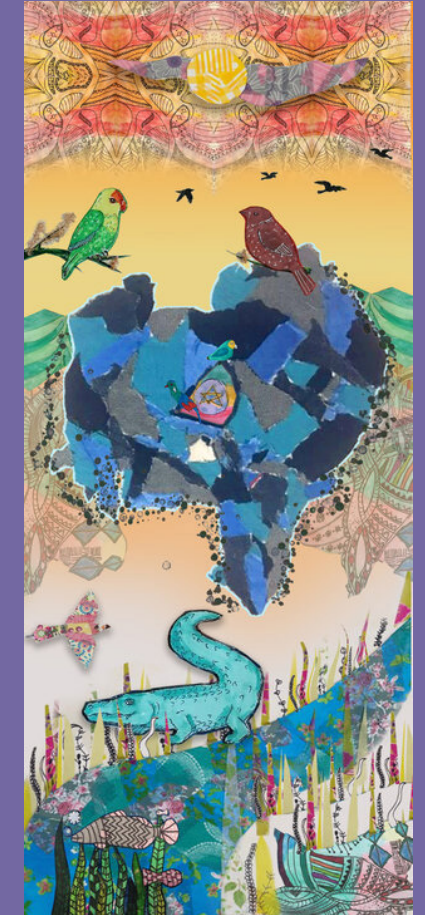
There is overwhelming evidence that the arts, culture and heritage sector has been one of the hardest hit during the Covid-19 pandemic, most notably the performing arts. Nationally, the picture has been a bleak one - performances have been cancelled, venues mothballed, exhibitions closed and much-loved festivals were abandoned for 2020. Some organisations are now starting to re-open, but cultural institutions are facing an uncertain future which will be further affected by changing audience habits and confidence.



The lockdowns and restrictions have undoubtedly had a negative impact on the cultural sector in Warrington in terms of loss of revenue, furloughed workers and closed venues. However, organisations and individuals have been innovative and flexible, adapting to constantly changing circumstances, and much progress has been made towards the goals set out in 'A Great and Curious Future'.

Since March 2020, networks have grown, new and exciting partnerships have developed and new ways of working have been explored, including using digital platforms more effectively. While venues have been closed, work has been cancelled and many creatives have suffered loss of income, 2020 has brought Warrington's creative communities together.

The next few pages will summarise the most significant cultural events, programmes and projects that have taken place in Warrington during 2020, both pre-COVID and since March.

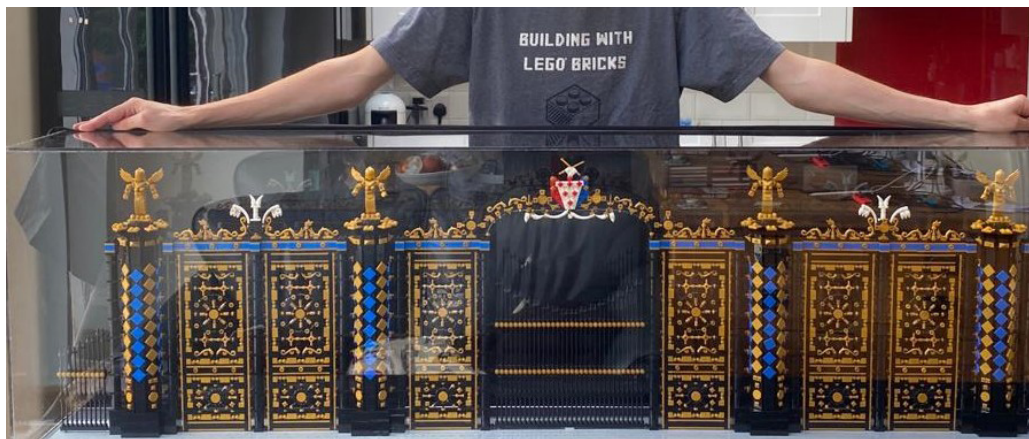


# We'll be celebrating by singing our own song

A place-making strategy which creates a cultural brand for Warrington will highlight the centrality of arts and culture to the borough as a whole, to individual communities within it and to the town centre.

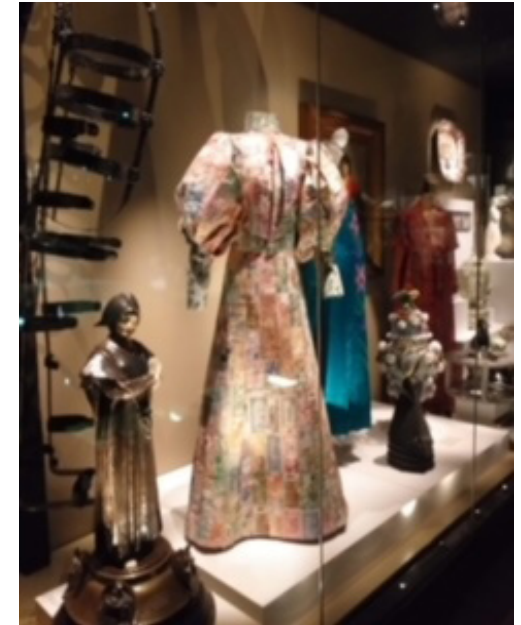
The Culture Commission's suggestion that nurturing a strong sense of identity and a feeling of ownership and pride of place should be priorities in Warrington has definitely been taken on board. This year, Warrington's heritage has taken centre-stage with many projects and exhibitions retelling the borough's stories in new and compelling ways. Our cultural programme, although limited for most of the year, has reached a wider ranging audience than ever before, including at national and international level.

*Lego Master Steve Guinness with his model of Warrington's iconic Golden Gates.*



## Warrington Museum & Art Gallery

At the beginning of the year, [Warrington Museum and Art Gallery \(WMAG\)](#) was mid-way through the hugely popular exhibition, 'Eric Tucker – the unseen artist', a collection of paintings by a local artist whose extensive collection was found by his family following his death. The exhibition welcomed 18,000 visitors, a 42% increase from the previous year and the largest attended exhibition since 2015. The discovery attracted national and international attention, with vast media coverage, including national newspapers and a feature on BBC Breakfast News, as well as from art critics such as Ruth Millington who described the work as "a significant contribution to modern British art." Compared to LS Lowry and described as 'an amazing find for art history', Eric Tucker has put Warrington on the international map as far as the art world is concerned.



*Susan Stockwell's exhibition, 'Hidden Histories, Untold Stories' at WMAG.*

WMAG's year closed with 'Hidden Histories, Untold Stories', an exhibition by international award-winning artist, Susan Stockwell exploring the hidden stories behind the museum's eclectic and wide-ranging collections. The exhibition forms part of a national Arts Council England funded programme, 'Meeting Point', and demonstrates Culture Warrington's growing reputation as a place where heritage and contemporary arts compliment each other.

To enhance their growing programme of captivating exhibitions, WMAG have developed an app which will enable people to engage with the museum and its remarkable collections in new and exciting ways through technologies such as augmented reality, which will take users on an exciting journey through the full expanse of its galleries.



## Heritage Projects

As part of our drive to develop an identity for the borough and communicate the pride in our town and its heritage, Warrington Borough Council successfully applied to National Heritage Lottery Fund for two projects this year: The Wire Works and VE75.

The *Wire Works* is a project which celebrates the borough's wire heritage, the production of which dominated Warrington's employment structure for over a hundred years during the 18th and 19th Centuries.

A partnership between creative practitioners, heritage facilitators, schools, colleges and remaining wire factories in Warrington, the project was planned to culminate in September 2020 with an engaging, contemporary exhibition in the town centre and a series of documentaries. Although paused during 2020, the project will continue in 2021 with an exhibition planned for the autumn.

The activities planned to celebrate VE75 were not able to go ahead, but partnership working brought a combination of 'live' and online events to Warrington residents in August to coincide with VJ Day. An empty shop unit on Bridge Street was used effectively by transforming the windows of the former jeweller's shop into a pop-up local history museum.

## Heritage Open Days

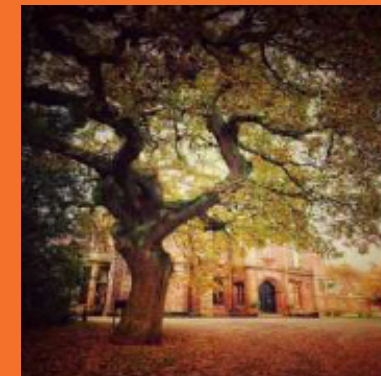
Heritage Open Days were planned to be a full-scale, whole borough event in September of this year, with the introduction of National Trust's 'Time Machine' in August intended to engage new audiences in the heritage of the borough. Neither events could take place as planned, but the council, Culture Warrington, Warrington BID and heritage partners from across the borough worked together to ensure Warrington's programme enabled residents to celebrate local stories from the comfort of their own homes, or unearth some hidden local gems in person whilst maintaining appropriate social distancing measures.



*Nat Bookbinder, one of the characters featured in VE Monologues, produced by Ludovico. Walton Hall was used as the backdrop to bring these fascinating Warrington war-time stories to life.*



*Lymm Canal as knitted by Warrington Crafting Community*



*An autumnal view of Walton Hall, taken by a visitor*

## Walton Hall and Gardens

Walton Hall and Gardens is regarded as one of Warrington's premiere tourist destinations, with a growing cultural programme. Until lockdown in March, the Friends of Walton Hall Music continued to hold regular and much loved live chamber music recitals in the Concert Room, opening up the joy of passionate live musicians to the public.

An innovative project to capture the voice of Warrington staff on the estate over the last 120 years has resulted in a collection of recorded interviews with gardening staff who worked at Walton Estate during the 1960's and '70's. A local drama society have recorded the voice of servants from the early 20th century from records of interviews held at the time. Some of these interviews can be found on the audio trail machines at Walton Estate.

A Heritage Open Days event had been planned in partnership with Myerscough College and Walton Lea Partnership, and although the original plans had to be cancelled due to tier changes, an exhibition was held over a longer time period as a pop-up in the Conservatory.

Despite an abrupt cancellation of the rest of the year's cultural events, Walton Hall's grounds remained open and continued to benefit local communities. The estate received the 'We're Good to Go' Visit Britain Industry Standard and became a haven for mental health lifting through its wildlife, environment, interpretation and friendly staff during the pandemic.

## Lymm Heritage Centre

Although unable to open for most of the year, the volunteers at Lymm Heritage Centre were busy preparing for a post-COVID relaunch. Additions to the offer include: a reconstruction of three local Edwardian shop windows, filled with items from the period; a viewing kiosk for the newly updated Lymm Archive, including a Lockdown Gallery; a new guided walk around Lymm within a book, *The Time Traveller's Handbook* including mini-movies to take you back in time as you walk around the village and a collection of stories; a Brazil '66 exhibit celebrating the visit of Brazil and Pele to Lymm for World Cup in 1966; "The Lymm Story" - using the themes of Trades, Transport and Traditions; a new Lymm Heritage Gift Shop.

## RAF Burtonwood Heritage Centre

The centre sadly closed its doors for the rest of the year in March, with insufficient staff to re-open safely and in line with COVID guidance. Volunteers continued to work to improve displays and Gulliver's World were granted Heritage Lottery Emergency Funding to enable them to work towards re-opening the centre in spring 2021 with an enhanced offer.

## Promoting our Culture Offer

Alongside the development of a place-marketing strategy, it is vitally important to develop a strategy to maximise the promotion of existing cultural activities, events and assets throughout the borough. Within Warrington, communication between key partners is becoming stronger and local networks of creative practitioners, heritage groups and cultural organisations are being used more effectively to provide updates, offer support and cross-promote. The Culture Consortium has been a key factor in strengthening partnerships and supporting each other's marketing campaigns.

Regionally, the council have entered into a refreshed partnership with Marketing Cheshire aimed at promoting some of Warrington's key visitor attractions. The new contract has given council owned visitor attractions, such as Walton Hall and Gardens, Warrington Museum and Gallery, Parr Hall and Pyramid, and Warrington Market, a much needed presence on Visit Cheshire online marketing materials and the Chester, Cheshire and Beyond leaflet.



*Lymm Heritage Centre*



# We'll have a cultural programme bursting at the seams

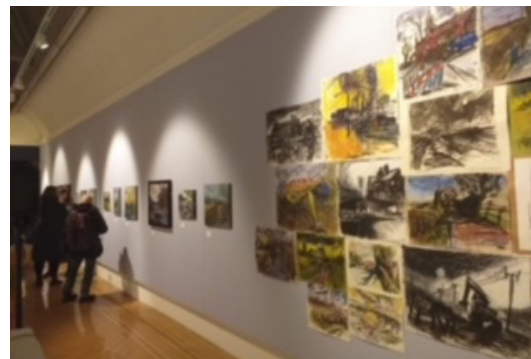
Warrington will be a welcoming place for cultural practitioners to experiment, create, collaborate, champion and lead our cultural growth to produce the highest quality offer for the people of Warrington and beyond.

One of our ambitions is to develop networks of creative practitioners to enable those collaborations which will lead to Warrington's cultural growth. This year has seen many partnerships developing, leading to an exciting programme of diverse and accessible events, using digital platforms and creative use of spaces.

## Culture Warrington

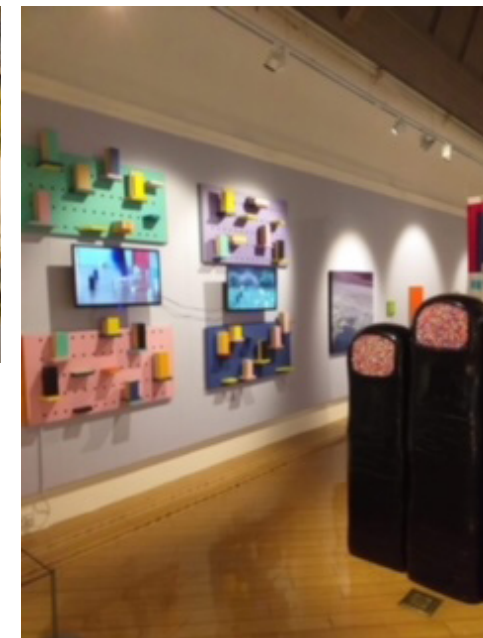
Undeterred by Covid-19 restrictions, Warrington's flagship cultural event, Warrington Contemporary Arts Festival (WCAF), still gave us a platform to experience local and national talent, providing the opportunity for creative professionals to collaborate and develop projects, using new spaces to exhibit and perform.

The revamped Open Competition encouraged entries from across the whole spectrum of contemporary arts, including dance, spoken word, installation art, film, visual arts and photography and welcomed the expertise of previous winner, Marie Jones, to curate and organise this year's competition. Joining the Museum & Art Gallery team were a panel of highly-respected judges from leading arts venues across the North West, further developing the reputation of the Open Competition and WCAF.



Culture Warrington were unable to match the success of last year's Light Night due to the restrictions of the pandemic, but funding from Arts Council England, Warrington BID, Heritage Open Days (National Trust) and Warrington Borough Council has enabled them to commission eight local/regional artists to create new work to animate Warrington Town Centre, from visual artwork to performance and digital installations. Linking with Warrington's Time Machine project, the commissioned work reflects Warrington's past, present or future, and will be positioned at various sites throughout the town centre early in 2021.

Parr Hall / Pyramid events team have continued to build and maintain relationships with national promoters, producers and agents while programming for 2021, ensuring the continuation of high quality performance and cultural experiences.



### WCAF Open Competition Prize Winners 2020:

- WCAF Open 2020 Solo Show Prize - Hope Strickland, 'Home Come Soon'
- WCAF Open 2020 Prize - Tara Collette, 'Unhappy Meal'
- WCAF Open 2020 Highly Commended Prize - Lauren Tucker, 'Neverland'

For the exhibition catalogue visit the [WCAF website](#).



## Not Too Tame

Having taken up residency in Warrington in late 2019, highly acclaimed theatre company Not Too Tame kept people entertained during lockdown with 'Local Legends', a series of online monologues delivered by well-known actors from the region, including Julie Hesmondhalgh, Maxine Peake & Joe Sims. Based on stories from people across the north-west and turned into scripts by some of the North West's most acclaimed writers, the project raised vital support for Warrington charities helping people on the fringes of our community who had been affected by Covid-19: St Rocco's Hospice, Warrington Foodbank and Warrington Wolves Charity Foundation.

Each video was broadcast from the [Not Too Tame website](#) and other dedicated channels.

In more recent months, Not Too Tame have hosted a series of fortnightly online Creative Catch-ups for individuals working in live performance (on or off stage) who are from or live in Warrington. This quickly gained a loyal following of between 30 - 40 artists for every session. The sessions have led to NTT providing a number of Creative Conversations with industry professionals to help with training, experience and creating future opportunities for Warrington & North West Artists.

## Get Creative Festival

Due to take place in May, the national Get Creative Festival, which supports communities to express themselves creatively, was cancelled and instead, the public were encouraged to get creative at home. The council worked closely with Culture Warrington and libraries to release a programme of online events to encourage our communities to continue to engage with high quality creative activities.

## Ludovico and Christmas

Working in partnership with Golden Square and children from 16 primary schools, local production company Ludovico produced a film to accompany the town centre's [Christmas light switch on](#), which took place virtually this year. The virtual lights switch-on, which took place on Friday 27 November, took its inspiration from the Will Ferrell film 'Elf', with the young people's rendition of 'Santa Claus Is Coming to Town' powering up the lights. Local actors from Ludovico's adult acting classes have written and performed Christmas monologues which were released online and screened in Golden Square over the Christmas period.

## Playground Panto

In spite of current performance restrictions, Culture Warrington have worked in partnership with local creative arts organisation, [Community Objectives CIC](#), to present 'Handsome and Dettol', a specially commissioned Covid-19 safe schools' pantomime to spread a bit of Christmas cheer this December. This proved extremely popular with schools as all sessions were fully booked.





# We'll continue to cultivate cultural growth

Warrington will be an incubator for talent and cultural entrepreneurship, providing opportunities for professional support, development pathways and a range of learning platforms.

Although this has been an extremely difficult year for education settings, and school closures has made working with young people more challenging than usual, we have still been able to reach out to our most vulnerable young people through national initiatives such as Let's Create and Let's Craft. Through partnership working, organisations are expanding cultural programmes for young people and offering opportunities to work with industry professionals. More opportunities are being given for young people to be Arts leaders and to design their own programmes of work. Some of the work that has been done this year clearly promotes the various pathways into a creative career.

## Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP)

Although Warrington's LCEP steering group has only met twice this year due to the circumstances, a vision for the LCEP has been created and some areas of focus have been identified. The group will be co-chaired by Janice Pounds (Accent Music Education Hub)

and Leah Biddle (Culture Warrington), both with a vast amount of experience in both leading and delivering cultural education which will enable the group to develop a clear cultural education strategy for Warrington.

## Accent Music Education Hub (Accent MEH)

Due to school closures Accent MEH have been unable to deliver their usual offer of instrumental and vocal provision to primary and secondary schools across Warrington for part of the year. Since schools re-opened in September, 98% of their work has been delivered safely face to face, with 2% of lessons being delivered online. Arts education programmes connected with British Values and Shakespeare have also been delivered. A new collaboration with Resonate Hub (Liverpool) will enable the delivery of more cultural programmes to children and young people.

## Rivers of the World Exhibition

This will be the second year of the Rivers of the World Project, run in partnership between Accent MEH and the Thames Festival Trust, and hosted by Culture Warrington. The project unites Visual Art and Geography, through a study of rivers in Warrington, Halton and our partner country Ethiopia. Following a teacher exchange visit to Ethiopia in February 2020, 12 secondary and primary schools have produced artwork which will be displayed at the Pyramid Arts





## Blooming Art

Moving into new premises in Academy Place early in the year, BloomingArt have been running accredited courses in Art & Design, Creative Crafts and Photography, upskilling our communities and enabling them to reach their full potential. After re-opening in July, the team of fully qualified staff have managed to deliver all classes for 2,500 children and adults.

Warrington Museum and Art Gallery (WMAG)

Adapting to difficult circumstances, staff at Culture Warrington have used some of an Arts Council recovery grant to improve the WMAG education programme through the creation of a new digital offer alongside the usual programme of workshops for visiting schools. The specially designed Digi Packs will focus on local history. In addition, the museum will offer loan boxes to schools and an opportunity to join a live workshop/showcase every Friday afternoon.

Over the summer, advantage was taken of the easing of restrictions and the museum was able to host Priestly College's exhibition, 'Brand Spanking Neon'. Taking inspiration from the Museum's Botany and Geology galleries to create a body of ceramic and textile works, the exhibition aimed to bring to life the myriad forms and textures of the specimens on display, reinventing the collections in a vibrant and light-hearted way.

## Ludovico studio

Ludovico, a Warrington-based media, production and education company, have been delivering acting classes from Pyramid Arts Centre since 2018. Sessions focus on core acting techniques, screen acting for film and TV, stage craft and industry know-how and are available for complete beginners trying acting for the very first time, and established professionals wanting to sharpen their skills.

## ACT NOW!

Delivered by Community Objectives CIC, a local organisation that delivers creative projects that benefit the community, ACT NOW! is a young person-led programme which aims to develop the next generation of 'Arts in the Community' leaders. The group creates performances that benefit the community while gaining experience, knowledge, and understanding from trained professionals about the multitude of career opportunities in the Arts and Community sector. This work has continued online throughout this year.





## Not Too Tame workshops

During their first year in residency in Warrington, Not Too Tame have been offering support to professional actors. In July, Royal Shakespeare Company Director and Cheek by Jowl Associate Director, Owen Horsley, led an online Shakespeare workshop for actors and followed this with a free Q & A which was open to all.

Among the priorities identified by the partnership between the council and Not Too Tame is to engage with communities in Warrington, particularly young people (16 – 30), to develop knowledge and opportunities around pathways to careers in the arts. Relationships have been developed with colleges and a session has been held with Priestley College Performing Arts students about access into drama school, training and career development.

## Bubble-Up

Bubble Up is a new programme from Curious Minds which nurtures new forms of artistic partnership and collaboration at an innovative, hyper-local level, for the benefit of children and young people as they return to schools. In Warrington, the programme is being led by Stepping Stones Creative in partnership with Warrington Youth Club to deliver quality arts experiences to young people with special educational needs with the purpose of contributing to their personal development. The development of Youth Voice is also central to this work.

## Score Creative Education

Score Creative Education specialise in supporting new and emerging talent, artist development and working with vulnerable and hard to reach groups. ACE Covid-19 Emergency funding has enabled them to move their music development offer online. The grant has allowed them to develop new teaching and learning strategies and to extend their geographical reach across the Liverpool city region and beyond.

Working alongside Accent Music Education Hub (Warrington and Halton) and Essential Music Education Hub (Cheshire West and Chester, The Wirral), Score Creative Education have been delivering DJ Skills, Vocal Skills, Song Writing, Instrumental skills, Music Technology, Sound Recording and



Music Theory to children and young people. They have been supporting Accent Music Education Hub to develop a digital strategy, exploring new ways of offering online music education to children and young people.

[How the music leaders have been delivering their online tuition \(vimeo.com\).](https://vimeo.com)

## HE:ART

This creative industries pathways programme was developed by Culture Warrington in partnership with Higher Horizon's for secondary-age and college pupils (Year 9 and above). After delivering 2 successful dance programmes in 2019 a theatre strand was introduced for 2020. The programme consisted of a student visit to University of Chester, including lectures and workshops, masterclasses at Pyramid Arts Centre with Ludovico Studios, Community Objectives and Fine Comb Theatre, talks by industry professionals and watching a professional performance by Frantic Assembly at the Everyman Theatre. Sadly, the opportunity to perform their own devised work at Parr Hall had to be cancelled due to Covid-19.



## Walton Hall

As a result of a successful collaboration in a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, Walton Hall has formed a partnership with Walton Lea Partnership, an organisation which provides supported learning, development and work activities for vulnerable adults and young people with learning disabilities, and Myerscough College in a unique venture to deliver learning in the repaired and transformed Conservatory and Shippon areas of the Walton Estate. This year, students have studied how a typical Victorian estate worked, creating a photography exhibition using recreated images from around the estate and presented their own poetry during a Victorian Afternoon Tea.



*Students from Myerscough College*



*'A beginner's view of the night sky/stargazing' event in the newly restored Vinery at Walton Hall.*



# We'll promote wellbeing through arts and culture

In Warrington, we will promote recognition of the connections between creative and cultural activity and improved social, health and wellbeing outcomes.

Arts Council England's 10-year strategy 'Let's Create' signals a clear national commitment to advancing the contribution of the arts and culture to health and wellbeing, including through social prescribing. This year has seen the development of partnerships and collaborations aimed at planning and delivering a programme of community activities which have led to an exciting, diverse and accessible programme using digital platforms and creative use of spaces. These partnerships will be the springboard for cultural activity in 2021, supporting Warrington's communities to recover from the impact of COVID-19.

## Creative Remedies

This programme of arts and well-being activities usually includes music, visual arts, photography, performing arts and multi-media, held at Pyramid Arts Centre and Blooming Arts Studios. The team of creative practitioners who lead the [Creative Remedies](#) programme have continued to engage their users through online tutorials on Facebook and YouTube channels, which have been achieving about 250 views per week.

## Walton Hall and Warrington Youth Club

Staff at Walton Hall have been working in partnership with Warrington Youth Club to pilot an intergenerational project for older, isolated women, working with primary school pupils to learn eco-crafts. In a separate project, children who are at risk from a low socio-economic background piloted a heritage and cultural activity pack.



*Creative Remedies*

## Let's Create / Let's Craft

Warrington Borough Council and Warrington Local Cultural Education Partnership were successful in bidding for an Arts Council grant (via NW Bridge organisation, [Curious Minds](#)) to deliver Let's Create packs across the town. The funding enabled art supplies and creative materials to be distributed to 300 children and young people in Warrington who are currently most in need of support. The packs were distributed through existing support mechanisms including Early Help, Warrington Youth Service, Family support and Children's Centres, Families First Team, Wired Young Carers and Homestart. Volunteers recruited through Warrington Voluntary Action helped to pit the packs together. This was followed by further funding from the Crafts Council to provide materials for Christmas crafts to vulnerable families and young people in partnership with Homestart Warrington and Foxwood School.

## Latch 52 Initiative

This project, devised and executed by [Community Objectives CIC](#), was a 12 month commission from Latch Ford Big Local Partnership (LFBL), a group of residents in the Latchford area identified by Local Trust as an area of deprivation and reduced opportunities. Community Objectives CIC, working in partnership with multiple local and grass roots organisations, facilitated creative workshops, events, social media campaigns and projects for all ages through the vehicle of Performing Arts, aimed at engaging the community in becoming more active citizens in their community and creating a greater sense of pride in the area.



Let's Create/Let's Craft art supplies



Latch 52 group



Virtual DAD day

## Warrington Disability Partnership (WDP) – DAD Virtual

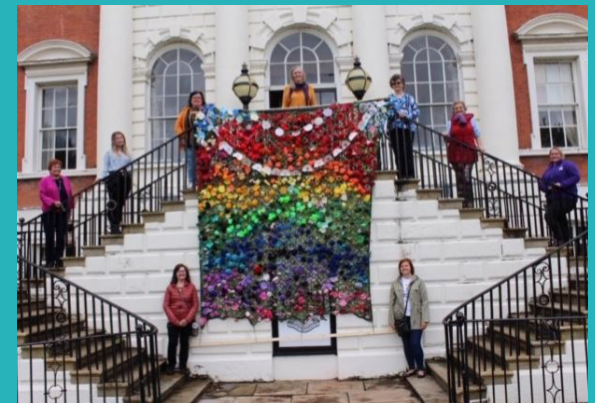
Disability Awareness Day (DAD) is recognised as the largest annual event of its kind in the world, and this year was unable to take place in its usual home, Walton Hall and Gardens, due to COVID-19. Refusing to let the pandemic stop its mission of providing vital information, advice and guidance to disabled people, WDP brought the festival of 2020 to its audiences virtually.

Working in partnership with 4WardFutures, a registered charity working with people who have a range of neuro-diverse conditions such as autism and Asperger's, WDP created an innovative, interactive online platform to deliver all the fun and entertainment of its live event along with the information, advice and guidance that the show and charity prides itself on. Launched on 25 October, the free, virtual event can be accessed on the [DAD virtual website](#).

The event was a huge success with 25,000 hits, more than 5000 visits and over 3,500 unique visitors. Over 200 exhibitors took part in addition to the Arts Marquee and Sports Zone and WDP facilitated nine free seminars on a variety of disability related topics during the following week, with over 300 attendees.

## Arts and culture in community organisations

Many of our third sector organisations, charities and voluntary groups participate in arts and cultural activities as part of their work. Since March, many of these groups have been unable to meet in person but have continued to connect with their members through online activity. A lovely example of this is the beautiful rainbow tribute to the NHS displayed outside the Town Hall that Warrington Crafters have created. More than 1,000 hand-made flowers, made by members throughout lockdown, contributed to the display. Among those who made flowers as part of the project were Lymm, St. Elphin's and Whitecross Crafters, Westy Friendship Group, Friends of Lymm Library, Loving Hands and HMP Risley.



## Blooming Art

Blooming Art has continued to deliver free and affordable art to our Warrington communities throughout lockdown and has worked in partnership with other organisations to deliver much-needed creative sessions. They were successful in obtaining a small grant from Cheshire Community Foundation which enabled art packs to be distributed to adult learners who were struggling financially during Covid-19. This enabled learners to carry on with their studies whilst maintaining positive mental health.

In addition to a weekly community Art & Well-being course open to all adults, Blooming Art also secured funding for 'Time for Me', a weekly session for older people and those struggling with their mental fitness.

Working in partnership with Life Time Warrington, on-line drawing videos have helped to keep vulnerable adults engaged throughout lockdown.



# We'll keep growing our creative tech and digital industries

**Creative Technology and digital platforms will be an essential part of Warrington's buoyant economy and will help shape the arts and cultural scene to be more accessible, dynamic and diverse.**

In 'A Great and Curious Future' we have recognised the importance of placing creative tech and digital at the heart of our plans to enable our cultural programme to add significantly to Warrington's audiences and therefore to our economy. This year has seen the development of new digital formats, platforms and projects in Warrington which have engaged a wide variety of people and enhanced cultural activity across our Arts venues and in libraries.

## Made.Digital

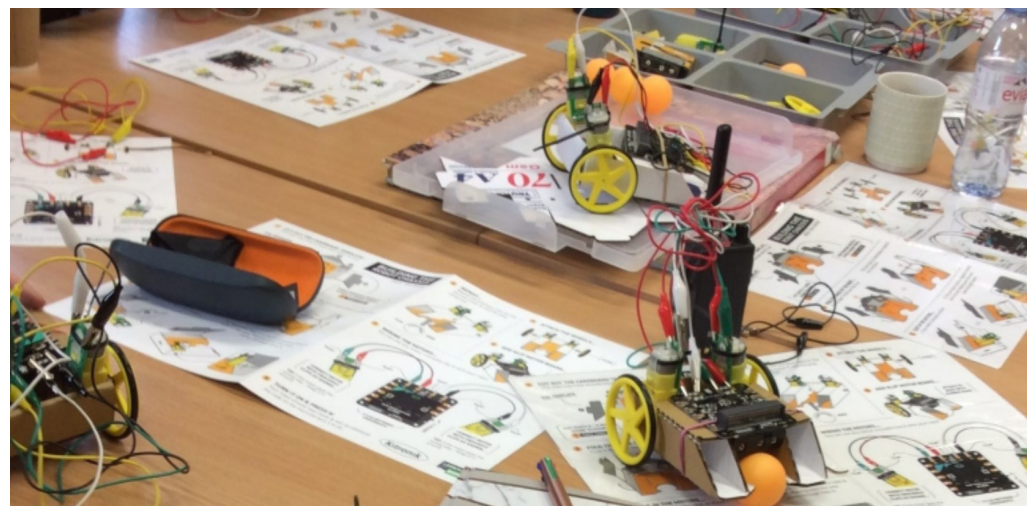
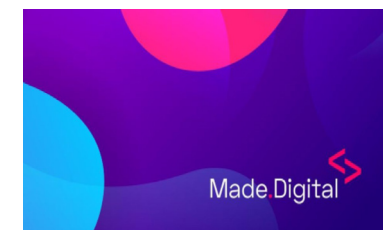
As part of the LEP's Local Growth Fund, Culture Warrington and LiveWire received £19,992 to create the Made.Digital programme. The aim of the programme is to make the existing Warrington Museum & Library building and Livewire's network of community-based libraries hubs for the delivery of digital programmes and workshops for coding clubs, schools, local businesses and digital creatives in the community.

Working in partnership with Spark PenkethMakerspace, staff from Warrington's libraries have been upskilled to develop a digital programme as part of an outreach offer across our communities, including robotics, microbits, block coding, 3D design in Tinkercad, and 3D printing on an Ultimaker2+ machine which was received in March. Before libraries were forced to close back in March, the team hosted a workshop which included learning about robotics and 3D printing and was attended by 51 young people and 19 adults. From March, many staff were furloughed and plans to deliver workshops in person had to be put on hold.



In August, following the return of some staff from furlough leave, a new YourLiveWireLibraries Facebook page was launched with 'Digital Tuesdays' providing an additional digital reach. In November, Spark PenkethMakerspace delivered 4 in-person workshops with 120 children learning Python coding, using new laptops funded by the programme.

August also saw the launch of new 'Made. Digital' channels on [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) which have been the platform for ongoing digital activity including online 'how to' tutorials such as Digital Storytimes and Coding Instruction videos.





## Culture Warrington

As described in previous sections, Culture Warrington have continued to engage with audiences through digital means throughout lockdown and tier restrictions. Specific Covid-19 related recovery grants have been used to enhance and expand the organisation's use of digital within their cultural offer. A new museum App, an Artefact Viewfinder which will be available on the website in 2021, podcasts and schools' digi-packs have all been under development in 2020. The use of digital applications within Warrington Contemporary Arts Festival and other programmes have been used to animate the town centre. All of this work lays the foundations for an increased digital art presence in the town's cultural offer.

Follow Culture Warrington and all its venues on social media:

### Culture Warrington:

Facebook: [culturewarrington](#)  
Twitter: [@Culture\\_WA](#)

### Pyramid & Parr Hall

Facebook: [PyramidParrHall](#)  
Twitter: [@PyramidParrHall](#)  
Instagram: [pyramidparrhallofficial](#)

### Warrington Museum & Art Gallery:

Facebook: [WarringtonMuseum](#)  
Twitter: [@warringtonmus](#)  
Instagram: [warringtonmuseum](#)

### Warrington Contemporary Arts Festival

Facebook: [warringtonartsfestival](#)  
Twitter: [@WarrArtsFest](#)  
Instagram: [warringtonartsfest](#)

## Walton Hall and Gardens

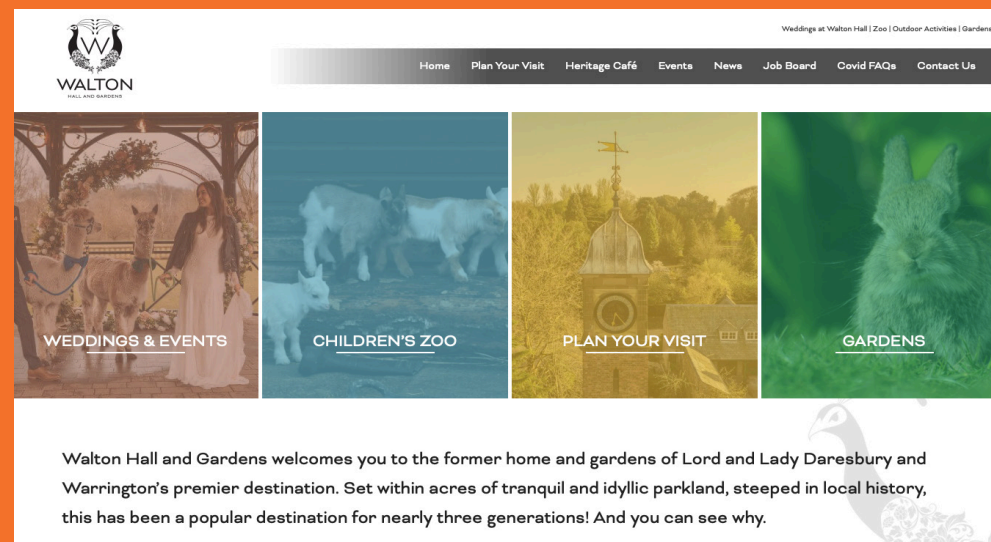
A newly designed, stand-alone website for Walton Hall and Gardens was launched which showcases the culture, leisure, heritage and history of the gardens and allows direct booking for plays, shows and events.

Web: Home Page - [waltonhallgardens.co.uk](http://waltonhallgardens.co.uk)

Facebook: [Walton Hall and Gardens \(facebook.com\)](https://www.facebook.com/WaltonHallandGardens)

Twitter: [@Walton\\_Gardens](https://twitter.com/Walton_Gardens)

Instagram: [waltonhallgardens](https://www.instagram.com/waltonhallgardens)



## Town Deal – Digital Hub

One of the highlights of this year was that confirmation was received from the government that Warrington will receive £22.1 million funding for projects to develop the town investment plan (pending completed Business Cases). The funding will go towards seven key projects, including a new Digital Hub. This project aims to develop a Digital Hub with 3 functions: supporting idea generation with research capability; providing tools to test ideas; providing incubator space for development and enterprise. The hub will be aimed at all aspects of digital and disruptive technologies such as 3D printing, Augmented Reality and essential skills for the 4th Industrial Revolution, and will have a significant focus on the gaming sector. As well as providing a significant boost to the creative industries in Warrington, the hub will enable us to enhance our use of digital across cultural programmes to create a more accessible, dynamic and diverse arts and cultural scene.



# Building beautiful - We'll commit to asset growth and improvements

There will be a commitment to developing our existing assets into attractive, thriving venues in which a varied cultural programme exists that makes a valuable and recognisable contribution to Warrington's place shaping agenda.

2020 has seen a record amount of external investment in culture in Warrington. Although our venues and assets have been hard hit by lockdowns and inevitable closures, there has been a determination to not only survive the pandemic, but to come back stronger and enriched. There are clear signs that the Arts, Culture and Heritage are becoming more embedded in Warrington's place-making and tourism strategies, and that their contribution to a thriving economy is recognised as highly significant.

## Town Deal: Remastered Cultural Hub - Pyramid Arts Centre

The second of the seven Town Deal projects is a proposal to redevelop Pyramid Arts Centre as an accessible, modern and flexible space for creative production, development, entrepreneurialism and industry growth.

The proposal draws on the ambitions within the Cultural Framework to strengthen Pyramid's position as a multi-disciplinary venue for the presentation of arts and culture with a focus on nurturing local creativity and accelerating talent development. This fund will enable Pyramid to fulfil its aims to be a home for Warrington's creative community, a springboard for their careers and an environment that enables them to learn, collaborate and produce new and exciting multi-disciplinary work to be presented in a refreshed, fit-for-purpose and tech enabled venue.



## New Art Spaces in partnership with Castlefield Gallery

A really important aspect of Town Centre revival is the creative use of empty retail units, and this year the council and Culture Warrington have teamed up with [Castlefield Gallery](#), Manchester, to provide

subsidised studio and exhibiting space for artists and creative practitioners in the old town centre Marks and Spencer unit. This partnership aims to support career and practice development, giving local, regional, national and international audiences an opportunity to engage with new artwork. There will be public access to the space as and when artists exhibit their work. There are currently nine local artists signed up to use the building as a unique testing ground for experimental and large-scale creative projects. Although public engagement opportunities have been hindered by Covid-19, some of the resident artists have used the window display spaces to make temporary exhibitions.

## Technically Brilliant Art Gallery

Another example of creative use of former retail spaces is [Technically Brilliant](#), which opened in the Golden Square in 2019. The popularity of the gallery continues to grow and, when able to open, there has been a steady stream of visitors, some of whom have been first time visitors to Warrington town centre. There has been a huge response to artist call-outs for submissions to the gallery's three exhibitions, which have provided established and emerging local artists an avenue to the public whilst giving Warrington town centre visitors access to art. Undeterred by local lockdown and tier restrictions, Technically Brilliant have continued to engage with the public through social media and have operated a 'click-and-collect' system to continue with sales.



# Summary and Highlights

This report has highlighted the resilience of our cultural organisations and individual creative practitioners during the pandemic. Closed venues and the loss of live audiences have given way to new ways of working which have the potential to open the door to many future innovations.

Here are the top 10 highlights of 2020:

- **Partnerships** – new, exciting partnerships have formed, developing innovative ways of working and laying the foundations for enhanced cultural programmes in the future.
- **Networks** – the strengthening of existing networks and the launching of a new online network will expand our pool of creatives, which will have a positive effect on our future cultural provision.
- **Funding** – an increase in investment into our cultural assets and programme is an indication of Warrington's determination to develop a culture, arts and heritage scene worthy of its people.
- **Audiences** – some of our creatives have found that the transition to digital platforms have enabled them to reach wider audiences than would have been possible if 'live' events had been permitted.
- **Marketing** – partnership working has led to a more collaborative approach to marketing across the borough, using social media platforms to cross-pollinate audiences.
- **Digital Technology** – new technologies have been adopted across all aspects of our creative organisations and programmes, not only for marketing purposes, but also to engage our multiple, diverse audiences.
- **Reimagining Spaces** – 'meanwhile' spaces and permanent residencies have all contributed to the reinvigoration of the town centre.



- **Warrington's Stories** – a renewed interest in our town's heritage and the impact this can have on regeneration programmes will benefit Warrington's future redevelopment and place-making programmes.
- **Creative Pathways** – an increase in opportunities for young people to work with creative professionals is a stepping stone in achieving our ambition to develop pathways into the creative industries.
- **Health and Wellbeing** – Covid-19 has highlighted the UK's health and wellbeing inequality issues and the pandemic has had a seriously detrimental effect on people's mental health. During these challenging times many of us have turned to the arts for support, demonstrating the powerful, positive influence that arts and creativity can have on physical and mental health. In Warrington, partnerships are beginning to form which will create more opportunities for delivering Arts for Health programmes.



# Going Forwards: 2021

Although tremendous progress has been made towards achieving the ambitions set out in A Great and Curious Future, this report highlights where there are still gaps and which areas need more focus going forwards. Appendix 1 provides a graphic representation of our progress towards each objective in terms of the level and strength of activity in 2020.

Here is a summary of potential areas of focus for 2021:

**Covid-19 Recovery** – The pandemic has laid bare the deep inequalities in every town, resulting in some of our communities being disproportionately affected. Our focus as a borough for the next 12 months will be on helping to support the most affected communities and individuals to recover from the effects of the pandemic. Arts, culture and heritage programmes can play a significant role in encouraging social cohesion, particularly at a time when localised cultural programmes will be especially appealing. Covid-19 recovery is something that we should factor into our short and medium term cultural plans.

**Health and Wellbeing** - The lockdown and social distancing measures have made evident the importance of arts and culture for people's health and mental well-being. Although there is a great deal of work taking place in Warrington which supports the health and well-being agenda, there is no coherent approach and funding opportunities are not maximised. This could be an area of focus for 2021, building on new partnerships and utilising the skills across our growing creative networks to devise cultural and creative programmes which improve social, health and wellbeing outcomes.

**Digital** – At the start of the first lockdown in March, it became clear that some of our organisations' digital platforms were not fit for purpose. Some of those issues have begun to be addressed with the help of Arts Recovery Grants, and the lockdown situation has enabled us to accelerate our plans to improve digital offers. This is an area which still needs a great deal of investment and skills development, and we should continue to put the objectives within section 5 of our Cultural Framework at the centre of our future cultural plans.

**Cultural Infrastructure** – It is important to remember that digital access, although important at the current time, will not replace a live cultural experience or all the jobs that go with it. We must continue to support our cultural organisations, both venue-based and otherwise, to continue to develop diverse and accessible cultural programmes which allow everyone to have access to a diverse range of meaningful, high-quality cultural experiences. We must ensure that support to cultural organisations also reaches individual freelance artists and other creative professionals. The valuable role in delivering cultural programmes to our communities played by civic infrastructure other than cultural centres, such as libraries, community centres, leisure venues and public spaces, should not be underestimated. Developing cultural infrastructure should be a priority in Warrington's future development plans.

**Culture and Regeneration** - It is important that we recognise the value of cultural participation as a driver for post Covid-19 recovery, not only in terms of social and health impacts, but also as a vehicle for economic recovery. As we develop our Arts, Culture and Heritage programmes, it is vital that we continue to strive to embed these programmes in Warrington's place-making and tourism strategies. The support of local communities is crucial in achieving sustainable growth, and it is important not to overlook the valuable contribution that can be made by creative communities to regeneration plans. A cultural offer which is closely aligned with our heritage will contribute significantly to our place-making goals. It is important that we align our regeneration programmes carefully with our cultural and heritage development.



*Looking to the future:  
Light Night 2019.*



# A Great and Curious Future

Warrington's vision for  
Cultural Growth 2020-2025

1 year review (January 2021)