

A Tavistock Community Arts Facility

Background

This short report seeks to introduce the concept of a community arts facility for the town of Tavistock and its surrounding area, in order to generate interest, support and momentum.

The need for a community arts facility was highlighted during consultation on the Tavistock Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan *sets out the community's ambition for the town, the priorities for change and the approach that will guide future Planning decisions in Tavistock*. Following the consultation stages, a Community Arts Facility has been included in the Plan as follows:

Policy CF2: Community Infrastructure Projects
<p>1. Development proposals which deliver, contribute towards or support delivery of the following community social infrastructure projects will be supported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Skate park; ii) Meadows Playpark Improvement; iii) Multi use games area; iv) Allotments (on additional sites); v) Cemetery; and, vi) Community arts facility.

The Plan also states that the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group *will work with partners to explore provision of a community arts facility, space and workshops*.

To demonstrate the extent of the community's aspirations for such a facility, a total of 68 comments were received during consultation on the Plan, specifically relating to the provision of arts facilities, including:

- A really good arts centre and gallery space;*
- An arts maker space and gallery and community centre;*
- Development of art facilities in Tavistock - particularly space to make and exhibit art work;*
- Art facilities for community use;*
- An art centre, catering for all modalities, several spaces so equipment can be left and also exhibits. This would be an additional benefit of attracting visitors;*
- More and improved arts and cultural facilities, including for art, performing art and music;*
- An Art centre: The Printworks/Butchers hall are good, but no place for longer term exhibitions;*
- More workshop classes and workshop spaces, art supplies available;*
- I would like to see an Art Centre or art facilities for demonstrations or display;*
- Community art gallery for local amateur artists;*
- Art centre including art studios for public use;*
- Specific arts space. Open to all. Workshops put on by individuals/groups to share skills in a friendly environment;*
- A community hub perhaps owned and run by the community;*
- A dedicated space for participating in and learning about various art forms, and an exhibition space for art;*

One consultee seemed to sum it up with the following contribution:

- A space for arts which would be large enough and central enough to engage with more of our community. An arts space that would allow exhibitions and residencies, and would offer affordable creative opportunities for people to make art, make new friends and connections, develop networks of support, as well as new skills. An outreach worker*

to do the development work to ensure that the people who need it most access the affordable opportunities. We definitely need a space for live music which is original and not just tribute bands. They definitely have their place, but there are so many talented bands/musicians around (even locally). I would also like to see an effective engagement strategy which would target and encourage those who are most disengaged in our area to try out/join in with opportunities. This again would require dedicated outreach work to enable disadvantaged people in our community feel that this town really does offer something for them: ie listening to and responding to their expressed needs in this context. You know, the sort of people who won't be responding to this survey, however well-intentioned it is ... I am very happy that you are asking people these questions. It's important that responses are taken seriously and acted upon where there is funding to do so. I understand that times are incredibly challenging at the moment. Good luck and well done for opening up the conversation :)

The proven benefits of arts and culture

It is widely acknowledged that Art contributes to the vibrancy, attractiveness and economy of a place, as well as the skills and wellbeing of individuals, and has a positive impact on both community cohesion and broader citizen engagement.

In a study undertaken by McKinsey and Co, arts and cultural activities were considered by the population to be amongst the most positively valued. Their study also calculated that in 2022 the value to the UK economy of the creative sector was £49 billion, the same as the food and beverage services sector. Arts and culture themselves support £23 billion of GVA and 360,000 jobs. (CEBR)

In St Ives, for example, known for its arts offer and which has a similar population to Tavistock, visitor spend is estimated to be around £200 million per year, with the Tate gallery alone contributing around £12 million per year to the local economy. (Local Government Association)

Evidence from West Devon Art Workshops shows that over 2/3rds of participants in art and craft activities consistently record a significant positive impact not only on artistic skill but also on *feeling part of a community, being socially engaged, increased self-confidence and improved sense of purpose.*

Identifying the Need

Whilst the NDP covers only the parishes of Tavistock and Whitchurch, the Tavistock market town catchment area includes the surrounding villages and parishes including Princetown, Bere Alston, Gulworthy, Buckland Monachorum, Yelverton, Horrabridge, Lamerton, Peter Tavy, Brentor and Mary Tavy. West Devon Art Workshops draw people into the town from a wide catchment including Okehampton, Holsworthy, Launceston, Calstock and Plymouth. Given the market town role of Tavistock in providing for the needs of its wider community, the need for a facility in the town should be considered in this broader geographical context.

Anecdotal evidence of need amongst visual and performing artists in the area, suggests actual demand for the following:

- Studio space / rehearsal space
- Exhibition / gallery space / performance space
- Space to hold workshops and run courses

In relation to visual art, there are many artists in the wider Tavistock area as evidenced by the following 'groups': Drawn to the Valley (111 members); Tavistock Group of Artists (60 members); West Devon Art Group (Peter Tavy) (45 members); Buckland Art Group (12 members); Whitchurch Art Group (15 members).

The performance arts are also thriving in the town but have no real venue, having to hire spaces ad hoc for performances and rehearsals etc. This does not create enough of an environment in which local talent is encouraged or given the support and space to gain confidence. In addition, Tavistock has little to offer

smaller touring artists or groups, either musical or theatre, which means that Tavistock misses out on the experience that other towns in the region can benefit from.

Young people are particularly poorly served in the local area, summed up by a quote from West Devon Art Workshops:

There is a clear thirst for art, shown by the enthusiasm from participants However this has only highlighted how few opportunities there are for young people to engage with the arts in this largely rural area. Art has been squeezed from the primary curriculum and is underfunded in secondary schools, where the chance to engage with contemporary approaches is limited.

One of the overriding observations from both the consultation and further conversations with local arts practitioners, is that there is no one focus for the arts in the town, no venue that really welcomes and nurtures local talent from across the artistic spectrum.

What might a CAF be?

Community Arts Facilities exist in many different guises in other towns and cities. Many cater for the full range of art and creativity including performing arts, dance, drama, poetry and music. Services and facilities provided can include:

- Performance space and Auditorium
- Rehearsal and practice space
- Gallery and exhibition space
- Studio and work space
- Space to hold workshops and run courses and classes
- Both physical and 'online' venue and spaces
- The provision of associated artist services such as art supplies and picture framing
- Business support
- Recording studio
- Space for associated recreational and health activities such as yoga
- Space for working on community arts projects such as Lantern Parade, Carnival floats etc
- Opportunities for digital creativity
- Outreach into the community to encourage latent creativity

Initial conversations indicate that a facility in Tavistock could be based on the following principles:

- Be Community owned / led / managed and supported by a community of friends / volunteers
- Encompass arts and creativity in its widest definition
- Be welcoming for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds, including significant youth involvement
- Be based on a financially sustainable operating model
- Be *the* place for arts within Tavistock, with both a physical and online presence
- Be a catalyst and enabler for creative and social projects within the wider community
- Enable an increase in community participation in arts and creative activities within the wider area, thus providing additional footfall for existing arts venues and projects
- Be a significant contributor to the local economy, bringing new experiences and hence new audiences and additional visitors to the town

What is clear from other arts centres in other towns and cities is that it is not just the bricks and mortar that makes the centre successful, it is having an enthusiastic and knowledgeable centre manager / promoter / compere, who is not only able to reach out to the local community but also has the ability to attract visiting

artists, musicians and theatre groups. The most successful venues are also able to appeal to and provide for all elements of the local community not just a select few.

Existing provision in the town

Whilst there is not one dedicated CAF in the town or wider catchment area, there are a number of arts and community venues that to a degree, individually, go some limited way to meeting some of the requirements. None of them however provide a comprehensive ‘home’ for the promotion of arts and creativity in the town, or for the creation of a welcoming arts community:

Community arts provision

The Printworks: Run by Kingdon House Community Association, The Printworks offers rooms for community use; and includes courses, groups, activities and events. Currently, there is a flourishing range of activities in arts, crafts, printing, yoga, musical theatre, dance, singing, meditation, discussion, support, and well-being. The venue also contains shared studio space for up to 3 artists / makers.

The Alexander Adult and Community Learning Centre: Owned and managed by Learn Devon (Devon County Council), the centre offers courses, room and hall hire.

West Devon Art Workshops: One-off workshops, weekly classes and courses in a wide range of Art & Craft techniques, and high quality art workshops for community groups, schools or organisations, run by Andy and Gill Cairns.

Butchers Hall and Town Hall: Run by Tavistock Town Council the facilities can be hired by the hour / day for performances, exhibitions and market stalls etc. Hosts a monthly arts market.

Commercial Arts provision

Tavistock Wharf: A privately run arts centre offering live music, cinema, theatre and other events. There is also a small Art Gallery, Coffee Shop and Licensed Bar with a waterside terrace.

Wildwood Arts: A friendly, independent art gallery based in Horrabridge, representing artists who work on Dartmoor and across the Southwest, currently representing over forty artists from Bristol to the Scilly Isles.

Elford Fine Art: Gallery offering a collection of period and contemporary paintings, including oil paintings, watercolours, pastels and drawings, feature landscapes, coastal, marine, genre and animal subjects from the 19th Century to the present day.

South West Crafts: Artists & Craftsman's online shop, with Gallery in Tavistock

The Paint Box: Patrick King's one man gallery

Heather Jane and Co: wide variety of crafted creations from more than 140 south west based independent craft makers.

Tavistock Picture Framing Gallery: Picture framing, mirrors and a selection of international art.

Initial identification of possible options and next steps

There are a number of ways in which the provision of a community arts facility could be pursued. The eventual choice will depend on a number of factors including, detailed assessment of demand, availability of funding, potential long term viability, how it dovetails with or supports existing provision, availability of sites

and/or premises, and of course, community will and ambition. Of course the eventual chosen route may be a combination of some or all these options.

It is clear however, from the consultation, and from initial further conversations, that a community based solution rather than a commercial one appears to be the favoured route. This would better enable any facility to meet the needs of people of different ages, abilities and backgrounds.

- Option A Provision of a state of the art new facility that meets all identified needs
- Option B Provision of smaller new facility(ies), meeting some of the identified needs, filling the gaps and dovetailing with existing provision
- Option C A comprehensive package of additional support to the existing provision to enable it to meet a broader need than currently
- Option D Support given on a coordinated but more ad hoc basis as and when new commercial or community proposals come forward, either through the planning system or through provision of enhanced business and other support, or the use of publicly owned assets, eg meanwhile uses in vacant shops, bringing upper floors back into use.

To progress this a number of initial steps are suggested:

1. Establish a steering group / working party
2. Foster links with, and encourage input from stakeholders and potential supporters
3. Provide further 'expert' input into the NDP and wider planning process as required
4. Carry out / commission a strategic feasibility study
5. Present feasibility study to all interested parties and those who could be instrumental in supporting delivery

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Acknowledgements

With thanks to the following who have provided some additional perspectives:

Ian Wright, NPD steering group
Vicki Lloyd, Tavistock Youth Café
Andy Cairns, West Devon Art Workshops
Peter Jones, The Printworks
Julu Irvine, local musician
Tanya Morel, local artist
Adrian Bower, local musician
Simon Glossop, local musician