Arts & Theatre

News

City Council unveil 2035 Sheffield Culture Strategy

Sophie Layton (she/her)

Sheffield City Council have launched a city-wide Culture Strategy for 2035, aimed at revolutionising the city's approach and appreciation towards the culture sectors. The 'all encompassing' approach was developed through consultation with arts groups across the city and country, and in collaboration with and funding from Arts Council England and The University of Sheffield. The strategy was formally approved by the Council's Economic Development and Skills Committee at the end of October, and presented as a "guide and vision for the future".

In a statement released by the Council, the local authority highlighted the "enormous benefits to the city" cultural industries bring, both in terms of financially and interpersonally. "Sheffield is home to more than 2,000 cultural and creative businesses, providing around 9,000 jobs and generating almost £1bn of economic impact annually". It is hoped that the new strategy will be instrumental in paving the way forward over the next decade for the cultural sector within the city.

The strategy contains both three missions and three values, which form the basis of the ongoing plans. Aiming to ignite, accelerate and elevate the cultural potential of Sheffield and the surrounding areas, the plan wants to focus on ensuring the future of the arts is inclusive and welcoming, collaborative with an emphasis on mentoring, and open, transparent and accountable to all.

The 30-page plan highlights the current state and importance of cultural diversity within Sheffield, the purpose of the strategy and an extensive activation plan with ten established outcomes, including greater investment, access for young people, addressing the climate emergency and an increase in cultural participation. The strategy also included a collective call to action to the sector, City Council, South Yorkshire Combined Mayoral Authority and the private sector, hoping to begin work as soon as possible to ensure swift delivery.

Sarah Sharp, former Executive and Artistic Director of the Montgomery Theatre and Arts Centre, and now Culture Manager at Sheffield City Council, thanked the culture team at the City Council for their work, praising the "passion" that has led to its development.

"This is a moment of opportunity for Sheffield, with all parts of the sector agreed on the need to do things differently. Our culture strategy will support and guide the sector to grow within this city-wide transformation, delivering on the remarkable potential of this city for years to come."

However, not everyone was enamoured by the new culture strategy, with some expressing "upset, concern and anger" at what they believe as a key omission from the strategy. Sheffield author, historian and teacher John Stocks, one of 12 trustees of the charity Sheffield Home of Football, shared his dismay that football had not been included in the city-wide culture strategy.

"According to [...] Sheffield Star, culture is 'arts, entertainment, theatres, museums and galleries' [...] Football is vibrant, visceral, rich electic and ever evolving [...]It embraces cutting edge design, art, fashion and photography. It engages ordinary people in music in an instant. Great writers have played football".



Credit: Tom Dixon

In a recent opinion piece for Forge Press Arts & Theatre, Adelaide Mason debated whether sport counts as culture, arguing that "overall, [she does] think that sport should count as culture but [...] that grouping it specifically with media and culture in a single Government Department could potentially be quite dangerous because it gives the Government the opportunity to forget about other aspects of culture".

Advocates of this strategy would argue that it addresses a range of problems facing many of the cultural industries, including some mention of the risk of venue loss, increasingly prevalent given the swathes of small and independent venues currently at risk across the country, including in Sheffield.

A recent comment on Forge TV's 'This Week in Sheffield' by SU President Daisy Watson seemingly suggested that the University of Sheffield Drama Studio is at risk, and given the lack of attention paid to the arts as highlighted by Culture Committee Chair Dame Caroline Dinenage MP speaking recently to Forge Press Arts & Theatre, this strategy may be the first steps to addressing key issues.

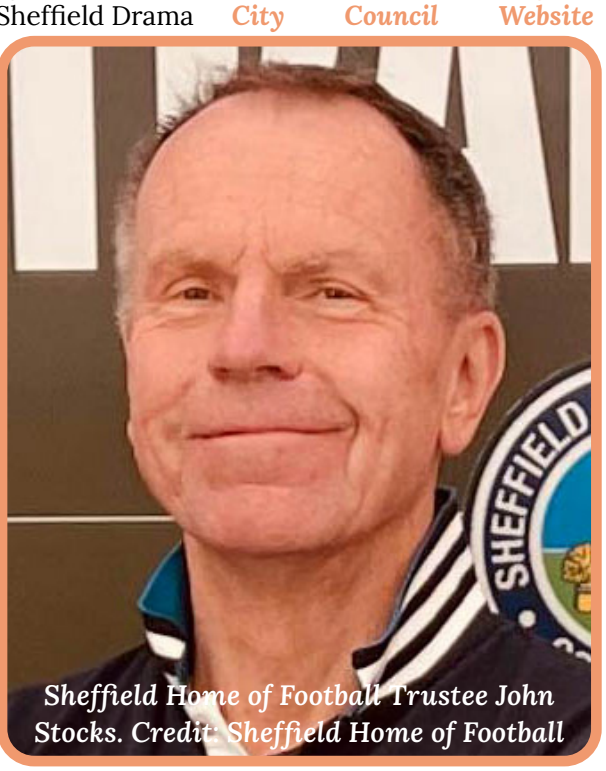
Whilst some division is clear about the scope of the newly-revealed culture strategy, its announcement by the City Council gives the public an insight into the intended direction of travel for the cultural industries within our city going into the future. Whether the strategy will be effective or fully realised remains to be seen, but it marks a clear intent for the future of Sheffield's culture, and where it could be in a decade's time, should swift progress from a range of stakeholders be actioned.

The full Sheffield City Council Culture Strategy for 2035 can be found on the Sheffield City Council Website



City Council Culture Manager Sarah Sharp. Credit: The University of Sheffield





Sheffield Home of Football Trustee John Stocks. Credit: Sheffield Home of Football