

## **The Arts Matter**

Worcestershire County Council has welcomed the results of a comprehensive study to investigate the contribution of the arts to the local economy and social well being of communities in Worcestershire. The study was commissioned by Worcestershire County Council in partnership with The Elmley Foundation, an independent grant making charity which supports the arts in Herefordshire and Worcestershire, with the overall aim of assisting the long term strategic case for funding the arts across the County in the future.

The results provide good news for a county being hit by the economic downturn. By reviewing the income, value of money spent on local suppliers, local job employment and tourism spend from overnight visitors the study revealed that the six major arts providers focused on in the study, are generating in the region of £31 million a year and supporting 250 local jobs. Put simply this means that for every £1 invested in the arts by local authorities in Worcestershire £32 of value is generated into the Worcestershire economy. By way of comparison the contribution of the arts sector to the Worcestershire economy is believed to be broadly equivalent to the combined impact of Symphony Hall and The Hippodrome on Birmingham's economy.

The study undertaken by ERS, a national economic development consultancy, focused on the work of six significant arts organisations and projects, namely; The Three Choirs Festival at Worcester, Malvern Theatres, Number 8 Community Arts Centre, Pershore, Shindig (Worcestershire's Rural Touring and community scheme), The Palace Theatre Redditch and Worcester Live (incorporating The Swan Theatre, Huntingdon Hall, The Ghost Walk of Worcester, The Worcester Festival and Shakespeare at the Commandery).

The study also investigated the social impact the arts have on the communities and individuals of Worcestershire. Using the Government's National Indicator 11 'Engagement In The Arts' statistics, the study recorded how Worcestershire already has a higher than average percentage of people in the local community attending and/or participating in the arts with 49.7% compared to a national average of 45.2% and a regional West Midlands average of 41%.

The most significant benefits were discovered in the area of education, with the Arts Education Service reporting an increase in levels of participation and achievement amongst children and young people and one of the highest number of local authority Artsmark Gold schools in the Country.

The contribution of volunteers were also highlighted throughout each case study as a valuable indicator of community involvement and participation, with each arts organisation involved sustained by substantial numbers of local volunteers fundraising, stewarding and working in box offices. The encouragement of healthy lifestyles contributing to mental and physical well being was also highlighted as a positive outcome derived from the varied dance, drama and amateur dramatic and operatic societies organised at the venues for all age groups. The study also found that the safe, inclusive and trusted nature of the public spaces offered by Malvern Theatres, Number 8, The Swan Theatre, Huntingdon Hall and The Palace Theatre also contributed to strengthening community safety.

As the economic downturn continues and competition for funding becomes even harder, the pressure on the arts sector to evidence the value of their economic and social impact has never been more important. As a result of this study an impact assessment tool has been devised which can be used by arts organisations in receipt of a local authority grant to assist them with demonstrating their social and economic impact.

Stephen Wilson, Worcestershire County Council Arts Officer said,  
"The findings of this study have provided concrete evidence of the way the arts inspire, support and enrich not just our lives but the economy of where we live. We hope that the development of the toolkit will provide a valuable resource for all arts organisations to prove their worth and encourage them to develop in new and exciting ways."

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#### **Editors Notes:**

**The two main aims of the study were to:**

- **Undertake and impact assessment to help demonstrate the contribution of the arts to the economy and social well being of communities in Worcestershire; and**
- **Inform the long term strategic case for the value of supporting the arts through direct funding, advice, advocacy and capacity building from Local Authorities and other developmental agencies in the future.**