

# Preston Cultural Networks Investigation

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The Brewtime Collective – commissioners of this report - is a self-organised network of independent creative & cultural practitioners in Preston that wants to create a sea-change by embedding cultural experiences in the lives and expectations of all the people of Preston.

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**Preston Cultural Networks Investigation** is a complementary piece of research to ascertain how Preston's creatives currently network and how best we can grow these partnerships.

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Brewtime  
Collective

*Preston's Creative Network*



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# Introduction

The Brewtime Collective is a self-organised network of independent creative practitioners in Preston. The group was established to give a voice to the city's creatives during the ongoing development of the 12-year cultural strategy which has been formulated by the Cultural Framework Board.

Preston City Council published a Cultural Framework plan in 2014, covering 2014 to 2018. In 2018, it began work on its new 12-year strategy, increased from the initial 10-year plan to allow it to incorporate the next Preston Guild in 2022.

The current Cultural Framework Board is comprised of representatives from Preston City Council, Lancashire County Council, University of Central Lancashire, Marketing Lancashire, Curious Minds, Creative Lancashire, The Harris Museum & Art Gallery, plus three independent cultural governors - Matt Wilde, Steph Fletcher and Phil Kaila. The board is planning to increase participation and representation by widening its membership.

This communications report was funded by ACE as part of a Brewtime Collective project 'Brewing Up Together' which included a now postponed (due to covid-19 lockdown) Pop up Get Creative Festival and other initiatives aimed at improving networking and communication in the city. This report assesses communications within Preston, and puts forward several recommendations to improve communications within the cultural sector across the city.

## About this evaluation and methodology

The researcher used a multi-method approach - mixing qualitative and quantitative data to identify key themes and develop insights.

The primary fieldwork included the compilation of a definitive list of cultural organisations in the city of Preston (and their social media reach), with a survey (via a digital form and interviews) conducted with these organisations. Organisations and creatives in the city were asked to answer a questionnaire relating to how they disseminate information. There were 54 responses by creatives.

A further survey distributed to consumers of arts and culture assessed how the public were informed about events in the city, analysing which platforms were most successful in distributing information and what areas can be improved upon. There were 88 responses from the general public.

The breadth of study within this report included several case studies of existing local and national networks and listings sites, plus further analysis of existing reports into this sector.

Further qualitative research will outline how Preston's creatives use networks and listing sites, and how this process could be improved for the benefit of both creatives and the public who attend these events.

All numerical statements made in this report, such as social media followers, were correct at the time of writing.

# Summary

**Survey feedback:** *'[We need] a dedicated advocate/broker/communicator for arts and culture (like Arts Officers used to be) but independent of PCC and LancsCC'*

Extensive feedback was obtained from both the general public and Preston's creative community to inform the recommendations of this report. It is clear that Preston is lacking several key elements which are blocking the growth of its cultural ambitions.

These ambitions are repeatedly stated in strategy documents, from the Cultural Framework report created in 2014 to the Towns Fund City Investment Plan report published in 2020. The 10-year cultural strategy document, drafted by Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy but universally rejected by the city's creatives, stated that 'Visibility and accessibility are vital if culture and creativity are to achieve all they can'.

The Towns Fund City Investment Report declares that the city needs 'a stronger, more resilient cultural ecosystem in Preston and the delivery of the new cultural strategy.

Missing from this cultural ecosystem, and what this report's recommendations calls for, is a stand-alone website with listings, including creatives' profiles, features and opportunities, plus a paid administrator(s) to maintain the site and deliver a city-wide cultural newsletter. The site would serve the dual purpose of connecting creatives and engaging with the public, encouraging them to take an interest in and attend a wide range of arts and cultural events.

Communications between Preston City Council cultural officers and creatives has been highlighted as being poor, with many wanting more contact and support. This type of role would be traditionally carried out by an arts engagement officer.

The report has looked into listing systems and has highlighted the work done by List.co.uk, including the adoption of an API system which allows automatic transfer of listings to other sites.

A physical venue - an arts centre or cultural hub - continues to be a major barrier in the city's development and ability to connect its creatives and other communities. While the Town's Fund plan states that the Harris Quarter - including The Guild Hall - will be developed, no definitive commitment to the creation of an arts centre/performance venue has been made. This report concludes that a cultural venue is essential to Preston's cultural development ambitions.

# Background

*Survey feedback: 'Nothing stops me working or developing ideas but The Harris and the Council have always been resistant to putting on events even when I fund them.'*

There is no doubt the city of Preston has a bold cultural plan, seen through its various cultural strategy documents and the Towns Fund City Investment Plan (CIP). But these ambitions are not without hurdles. The city does not have a genuine arts centre-style venue to host creative events and performances. There are better theatre spaces in the neighbouring towns of Blackpool, Lancaster, Wigan and Chorley.

Similarly, the city does not have a single coherent cultural communications hub. Communications are fragmented – there is no single go to destination to discover events, opportunities, workshops, or to discover more about creative talent in the city.

After the unique and hugely successful Preston Guild 2012 celebrations – with 900,000 visitors to the city across a 10-day period – a cultural plan was devised in an attempt to maintain and build upon the positive impact the Guild had on the city.

Preston's cultural output over the past 10 years has increased hugely through a series of well-received cultural events.

The cultural output has included (but is not limited to) Lancashire Encounter festival, the creation of The Birley artists collective and studio space, various engagement initiatives by arts organisation They Eat Culture, In Certain Places' program of public art interventions and the diversification of The Harris Art Gallery & Museum into a producer and host of cultural events and performances.

But as the TFCC draft strategy stated, culture and creativity requires visibility and accessibility to thrive. This report aims to examine how this visibility and accessibility can best be achieved.

# The Cultural Strategy - a brief history

In 2011, the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was formed. It was built around a strategic focus to enable business expansion, working with local government to bid for public funds including the £450 million City Deal for Preston, South Ribble and Lancashire.

In 2013, Preston City Council commissioned Creative Tourist - best known for their cultural work in Manchester - to produce a strategic plan to develop its cultural ambitions. This work helped create the Cultural Framework, and subsequently the Cultural Framework Board which steers it. The Cultural Framework for Preston 2014-2018 report was published in 2013, the year after Preston Guild.

In 2014, Preston Creative Partnership (PCP) was formed by a number of independent creatives. Although the PCP has subsequently devolved – with some members now part of the newly-created Brewtime Collective - it did secure Arts Council Funding early in 2020 for a creatives' database website. The website, which is intended to also host venue and events information, is still in development.

Preston's cultural ambitions are well defined. Years of consultations between its institutions and creatives, and between institutions and focus groups, have resulted in numerous statements of intent.

During the past five years regular meetings with creatives have revolved around plans for a City of Culture bid, and then a Creative People and Places bid. These meetings then evolved into the development of a 12-year Cultural Strategy. This strategy is currently in a prolonged development period after the initial 10-year strategy, drafted by Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy (TFCC), was rejected by the city's creatives because it failed to reflect the general vision shared by the creatives who live and work within the city. In a joint statement made by over 30 creatives to the Cultural Framework Board, they rejected the third draft of the TFCC report because it 'lacks focus, lacks clarity of purpose, does not offer meaningful direction and is not actionable'.

Following the rejection of the 10-year strategy, a series of consensus workshops were held where new strategy aims were generated from a wide variety of creatives working in various sectors across the city. These outputs are expected to form the new 12-year strategy. At the time of publication it is unsure what form the new strategy will take or who will write it.

## Cultural Framework for Preston 2014-2018 report

This report was published in the wake of the successful 2012 Preston Guild celebrations. The previous cultural targets were published in 2008 as part of a community wide report called Preston Community Report (2009-2012).

This 2014-2018 report claimed that 'Culture in Preston is innovative and not afraid to take risks and to surprise, delight and challenge audiences'.

The 2014-2018 report also stated that 'Policy makers in local authorities, the university and the business sector recognise the value of culture and support its development' and that one of their goals is that 'Promotion of the city highlights culture as key feature' while 'People are able to find out easily about the cultural opportunities that are available'. This statement, which is particularly relevant to this report, has not genuinely been tackled, with the last actively engaging listings project, The Preston Guide run by The Two hats, ending in 2013.

Under the headline: Making It Real is the bold statement that 'Preston City Council is fully committed to promoting arts and culture in Preston'.

This same document also champions several organisations and venues as contributing to the 'vibrancy' of the city and that 'Preston City Council recognised the desire for a vibrant events programme in the city centre'. Several of these organisations and venues have subsequently disappeared: Preston Tringe, Two Hats listing and cultural magazine/website, Korova Arts Cafe and Bar and 53 Degrees (which did re-open with limited programming). Also, Oxheys Mill's Studios have closed - although the group of artists continue to work.

In 2017, Preston's Cultural Framework Board considered making a 2025 City of Culture bid. This was discussed at several Preston Artist Symposium meetings that year, although the idea was later dropped. Lancaster and Morecambe had been undertaking similar joint discussions. Eventually a joint Lancashire 2025 bid was announced and is currently ongoing.

## **The Preston Cultural Model - A TEN-YEAR STRATEGY FOR CULTURE IN PRESTON (draft) (May 2019) report**

In 2018, Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy (TFCC) were commissioned by Preston City Council to develop a new 10-year cultural strategy (with the previous strategy due to expire in 2018). Although the work included a number of public forums it was acknowledged that the work needed to be widened to encourage further engagement and more representative views. By the end of 2018, the Cultural Framework Board was proposing to submit a Creative People & Places (CPP) bid – having turned down the opportunity of putting in a joint bid with Blackpool's LeftCoast in 2012. The CPP bid was later dropped.

The draft 10-year Cultural Strategy by TFCC (May 2019) described Preston as a 'fertile ground for imaginative, ambitious and often radical creative talent' while also advocating risk taking by the cultural sector and stating that 'Visibility and accessibility are vital if culture and creativity are to achieve all they can'.

A huge amount of unpaid time was invested by independent creatives who attended these meetings to help the development of projects and proposals put forward by Preston City Council. Preston's creatives continue to enthusiastically attend meetings in order to help shape the city's arts and cultural development.

The draft TFCC report (May 2019) contained statements such as 'Preston is a forward-looking city', that it can play 'a leadership role in accessible and inclusive arts' and has a 'commitment to inclusive growth'.

The strategy statement was built around the city's commitment to 'Build on its distinctiveness through bringing the city's unique personality to the fore: its people, places and their passions' and the intention to 'Secure innovative solutions for a changing city centre with culture a transformative agent in ensuring Preston grows as a vivid and vibrant destination'.

Yet this assertion of distinctiveness was contradicted during Cultural Framework discussions at this time. One of the problems outlined in discussions over a proposed CPP bid was Preston's lack of an obvious identity, particularly compared to neighbours Blackpool (CPP: LeftCoast, coastal and holiday resort) and East Lancashire (CPP: Super Slow Way, textile industry and canal). A draft summary for the CPP bid (December 2018) included the term and was headlined 'Pioneering Preston'.

## History repeating itself

It was pointed out by one Preston artist during a meeting between the Cultural Framework Board and creatives that these kinds of focus groups, held two-to-four times per year and attended by between 20 and 60 people, had been taking place in the city for three decades - with a feeling that information gathered twenty years ago was not actioned. The creative feared that history was repeating itself.

The draft TFCC 10-year Strategy for Culture in Preston Report does concede that 'Preston has suffered from long-term under investment in cultural infrastructure, leadership, delivery capacity and governance'.

This under investment and unfocused direction has led to concerns from Preston's creatives that arts and culture development in the city has suffered. Brewtime Collective was created during this period as a means for the independent creative sector to have a bigger say in the decision-making process using the bottom-up approach, in contrast to the PCC and Cultural Framework Board process of decision making. Brewtime stated that 'Preston needs a bold, game-changing, creative strategy that will propel its fragmented and fragile cultural offerings into a confident, robust, healthy and vibrant cultural scene'.

While it is acknowledged that a strategy is not an easy document to produce – Wigan's recent cultural strategy document The Manifesto received criticism from creatives during its development – not having an actionable, focused strategy has clearly adversely affected the development of arts and culture in Preston.

## Preston's City Investment Plan

A board of twelve members formed the Towns Fund Board in November 2019. In July 2020 the board published its City Investment Plan (CIP) 2020-2035.

The wide-ranging document outlines plans for a £24.98million Towns Fund investment in Preston with heavy emphasis on 'delivering a programme of culture-led regeneration, will drive our economy'.

While publicly supporting the aims of the 12-year strategy, the report states: '£24.9m of Towns Fund investment [is] to deliver a bold and transformational programme predominately focussed upon culture and regeneration, concentrated in the Harris Quarter area... our city's cultural and civic heart... Deliver a stronger Harris Quarter leisure and cultural offer by building a critical mass of complementary destinations, locations and public spaces.'



It acknowledges the importance of creatives and cohesion in the city, further stating: 'Culture is central to our plans to transform Preston. Grassroots and community activities and events, city-wide festivals and celebrations, our sports teams and hosting of sports events, the 20 yearly Preston Guild, the city's arts venues, museums and libraries, and the growing number of creative organisations and businesses which have their home in

3 Preston are a vital part of what makes the city distinctive and different. We recognise the value of culture in making our Community City a more vibrant, attractive, inclusive and appealing place in which to live, work, visit, study and invest.'

The CIP report outlines the need for 'a stronger, more resilient cultural ecosystem in Preston and the delivery of the new cultural strategy' while 'supporting the growth and development of local cultural organisations and their skill bases' and 'supporting the capacity and development of community and voluntary organisations'.

The report indicates that £250,000 from the CIP will be spent on its Cultural Capacity Building proposal.

## Call to Action Session - Preston Cultural Strategy

***Key statements generated from consensus workshops: 'We want a multi-purpose arts centre'***  
***'We want Preston's cultural scene to be connected, with a clear voice that reaches beyond Preston'***

As part of the process of redefining Preston's cultural strategy document, the consensus workshops held in autumn 2019 brought in a wide range of evaluations and opinions on Preston's current cultural landscape, as well as offering solutions going forward. With specific regard to communications, the workshop outputs called for a more cohesive communication and marketing strategy alongside a regular sustainable, managed calendar of events, including networking, a funded centralised website and creatives database and more collaboration and support for project funding.

It was felt that the city has failed to secure enough money for arts and culture, while there was an unwillingness to share control between people and organisations.

One clear obstacle to that aim which emerged from the workshops was that the city lacks a multi-purpose arts centre/hub.

***'Prestoning - to take risks, pioneer, celebrate - 'Preston Model' it!'***

The third consensus workshop - Identifying our Strategic Direction - outlined several key themes to progress the cultural strategy, focused around the term Prestoning, which has now become a moniker for Brewtime Collective.

Themes highlighted included the need for a centralised, funded website, including an online hub of knowledge resources, the adoption of an arts-based Preston Creative Model and a central physical arts hub in the city.

The workshops also outlined the need for a more cohesive and supportive approach to funding opportunities - specifically the infrastructure within Preston City Council to support new initiatives and help creatives realise them.

# Preston

**Survey feedback:** 'Everything feels scattered. It would be good to have one central resource, maybe with a forum, links to opportunities, collaboration ideas, friendly swaps, etc'

**North West population figures:**

Manchester 510,746 (Greater Manchester 2.813million)

Liverpool 552,267 (Wirral 323,235)

Lancaster 144,246

Preston 141,818 (South Ribble 110,527)

Blackpool 139,300

While major cultural cities like Liverpool and Manchester have multiple arts, culture and listings websites, Preston has no single one-stop website for cultural events, news and listings. Information is difficult to find for live events, talks, workshops, meetings, networking and creative groups.

For events listings, the most accessed and comprehensive is VisitPreston.com, a site to which any individual can upload their events. PrestonAtNight.co.uk, run by Preston City Centre Business Improvement District (commonly known as BID Preston), has a listings site focussed on the night-time live economy. An individual must be a BID member or invited to the site to enable the uploading of events. For those with more local knowledge, website visits might also be made to The Continental, The Ferret and The Harris Museum.

The Harris has taken on the role of Preston's de facto arts centre, hosting a number of cultural, workshop and performance events. However, it's availability as a venue is limited - late nights on Wednesdays (9pm) are the only agreed regular evening slots and these events are mostly the Harris and Preston City Council's own events. While creatives are able to use the space, hire fees for non-Wednesday nights make the venue inaccessible to most independent creatives.

Preston City Council piloted Lancashire Encounter Festival in 2015 as a way of continuing the enthusiasm for Preston Guild – which takes place once every 20 years – with the festival subsequently being held every two years, starting in 2016. A wide range of cultural events are held in the city centre on Saturday afternoons during the summer months, particularly focused around the Flag Market, while the Harris Museum has built a reputation as a host for arts and performance events inside the building, including regular evening events on Wednesday nights.

## The Preston Guide

With funding from several local individuals and organisations The Two Hats launched The Preston Guide as a website and printed magazine in 2012. This was Preston's last genuine attempt to produce a coherent listings publication.

The Preston Guide, a website with a monthly print edition of around 2,000 copies eventually created, was jointly funded by the University of Central Lancashire, events venue 53 Degrees, They Eat Culture, The Continental, an independent artist, the University of Central Lancashire, Preston City Council and Lancashire County Council. It closed in 2013, 18 months after its launch, when funding from Preston City Council and the University of Central Lancashire was withdrawn. The project had been previously funded by the Cultural Framework Board.

Local artist David Henckel ran The Two Hats on a voluntary basis for almost two years. After its demise due to lack of funding in 2013, Henckel was scathing of Lancashire County Council and

Preston City Council who he says 'understood its value (having talked about producing one themselves for the last four years), [but] they were no longer in a position to hand over a chunk of money'.

He added that 'Even though it is clear that a small amount of funding in the right hands (that's ours) would have obvious benefits across the sector and add value to all the other projects which they deemed worth the money'.

Henckel, who had an MA residency at UCLan prior to creating The Two Hats, said: "There is value in a free listings magazines, especially for people who do not use the internet - it's just as important as Facebook events."

The city has also seen databases for creatives come and go, with Lancashire Artists Network disappearing due to a lack of funding. Its latest attempt, the Permeate Preston website, appears to have stalled.

## VisitPreston.com

Visit Preston is a partnership between the University of Central Lancashire, Business Improvement District, The Chase, Preston City Council and Lancashire County Council.

The website's design does not reflect the stated 'vibrant destination' aims of the cultural strategy. Like many Visit websites in the UK, Visit Preston is fairly static in its output - it gives basic information about the city and its attractions, plus it has a listings.

The website is not arts and culture focused – it has an awkward corporate feel to it. The first tab across the top of the page is 'Invest' then 'Live/Work'. Similarly, the Invest section on the front page is very prominent, placed above the Visit section. This all pulls the emphasis of the site away from events and visiting the city. The majority of Visit pages across the country are more tourist-friendly and leisure based in their content and appearance.

The Arts and Culture section of VisitPreston.com is hard to find. Hidden in the Things To Do page, which is part of the Visit page, it takes three clicks to find. The page has only two sections: Art Galleries and Museums (which lists six venues), and Theatre and Live Music (which lists three venues).

One of the music venues listed – The Guild Hall - has been closed since May 2019.

Written posts about events in Preston are in the separate blog section in the Visit Preston website. The blog has been running since November 2018. It had 29 posts in 2019. The posts highlight events and things to do in and around the city with some creativity in the posts, with only one short profile-style post (on Priest Town Brewing).

The website as it is, in layout and content, gives the impression that Preston is a culturally devoid city with little to attract either visitors or locals. Case studies in this report (pages 25-31) highlight what can be achieved with content and layout, such as the newly launched Blackpool Social Club (case Study 3).

In contrast, Visit Preston's What's On pages are a valuable resource to the city – and are the most popular pages on the website. The What's On pages receives on average 8,500 page views per month, at times this figure is double the number of visitors to the rest of the site. The most popular blog posts relate to general events. Late Night Christmas Shopping received 6,076 views compared to 321 views for The Ultimate Preston Quiz. The highest page views for a non-Christmas post was

The History of Preston's Annual Egg Rolling Event 1,329. On the Arts and Culture section, the most popular page visited was the Harris Museum information page (no statistical figure available).

However, the blog pages are not easy to discover – there is no link on the front page – and their list format design is uninspiring. With more creativity, these blogs could be given more prominence and become a feature of the website.

Inaccurate information and broken links are detailed in the appendices of this report.

Independent events in the city are not fully supported by Visit Preston. While the website will publish a blog post about an event or festival, these are not included in the website's page of annual festivals.

So, while the Annual Events page lists five events: Egg Rolling, Lancashire Encounter, Caribbean Carnival, City of Preston 10k and Preston Pride – it does not list Lancashire Festival, Lancashire Fringe Festival, Rockprest, Derelict Festival, Preston Arts Festival, Preston Jazz & Improvisation Festival, Lancashire Science Festival, GlastonFerret, Whinge Festival, The Continental Beer & Cider Festival (with music and DJs), Preston Rocks & Prestfest.

## **The Harris**

The Harris Museum has hugely diversified its output over the past decade, incorporating a successful live programme of performance and music events, including its Harris Live music events of the first Wednesday night of every month. Other events tie in with festivals, city celebrations and their own exhibitions. The Harris is able to promote these events through its excellent and active social media platforms. Backed up by a series of performances, innovative workshops and talks throughout the year, the programme has which have made the Harris a vitally important arts venue in the city. Its well-designed website reflects the cultural ambitions of the city – it looks, vibrant, busy and fresh.

The Harris Museum newsletter (1,600 subscribers) is limited to Harris and Preston City Council events. Their newsletter is the most popular in the city.

## **The Birley**

The artist-led studios and project space has received national recognition for its work, which focuses on contemporary art and socially-engaged arts practice. Established in 2014 as a Community Interest Company by a group of UCLan arts and media graduates, they are based in unused Preston City Council offices, under a reduced-rent agreement. The studios and programme are volunteer-led, and are funded by studio membership.

In 2019 they underwent a large expansion, and now support more than 30 artists and associates. In late 2019 they were successful in an Arts Council England grant for organisational development, and they will relaunch their public programmes in early 2021.

## **Brewtime Collective**

Commissioners of this report, Brewtime Collective was formed by individuals from the city's creative community. The Brewtime Collective have given their time and experience to creating an achievable and ambitious cultural strategy relevant to Preston.

Brewtime Collective's stated aim is to actively shape the arts and culture scene in Preston, creating pride in the city and its arts activities through improved communication and collaboration. The

group has already established itself as a leading connector within the city's creative community. Their public Facebook group has over 200 members.

After a series of open-call meetings for Preston's independent sector, the group of eight core members, representing varied creative disciplines, now regularly meets in the city.

The Brewtime Collective has contributed to creative engagement in the city. The Collective reacted quickly during the first part of the covid-19 lockdown, working with PCC, UCLan and Curious Minds, to support local artists with over 20 micro commissions themed around the word 'Prestoning'. Brewtime also secured funding for an ACE Get Creative festival (now due to be held in May 2021) aimed at increasing collaboration and networking between practitioners as well as surprising and delighting the people of Preston.

The group's members have a wealth of experience writing funding bids and developing creative projects. There are obvious opportunities to use the Collective as focal point for both future funding bids - assisting independent creatives with their applications - and organising further creative commissions and seed-funding initiatives.

## **They Eat Culture**

The well-known non-profit arts and cultural production company, They Eat Culture, have an impressive track record of putting on a wide range of arts fairs, events and performances since their launch in 2010. In recent years they pioneered public-facing initiatives People's Production Lab, Mobile Home and The Living City. People's Production Lab was launched in 2018 primarily as a city centre venue - an office block - hoping to bring the city's creatives together under one roof - to work and to hold events. While it did host several fairs and events, the ambitious project ultimately failed to unite Preston's creative community and They Eat Culture have subsequently vacated the building.

Their website has not been updated for some time, leading to inevitable inaccuracies. Its theatre and performance page was last updated in January 2017 and its most recent events have been posted on social media, sometimes at short notice.

## **Oxheys and Lancashire Artist's Network**

Oxheys Mill Studios was set up in 2011 by independent artists as a direct response to the closure of the Preston City Council PAD Gallery. The group operated for six years out of Oxheys Mill holding a range of exhibitions, residencies and artistic engagement projects. Oxheys subsequently evolved into an artists' collective and continues to organise activities and events Life Drawing at The Harris and the annual Making A Mark event which is supported by PCC with funding from the Arts Council.

Lancashire Artists Network, run by Oxheys members on a voluntary basis, was a website which featured listings and a monthly newsletter. The newsletter and website ceased operation in 2017 due to lack of funding.

## **Podio Magazine**

Edited by Andrew Neale, from his home in Thailand, Podio Magazine has approximately 10 locally-based volunteers working on the quarterly magazine and website. The magazine print runs varies from 2,000-3,000 to 10,000 for special editions (Preston Pride, the start of the new academic year and Christmas).

The magazine regularly includes features on local artists. They have offered to collaborate with Preston's creatives, particularly with regard to promoting events in Preston. The magazine has suspended its print edition during the covid19 pandemic.

## Live events

Both the Continental and The Ferret, who have the same owners, run substantial live music programs in the city, plus theatre and spoken-word events. Both websites are regularly updated and both have recently been re-launched with new designs and improvements in their listings pages. They both now use a calendar-based system.

A number of other venues including The Dog & Partridge, The Guild Tavern, The Adelphi, Ships and Giggles, Winedown and Vinyl Tap put on gigs and performances. Baluga Bar & Club began hosting regular comedy nights in 2019, organised by Preston Comedy Club.

Derelict Festival, run by a UCLan senior lecturer, hosts a number of live performances and an annual performance festival, often by acclaimed contemporary theatre-makers, while Enjoy the Show puts on regular theatre and spoken-word events in a number of city venues. The independently run organisation also runs Lancashire Fringe Festival.

Action Records, a successful independent record shop, bring internationally acclaimed musicians into the city for promotional gigs, often held at Blitz music venue. Blitz itself does not have a website and communicates entirely through its Facebook page of over 8,000 followers.

## Are Preston's creatives divided?

**Survey feedback:** *'A cocktail of too many chefs, combined with clashing and toxic personalities who crop up wherever you turn make at times Preston's arts and culture scene rather unpalatable and off putting - so they spoil the broth big time!'*

*'There are a lot of organisations working towards the same goals but working against each other which means accessing the information can be tricky if you don't "know the right people" it would be good if there were announcements from an impartial source about opportunities'.*

Some survey feedback suggested there was a lack of unity amongst creatives in Preston. While most creative networks in any town or city have some degree of disharmony, there are noticeable divisions which has affected opportunities to create work, collaborate and ultimately develop the creative output.

While disharmony can come from independent organisations and networks feeling they are not supported by key stakeholders, in Preston this disharmony can also be seen in divisions between some individuals and organisations.

## Unpaid time

The numerous strategy and networking meetings involve a huge amount of unpaid time for Preston's creatives and many feel that this voluntary contribution should be paid for, to recognise the commitment of creatives to Preston's cultural development and enable them to devote time and resources to this work. In their letter to the Cultural Framework Board (June 10, 2019) objecting to TFCC strategy document, a group of independent Preston creatives estimated that £10,000 had already been invested through in-kind time and support to the strategy process.

# Collaboration

In line with various Arts Council England funded projects, Preston's major cultural organisations have a solid history of collaborations. Major players like Preston City Council, the Harris Museum, They Eat Culture, Derelict Live, University of Central Lancashire, Oxheys Mill Studios, About Time Dance Company, Lancashire Fringe Festival and In Certain Places regularly work together.

Other events-based organisations like Preston Arts Association, Windrush Festival and music venues The Ferret and The Continental - plus Action Records who put on high-profile gigs - and many others tend to work alone.

All of these organisations, whether they collaborate or not, communicate their events through their own channels. There are several key organisations, particularly on Twitter, who assist in disseminating information. These include @VisitPreston @BIDPreston and their affiliated account @PrestonAtNight, @newcontinental @prestoncouncil and @blogpreston.

Website Blog Preston is hugely supportive of events in the city, not just with articles but also on social media. It has a very active Twitter account with 24,100 followers while its Facebook page has 42,199 followers.

The Lancashire Post newspaper supports local creatives and cultural events. It has a daily circulation of just under 7,000. The newspaper's Twitter account has 70,000 followers while its Facebook page has 112,291 followers. Although in actual engagement with readers on Twitter and Facebook, Blog Preston frequently out-performs the print publication.

There are other significant individuals on social media who have a huge reach through their own networks (Twitter and Facebook) and their support is often crucial in the sharing of information and making a particular event a success (See Appendices - page 45).

BBC Radio Lancashire @BBCLancashire has the largest following on Twitter with 136,800. VisitPreston @visitpreston has 16,900 followers, the Harris Museum @HarrisPreston has 14,600 while UCLan SU @UCLanSU has 11,500 followers with The Continental @newcontinental having 10,500 followers and Preston BID @BIDPreston 9,561.

The Duke of Preston @DOPreston has 13,900 followers while BBC Radio Lancashire's John Gillmore has 11,100. Mark Inglis @PrestonPhonebox, a keen supporter of local events, has 2,686 followers Martyn Rawlinson @martynrolly has 2,195 followers and Glenda Andrew @WindrushPreston has 1,770 followers. Peter Kelly @cllrPeterKelly, Cabinet Member for Culture has 1,256 followers.

**Other significant organisations outside of arts and culture include** UCLan @UCLan with 47,200 followers, Preston Hour @PrestonHour with 7,797 followers, Disability Equality NW @DisabilityNW with 5,812 followers and St George's Centre @StGeorgesPR1 with 4,276 followers.

## Closer engagement with UCLan

Has the relationship with UCLan been developed enough? Certainly there is room for increased engagement between UCLan students and the city's creatives, either in regard to artists or live events. While UCLan's events organising team are supportive of all events across the city, a working relationship with UCLan's Students Union and Preston's creative community could be further developed.

The university, home to 30,000 students, recognises the importance of its links to the city and does financially contribute to various projects, usually Arts Council funded events organised by the city council. The Life at UCLan part of UCLan's website is an excellent example of how to promote the city in a positive way, with contributions by students. It's What's On calendar also details all university events in an easy-to-digest way, although it is not widely circulates outside of the university.



# Improving listings

*Survey feedback: 'One central place. I find it hard to know about events even though I search for them. Quite often find out about them on the day or too late'*

Maintaining an arts and culture website is hard enough - but including a listings site makes the job even tougher. For some it is a step too far. Several arts and culture websites have decided to avoid listings because the workload is substantial and time consuming.

For example, **Northern Soul** ([northernsoul.me.uk](http://northernsoul.me.uk)) is a huge independent Manchester-based arts and culture website, covering events across the North of England – though explicitly stating that it is not a comprehensive listings site.

Northern-based not-for-profit platform for contemporary visual arts and writing website **Corridor8** ([corridor8.co.uk](http://corridor8.co.uk)) has considered including events listings on its website but the editorial team have never committed to the move because they don't have the capacity to maintain it.

While a website is just one part of communications within the city, the case studies in this report highlight how difficult the job of maintaining a listings site is, to the point where organisations can flounder.

Online listings can be delivered either as a standalone site (there are many national tickets-based websites including Ticketmaster and Live Nation). These are complimented by other national tickets sites which can be used by smaller local organisations and individuals to sell tickets for events (these include SeeTickets, Ticketsource, Eventbrite, WeGotTickets and Preston-based Skiddle).

On a local level, listings are often held within one section of a broader website – these can be independently run or a council-funded site like VisitPreston.com.

Preston's only city-wide listings pages sit within the VisitPreston.com website. Preston At Night listings covers night-time events only.

The report *Could Open Data Help Arts and Culture Listings?* (commissioned by Nesta, Sept 2019) found that there is no data standard for publishing arts and culture listings. This can be seen in the varied listings styles.

The report states that 'discovering relevant events is sufficient enough of a problem that a number of commercial services have been developed to help audiences discover events'. It goes on to say that 'ultimately the purpose of arts and culture listings is to enable people who would like to attend a particular event to find out about that event and book a ticket if appropriate.'

Further to this, the report lists the five main avenues for the public to find out about events as:

- The marketing channels of a venue that they prefer or have visited before.
- The marketing channels of a ticketing or event marketing service.
- The marketing channels of an artist.
- Relevant news or entertainment media.
- Friends and family.

The report recommends that any listings website should publish their data via an open application programming interface (API) – which is a way to pass data from one system to another - and allow third-party access.

It endorses schema.org, a system of using back-end microdata to enable pages to be marked up and become searchable to major search engines. This work would be carried out by a webmaster. If the community or organisations use the same data standard, sharing listings becomes a much more simplified, automated process.

***'The biggest reason someone doesn't attend an event is because they didn't know about it' Live Nation, owner of Ticketmaster***

The Nesta-commissioned report highlights the work of [list.co.uk](http://list.co.uk), who offers listings services. For example, The List works with Edinburgh Festivals (including Edinburgh Fringe) websites, where their listings automatically get imported into The List's website, and then exported to other listings websites. The List has an audience of 2.2 million unique users per month. This is a paid service and can be tailored to specific areas or cities and can include community events. The List works with several town and city councils across the country. They collate community events from a specific area and deliver these events as code which can be placed straight into an existing website.

The report concludes that 'audiences (or potential audiences) are missing out on events because the listings ecosystem is not working effectively... It is well-known that audiences find it difficult to discover events and creating a new listings service is usually seen as the solution... We would strongly encourage an approach that encourages and enables bands, venues and other listings publishers to publish their data via an open API and against a common standard.'

The List's work on [Visit Southampton](#), a city council/BID website, shows how they could work with Preston.

The UK's most popular website provider for destination marketing organisations (DMOs) is Simpleview. VisitManchester VisitExeter, VisitBrighton and VisitBournemouth all use Simpleview. VisitSouthampton uses [DestinationCore](#), a rival to Simpleview. An example of a bespoke The List website is [Visit Aberdeenshire](#) built using The List's own data.

The List has done some a preliminary assessment of Preston for this report. They stated:

'Looking at pre-Covid-19 figures we had around 250-400 live events in Preston at any one time and I would expect us to easily get up to this number once live events start to make a comeback again.'

To manage a data feed for Preston, The List would charge approximately £375 per month.

The List uses an automated process to collect live events data, plus an upload form for individuals to supply information where it can't be obtained from a ticketing provider or venue. The database of information is supplied to the website every night.

This same information is supplied to The List's partners: hotel chains, media publishers like Trinity Mirror and rail companies, meaning events reach a wider audience.

# Key findings

*Survey feedback: 'More support from Harris and council, everything seems too much trouble for them, or too long winded.'*

*'City lacks a culture of hosting large performance events. Council lacks dedicated officer for Arts/Performance development.'*

*'Improved access to funding.'*

*'Everybody involved in the arts locally should be aware of each other and what they do and seek to work together if appropriate for the benefit of all.'*

It is clear there is room for huge development and growth in communications within Preston's arts and culture sector. And while lack of investment in the arts and culture has been a barrier to developing these communication channels, there are enough outstanding examples of innovative creative solutions elsewhere to achieve results without a huge amount of financial input. Sometimes these innovation models are led by commercial enterprises ('cene magazine), but often they are led by the passion and drive of local creatives (Creative Stoke, Blackpool Social Club - Case Studies, pages 25-31) and sometimes a mixture of both (Arts City in Lancaster, Art in Liverpool - Case Studies, pages 25-31).

Any solution must balance long-term sustainability with proper investment and support from key stakeholders in the city – Preston City Council, BID Preston, the University of Central Lancashire and others.

Preston lacks an arts and culture website similar to those seen in many other cities. While it may seem too obvious to recommend another website as the solution to communicating, marketing and promoting, it is clear that a sustainable multi-purpose platform featuring articles on events and creative artists, creative opportunities, events listings and a database of creatives – backed up by social media support - would hugely benefit the city, both in practical terms and in the perception of the city's culture and creativity.

There is no doubt that maintaining an arts and culture website – particularly if it wants to have a news-style feel - takes a huge amount of time, with the main barrier being money (i.e. paying someone to do it). It is often underestimated how much time and money is needed to run some websites. For example, BBC Sport Online has around 50 people every day working on it, including one person whose sole job is to monitor and arrange stories on the website's front page. An arts and culture website is unlikely to ever have income to fund this kind of work, but a news-style updateable front page updated every few days is not an impossible task – and examples show it could be achieved by a paid member of staff.

But a new website alone will not improve communications within the city. A much more complex, inter-linked approach is needed if new communications practices are to be successful and sustainable. While funding is central to this, it is not the only important factor, as shown through case study (pages 25-31), cohesion and collaboration between creatives and organisations can be a hugely important aspect of communications.

The case study examples which succeeded in developing audiences have done so through paid staff and additional paid freelancers. Having dedicated staff allows these organisations to reach and continually engage with audiences - something Preston has struggled to achieve for events since the 2012 Guild. Preston's last listings website and publication - The Preston Guide - ended in 2013. It is unlikely that current PCC staff would be able to take on the extra workload.

The language used in Preston's various cultural reports calls for risk taking, innovation, co-operation and communication. It is clear that a listings site - or any website - is not enough. Preston's cultural leaders have to be genuinely innovative, if not copying blueprints of other organisation's successes then at least adapting them to help re-invigorate the city's arts and culture development.

A joint, sustained cultural events programme should be underpinned by an email newsletter which ultimately generates interest in cultural events across the city in a long-term sustainable way. This would mean cultural officers investing more time and support - and possibly money - into independent events, enabling them to succeed while promoting the city as the magnetic cultural beacon it dreams of becoming.

A more structured city-wide events and opportunities newsletter is needed to support Preston's cultural development plans (Lancaster's Arts City has two mailing lists, one for creatives and one for the general public).

From the survey, creatives clearly believe a Facebook page is one way forward to further communicate opportunities and events. Possibly two pages would be needed - one for events and notifications, another for creative opportunities and associated discussions. Brewtime's existing Facebook group could fulfil this role as it has already built a strong reputation for disseminating opportunities within arts and culture. Similar successful existing Facebook pages have been started by individuals, with engagement from members generating content. These include private groups [Creative Opps Network](#) and [UK Theatre Producers](#) (both pages have two administrators).

## Cultural website

In website design and function, Preston's cultural website VisitPreston.com does not reflect the cultural ambitions which the city's stakeholders produce in official reports and funding application documents. It focuses too much on corporate promotion although its listings website is a popular destination for people seeking events to attend.

Preston is a small city, so has less cultural venues than cities like Manchester and Liverpool. But with creative presentation of its highlights - which can include its artists and creatives - the city could communicate itself in a far better way, using its creatives and artists as key features. For example, putting the blog section at the front of the website and presenting it in a magazine style would instantly improve the appearance of the site - and improve the image of the city in the eyes of those who visit the website.

Visit Preston's partners include Preston City Council, BID Preston, Lancashire County Council and UCLan, the same key stakeholders any proposed new website would seek support from. While the current website could be redesigned to incorporate new features, to fully integrate opportunities, feature articles, listings and an artist directory would be best achieved via a standalone website.

## Better social media

*Survey feedback: 'More social media presence. More support centrally from the arts team in the council'*

Feedback clearly stated that creatives are not clear who they can turn to for advice, especially for funding and other practical guidance. Preston's cultural officers do not have a high enough profile, with some creatives not knowing who they are, and therefore are unable to ask them for support. On social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) PCC's three cultural officers have a combined following of 292 people on Twitter – an indication of the lack of connection with the sector which can be improved.

# Mailing lists

## Key mailing lists in Preston (full list in Appendices, pages 45-46):

Visit Preston	2,000
The Continental	2,000
Harris Museum	1,600

Mailing lists can be a key way to communicate between creatives/organisations and individuals/the public. While independent creatives, and some smaller organisations, often struggle to maintain their own mailing list, a combined or unifying mail-out could have a huge impact on the dissemination of information within Preston. Several case studies - Lancaster Arts City, Art in Liverpool and Word of Warning (Case Studies, pages 25-31) - advocated the use of mailing lists, finding them a hugely valuable way for people to access information about events and opportunities.

# Listings

**Survey feedback:** *'Come on, it's not hard. It's basically a publicly accessible calendar, searchable by date. Is there something happening on such and such a date, yes, boom!'*

In a time where information is freely available but incredibly fast flowing, and where one person cannot be expected to subscribe to and check on every cultural organisation to find out what is going on events, opportunities etc are so easily missed by both creatives and the public.

While listings pages work best as part of a magazine-style content website, there are ways in which the listings themselves can become more effective – particularly around how they are shared.

A standard events template would help the city to share information between creative groups, for particularly via mailing list emails and website listings. If an outside listing service (The List) not adopted, a universal events template - where all events information is presented in a uniform way - would make sharing information much easier. The List's £375 per month would easily be enough for one person to compile listings and circulate a weekly email and keep the listings part of a website updated.

Adopting a universal system across the city to allow listings to be easily transferred from one website to another would require further back-end website work. But a standardised listings template (for both website listings and mailing lists) would ease workloads for website administrators.

# Arts centre

**Survey feedback:** *'No arts centre no cultural connection - simple!'*

A physical space to communicate and connect with audiences and creatives is vital if Preston is to fulfil its regeneration ambitions through culture. This could be part of the Harris Quarter re-development plan outlined by the Towns Fund report.

There is disparity between the city's aims to be a vibrant, risk-taking cultural destination - as stated in the cultural strategy documents - and the capacity to realise these aims because of a lack of venue space. The application of £25million funding from the Towns Fund includes a proposal to develop the Harris Quarter, which could include community uses for Preston Guild Hall, now back in PCC ownership.

The lack of a multi-purpose arts centre in Preston is perhaps the biggest barrier to developing cultural offerings in the city. This problem is more acute with the possibility of a closure to The Harris Museum for as long as five years if its Re-imagining project commences.

Feedback stated that too many of the city's arts and performances events are held in pubs. This highlights the need for a central multi-purpose arts centre.

What short-term public spaces will be available during the time of the Harris' closure is unknown, both for creatives and the museum's own activities. For arts and culture, a possible way forward is the Theatre Deli model in Sheffield (see Case Studies - Other examples of interest page 30) which has successfully repurposed a large shopping store warehouse.

The Preston Towns Fund City Investment Plan (CIP) 2020-2035 report states that 'Preston lacks a supply of high quality office space. This has become a significant barrier to new commercial investment in the city, which in itself is limiting our ability to drive any agglomeration'.

This report's own findings has found that a similar significant barrier in arts and cultural development is a lack of venue space such as an arts centre/cultural hub.

## Cultural development

To fulfil Preston's aims of cultural development, emphasised by Brewtime's statement - *'Preston needs a bold, game-changing, creative strategy that will propel its fragmented and fragile cultural offerings into a confident, robust, healthy and vibrant cultural scene'* - the city clearly needs cultural investment and a dedicated creative to administer a new website and associated social media platforms.'

The City Investment Plan report also states that 'culture is a key theme within our CIP to support the city's growth and regeneration objectives' and 'the development of Lancashire's and Preston's cultural strategies articulates the important role which Preston plays in supporting mainstream, as well as local and community based cultural organisations and activities'.

The CIP report cites Brewtime Collective's development as being crucial to cultural governance infrastructure and 'the sustainable role in the city's cultural offer'.

Without exception, all major cultural regeneration programs include investment into a re-invigorated online presence - for marketing, mailing lists, promotion and events listings. It is unrealistic to expect Preston to achieve its cultural ambitions - as stated in documents like the 12-year strategy and the CIP report - without adequate and sustainable financial and practical support for such a website, which should include active collaboration and support with the city's creatives. This ideally would include profile and features on cultural events and creative artists associated with the city.

A unified communications hub is crucial to these aims, both for development of creatives and creativity, and for the community, public and visitors to access arts and cultural information.

Events listed on online platforms and newsletters would benefit from a uniform layout (in the presentation of information) to allow for easy sharing on other platforms and creative mailing lists.

The lack of high-profile social media accounts - personal and organisational - does a disservice to both council-run events and independent events and workshops, run by creatives who deserve more support.

## Recommendations

**Survey feedback:** *'The council and the Harris need to decide if they want to promote the independent sector'*

**This report recommends the following actions:**

- The creation of a stand-alone website with listings, profiles, features, opportunities, interviews and opinion pieces by creatives, backed up by or linked to Facebook pages and social media accounts.
- A paid administrator to run the new website, funded by key stakeholders within the city including Preston City Council, UCLan and BID Preston.
- Increased pro-active engagement between PCC cultural officers and the city's creatives.
- Closer consultation between key stakeholders on the City Investment Plan and the Preston's creatives in decision-making with regard to arts and cultural objectives.
- The adoption of a universal city-wide events template to enable easy sharing of events across multiple organisations and mailing lists, including using an open application programming interface (API) on all events listings sites.
- An increased and structured offer of funded opportunities for creatives to produce new work, develop practices and engage with communities and audiences.
- The creation of a structured system to deliver advice, development support and funding support to independent creatives.
- A short-term and long-term commitment to a physical cultural hub within the city, capable of hosting events, workshops and small to medium sized theatre shows and performances.
- Commitment to pay independent creatives for their time attending meetings and strategy workshops.
- Discussions with potential funders about taking these proposals forward.

# Appendices

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# Case studies

**For reference, Preston's social media is as follows:**

**VisitPreston.com** 8,500 average website visits per month – Twitter 23,100 – Instagram 4,416 – Facebook 8,963 likes/9,701 followers – 1,600 mailing list subscribers

## Case Study One

**Lancaster Arts City** ([artscity.co.uk](http://artscity.co.uk))

Twitter 4,573 - Instagram 1,379 - Facebook 1,742 likes/1,979 followers – mailing list 920

Lancaster Arts City ([artscity.co.uk](http://artscity.co.uk)) is run by Lancaster Arts Partnership (LAP) and aims to increase arts opportunities, develop partnerships and promote the profile of the arts in Lancaster and Morecambe. Its partners are Lancaster BID, Lancashire County Council, Lancaster City Council. It promotes The Dukes, More Music, Ludus Dance, Morecambe Artist Colony, Lancaster Arts, Litfest, Light Up Lancaster and Lancaster University arts events.

Its quarterly email (which goes out to 920 people, split between creatives and the public) details all the events in the area, plus relevant creative opportunities further afield. Website hits spike when the newsletter is sent out. Any creative in Lancashire with a desire to know what's going on is likely to be a subscriber. There is no comparable arts-based email in Preston.

The website averages 276 website visitors per month. Peaks can be as high 4,200 visitors coinciding with Light Up Lancaster. The most popular pages are the events calendar and the members directory. The website is aimed at audiences rather than creatives.

Its Twitter handle @LancsArtsCity has 4,571 followers, while its Facebook page has 1,975 followers. There is no comparable social media account for the arts in Preston.

LAP lists over 20 members and has a paid-for membership model, similar to those used in Manchester, ranging from annual subscriptions of £50 to £250. This includes listing in the Arts City website, discounts for leaflet distribution in the city-wide leaflet racks, option to post articles and events in their blog and on the events calendar, and networking events.

Lancaster Arts City is a successful example of a city (of a similar size to Preston) using a multi-pronged approach to the arts (website, social media, newsletter) to successfully promote the arts.

The organisation has one paid administrator, working 10 hours per month. They also employ a freelance co-ordinator to co-ordinate upkeep of their 16 leaflet rack display sites (£260 per month, approx six hours per week).

LAP is currently looking to become a Community Interested Company (CIC) and has no current funders – income is generated membership (22 members) and leaflet distribution. All partners to LAP are voluntary, with one paid administrator (10 hours per month) and one paid leaflet distribution manager for 16 leaflet racks around the district (part-time).

Arts City launched Lancaster's successful First Friday events back five years but these no longer take place due to lack of funding.

Administrator Johnny Bean said: "Our value is really in bringing together disparate artistic and cultural organisations in the district to talk with each other, cooperate and advocate."

Ironically, the Lancaster Art City monthly email is one of the best ways to discover cultural events and call outs in Preston, as the newsletter lists happenings across the region and not just in Lancaster and Morecambe.

## Case Study Two

**Creative Stoke** ([Facebook page](#))

Twitter no account - Instagram no account - Facebook 3,521 members

Creative Stoke's website was launched by local creative and editor Dave Haden in 2001, incorporating news, opportunities, courses and events with a mission to promote local creative talent. It included a directory of over 700 local creatives.

The website was updated regularly with a regular stream of opportunities and events notices. A page selling artworks and crafts by local artists was introduced to the site.

In 2016, Haden decided to stop circulating the Creative Stoke newsletter. A year later he also stopped updating the website - which was fairly primitive by today's standards - in 2017. The volunteer-led organisation now exists only as a Facebook public group and is focused 'on information likely to be of interest to creative \*producers and makers\* (rather than just consumers)'.

Haden said: "A Facebook group is just so much easier for your editor to administer."

## Case Study Three

**Blackpool Social Club** ([blackpoolsocial.club](#))

Twitter 2,900 - Instagram 415 - Facebook 2,114 likes/2,189 followers

(Aunty Social Twitter 1,622 - Instagram 424 - Facebook 1,629 likes/1,732 followers)

As the 'home of creativity and culture on the Fylde Coast', Blackpool Social Club (BSC) is an unfunded project built on a manifesto of showcasing the town's creativity through the eyes of contributing writers, photographers and film-makers.

BSC, launched in July 2020, is a re-boot of volunteer-led arts and culture magazine altBlackpool. AltBlackpool started eight years earlier and published over 1,700 articles on its website and four print editions. At its busiest, alt had a team of over 35 contributors. altBlackpool was not without its problems and a lack of funding and ever-increasing workload led to its closure in 2018.

Part of this failure came from key players in the town's wider arts sector declining to support altBlackpool's funding bid and sustainability plan. Instead, the town's major organisation created and invested in their own new platform - CultureBlackpool, an Arts Council-funded collaboration between VisitBlackpool, LeftCoast, Grand Theatre Blackpool, Blackpool Council Arts & Cultural Services including the Grundy Art Gallery and the Winter Gardens Blackpool.

Another reason for altBlackpool going on hiatus was burnout – administrating a cultural website like this is a lot of work, regardless of pay, especially if you're working in a challenging environment where support from the wider sector isn't always forthcoming.

altBlackpool was invited to contribute content to CultureBlackpool, but this would have been without remuneration, seriously increasing the volunteer workload without much recognition.

Blackpool Social Club is currently funded and supported by Aunty Social, a Blackpool-based voluntary arts organisation run by Catherine Mugonyi (who is also Creative Programmer at The Harris

Focused on community and alternative happenings as well as the work of local creatives, Blackpool Social Club brings a magazine-style online presence to culture in the resort, with a wide-ranging series of interviews, profiles and stories. It is administered by Mugonyi and local photographer Claire Walmsley-Griffiths, two people passionate about creativity in their town.

As part of their launch, BSC have developed a relationship with the Big Issue North, highlighting homelessness issues and campaigns in the resort as well as learning from a well-established publication through work with deputy editor Antonia Charlesworth.

Mugonyi says that being able to pay an administrator or editor is vital to keep a cultural project like BSC going. She said: "It does partly come down to having at least a paid editor post - just a few hours a week. It's a lot of work coordinating all the team members and providing support.

"[Our contributors] are all volunteers so we need to make their lives as easy as possible. As soon as something feels like a chore, people quite rightly want to step away. Aunty Social funds BSC through our general income generating activity (earned income), we cover hosting, domain, security, insurance (public liability, employee/volunteer liability, product, cyber - it can get pretty expensive!).

"We're not super keen on relying on grant funding because that's time-limited and usually comes with many strings attached, so we're looking at ways to generate sustainable revenue. However, we may need to look into a grant to help get us to the point where we can generate sufficient income.

"We've broken down the editor roles so that more people can share the 'top-level' responsibility. Hopefully this will give more collective support to those working at this level and ensure that any pressure/work is shared, rather than all on one person.

Since 2018, altBlackpool has been missed by Blackpool's creative community – many of them, especially artists and photographers, found that they gained a significant amount of work from the exposure gained through altBlackpool's articles and galleries.

Most of BSC current contributors were also involved with altBlackpool - and there are plans to explore more audio and video pieces, plus artist-led opinion pieces and critiques.

To enable its success, BSC has developed personal relationships with its volunteers, contributors, venues and artists, monitoring wellbeing and complimentary tickets to events, free training, journalism 'masterclasses' with Big Issue North and a number of social events to make sure the contributors know that they are valued.

BSC also aim to remain totally independent, which they say is a challenge when receiving sponsorship or grant funding – but they want the focus to be on the work of the volunteers and contributors who are essential to the success of the project.

## Case study Four

**Art in Liverpool** ([artinliverpool.com](http://artinliverpool.com))

Twitter 32,000 - Instagram 3,627 - Facebook 12,168 likes/13,197 followers - Mailing list 790 (down from 3,000 since new GDPR rules were introduced)

Originally set up by Ian Jackson and Minako Jackson in 2004 as one of the internet's first-ever blogs, Art in Liverpool publishes regular articles, listings, opportunities and news for artists and audiences around Merseyside. A print magazine dedicated to reaching new audiences for the arts the region is also published every month.

Their research found that their website failed to reach both the economically disadvantaged communities and the elderly - so in 2018 they launched a monthly print edition of their website output. The 3,000 copy print runs have a 90% pick up rate in areas outside of Liverpool city centre (for example St Helens, Knowsley, Wirral).

The employ a freelance marketing co-ordinator and have two part-time staff who work mainly on their co-programmed output, which includes language classes for refugees in collaboration with Tate Liverpool.

The organisation has a clearly-defined mission statement to 'be the hub for all information and critique related to Liverpool's thriving visual arts scene... our focus is on enabling artists and creative spaces to be the best they can be, developing meaningful relationships and partnerships around Merseyside that can have a positive impact on the cultural community'.

From finding out what's on, to looking for jobs in the arts, to providing a comprehensive directory of local artists, the site is Liverpool's go-to platform for all things art-related in the city.

The site maintains its readership through regularly updated content which gives it a news-style feel.

One of the successful parts of the site is that its events listings used the same back-end base code as most of Liverpool's main cultural institutions use in their websites (Culture in Liverpool, Bluecoat, Metal Culture) which allows easy transfer of listings information).

The WordPress site also uses a plug-in to ensure that all listings and updates and posts automatically get shared on Twitter and Facebook.

Patrick Kirk-Smith, the sole full-time employee of Art in Liverpool, said: "The most time consuming thing for Art in Liverpool is the social media. And on those weeks when there is too much work to do, it's good to have the basic covered on social media automatically."

## Case Study Five

**Word of Warning** ([wordofwarning.org](http://wordofwarning.org))

Twitter 4,740 Instagram 260 - Facebook 1,289 likes/1,391 followers - 2,000 mailing list subscribers

A successful independent contemporary theatre listings organisation is Manchester-based Word of Warning (the public arm of production outfit hÅb). Word of Warning combines a weekly events round up email with a website-based Google calendar.

This brief but personable weekly email from Tamsin Drury details the next two weeks' worth of performances in Manchester and further afield. It is the combination of the email and calendar which makes Word of Warnings output - and promotion of works it is not associated with - so successful.

Because the way events are listed, chronologically (with links) but in a series of five or six short paragraphs, the email has become known as one not to miss for contemporary performance fans in the North West.

Drury trawls over 80 websites a week to compile Word of Warnings calendar, which would happen at the start of each theatre season but this work becomes more haphazard during times of increased workload. She believes the calendar is the best way to keep on top of – and informed about – the regions live art and contemporary performance events.

## Case Study Six

**Birmingham Art Map** ([birminghamartmap.org](http://birminghamartmap.org))

Twitter 4,776 – Instagram 1,124

A very simple but effective idea, Birmingham Art Map is a website hosting a map and accompanying downloadable pdf of cultural events across the city of Birmingham. Below the map on the website are the venues – and their events – in a magazine-style listings format (without images).

The Art Map is designed to make it easy to discover, explore and enjoy art, culture and creativity in Birmingham. The printed version of the map is available across the city from a number of venues and cafes.

Not all cultural events are listed on the printed version because of space, so the website and social media backs up the map with up-to-date programme information.

The Birmingham Art Map is produced by Eastside Projects, a not-for-profit artist-run public gallery space created in 2008 who commission, and produce experimental art practices while working collaboratively on cultural projects within the city. They have been supported by a long list of funders, including Birmingham City Council and Arts Council England.

## Case Study Seven

**Cene Magazine** ([cenemagazine.co.uk](http://cenemagazine.co.uk))

Twitter 1,854 - Instagram 5,120– Facebook 1,406 likes/followers 1,647

Tackling arts and culture - plus fashion, food and drink - on a regional rather than city basis, 'cene was created to push creative boundaries in Kent. It is an example of a commercial enterprise working within arts and culture. It has three full-time staff.

The website's media section offers photographers, film-makers, designers and PR & marketing (those creatives who produce the magazine and website) for hire.

Through its creatives, magazine and events, 'cene 'is determined to both motivate and support those at the forefront of the Kent 'cene'.

'cene's analysis of its own creatives echoes that of Preston's. It adds: 'There is a cluster of brilliance just waiting for the oxygen to ignite the flames and roast the raw talent simmering away in Kent. 'cene displays the cultural movement that Kent has to offer, and lets our readers engage with, create, and become the names of the future'.

Such bold statements need to be backed up comprehensive listings, feature interviews and stunning design. The free magazine, available from 500 locations, is paid for by advertisements. The output is ultra-professional. Writing is backed up by creative imagery.

The 5,000-circulation magazine is effectively an advert for their work. They also compile listings under the banner That's Kentertainment.

The 'cene website has over 7,000 unique visitor per month. Its creative approach to advertising has included 3D glasses, scratch cards and pop outs with the magazine. 'cene has a comprehensive advertising offer and price list for advertisers and events organisers.

# Case Study Eight

## Broadgate & District Community Magazine

The Broadgate area of the city developed strong community links through a local magazine delivered door-to-door, which features events. Broadgate & District Community Magazine, compiled by Broadgate Residents Action Group, has been published for almost 20 years and is delivered to 1,800 homes. The magazine also had an accompanying blog from 2008 to 2013 (<http://broadgateisgreat.blogspot.com/>)

The magazine is distributed by a team of 25 people. It costs £344.41 for 1,800 copies of a 20-page issue.

It includes a page by Communities connectors, a short story by Terry Quinn (of Damson Poets) contributes a history and poem page. There is also a finance and local police news page.

The magazine is financed by local advertisers, plus grants from Lancashire County Council, Lancashire Police, Our Lancashire and the English Football League (who have their offices in Broadgate).

The recent Preston City Council funded, UCLan-led Connected Communities project in Broadgate successfully worked with the magazine to engage with the community, including enabling a series of events. Primarily built around helping people from diverse backgrounds to connect and tackle loneliness and social isolation, the project delivered a series of street parties across Broadgate in July 2020. A second project is due to begin in Plungington.

## Other examples of interest:

### **Creative Tourist** ([creativetourist.com](http://creativetourist.com))

Twitter 24,700 - Instagram 4,566 - Facebook 8,668 likes/9,713 followers – newsletter 7,000 subscribers

Launched as Manchester's first dedicated arts and travel website, with an aim to raise the profile of Manchester as a cultural destination. Around 60,000 people read the website every month. They cover all creative areas, focused on tourism recommendations and features on theatre and festival guides, films, exhibition, music, literature, restaurants, bars and family activities.

Creative Tourist also runs Manchester After Hours, the city's annual Museums at Night programme and Wonder Women on international women's day from the city that was the birthplace of the suffrage movement.

Their weekly email lists a huge range of events across the north of England.

**Museums Development North West** ([museumdevelopmentnorthwest.wordpress.com](http://museumdevelopmentnorthwest.wordpress.com)) is an example of a well designed, informative website which uses a basic WordPress template. It also uses a WordPress plug-in which compiles all blog posts from that week into an email for subscribers. This system can be set up so that posts are collated into a weekly email (plug-in: Email posts to subscribers).

**Leeds Inspired** ([leedsinspired.co.uk](http://leedsinspired.co.uk)) Twitter 48,000 followers – Instagram 14,600 followers – Facebook 23,338 likes/24,140 followers

This What's On guide is run by Leeds City Council and lists exhibitions, dance, performance, films and family events – mixing council run events with independent events. Individuals can upload their own events. It also prominently details information on how to apply for a local authority arts grants. The

site includes an archive of past events held in Leeds which show the depth of cultural events in the city. Despite a simplistic design with relatively few sections, the website looks busy and showcases brilliantly arts and culture in Leeds.

It uses the popular magazine-style website layout – similar to Blackpool Social Club - which has proved popular with visitors – although content is restricted to events rather than profiles and features.

There are 371 posts on the Leeds Inspired blog page, with only six displayed per page. While these are presented beautifully (headline, photo, content details + tags, intro text) this page listing format, as used less successfully by VisitPreston.com) does limit the appeal of the Blog Posts. The most successful news-based websites, such as Mail Online and BBC online, put a huge amount of effort into arranging their front pages and where the most important and relevant stories are placed.

### **Now Then (Sheffield & Manchester)**

The magazine (published for 12 years but recently expanded to a website) profiles artists alongside music, food, news and arts and culture. Billed as an 'independent platform for free, high-quality citizen journalism', the magazine has social change as its core belief with articles, reviews and interviews written by local people and the direction of Now Then decided by them.

Now Then Magazine is owned by not-for-profit social enterprise Opus Independents. The website design is basic.

### **Theatre Deli (Sheffield)**

The Theatre Deli model in Sheffield, where the theatre and community venue operates out of a large former retail warehouse within the city. This ill-fitting hangar space - with a theatre space housed at one end of the warehouse - has been hugely successful in artist and audience development for over 10 years.

Theatre Deli is a multi-funded arts organisation working across three venues in Sheffield and London. It is Arts Council England funded.

# Survey feedback

Two surveys were circulated to inform this report, one for creatives in the city and one for the general public. The aim of the surveys were to examine how information is distributed between creative groups, and to the public. Survey data and brief analysis is detailed here

## Creatives' survey

### Which mailing lists/networks local to Preston do you subscribe to?

The Harris Museum is the most popular mailing list in Preston for creatives - 70.8% of creatives surveyed subscribed to it.

Then are a number of popular mailing lists from independent organisations and the council. The mailing lists for In Certain Places (52.1%), Oxheys Mills Studios (43.8%), Curious Minds, They Eat Culture (43.8%) and Preston City Council/Preston City Council Cultural Strategy (37.5%) and Preston City Council events team (35.4%) were also popular.

### Which listings sites do you use to find out what is going on in Preston?

The most popular source of information is through Facebook newsfeeds shared by a friend (used by 59.3% of those surveyed), with news website Blog Preston used by 48.1% of those surveyed, far more than the Lancashire Evening Post (29.4%).

Twitter (37%) and Instagram (33.3%) were also popular - but were matched by Brewtime Collective's Facebook group as a popular source of information (also 33.3%), despite the page being relatively new. It out-performed VisitPreston (22.2%) as a source of information for creatives.

Podio magazine was a source of information for 11.1% of those surveyed. Several Facebook news pages scored higher than Podio - led by Preston Past & Present with 25.9%. Several other What's on pages were used by between 11 and 13% of those surveyed.

### How do you publicise events/creative opportunities/creative conversations?

Results here showed the wide varied of methods used to publicise events and to communicate messages.

Again, Facebook is the most popular medium for publicising events, with posts on an organisation's Facebook Page the most popular (78%), with personal posts on an individual own page (58%) more popular than on a other pages (such as a local news page on Facebook - 48%). Traditional posters and flyers are also seen as an important part of promotional activity (60% of creatives surveyed use this method to publicise events), closely followed by direct messaging and email newsletters.



Newspaper publicity was used by 42% of those surveyed, with radio publicity used by 32%. TV publicity was used by 12% of those surveyed (all unpaid publicity - not advertisements).

Interestingly, direct messages were done by 52% of creatives and an email newsletter by 42%. Phone calls were made by 28% of creatives surveyed.

## If you use paid adverts, please state which

Facebook ads are by far the most commonly used form of advertising (69.2%). Paid newspaper ads were used by 20% of those surveyed, with Instagram ads being used by 12%. Radio advertisements were used by 8% of respondents.

## Further survey questions

Written feedback was collected from seven main questions, plus an option for further comments.

### The questions asked were:

How can Preston improve communications between its creatives?

How can Preston's creatives improve communications to its audiences?

Which groups/ communities would you like to see better engaged in Preston?

Who do you turn to for advice?

How could your work be better supported?

How can Preston's cultural leaders improve their communications with you?

What barriers are there in Preston stopping you creating new work, developing ideas or putting on an event?

Which of these (above [paid advertising options]) do you feel are most effective in communicating your work and why?

Selected feedback - Any other comments?

Listed below are all the questions and a summary of the answers given.

### How can Preston improve communications between its creatives?

By far the most popular response was a request to have a creative/listings hub for the city. Feedback strongly highlighted a lack of cohesion and centralised site for the city's creatives and events. Some creatives also wanted regular meetings for creatives, possibly speed-dating style (once used during meetings at Korova Arts Cafe) or using the Pecha Kucha format where 20 slides are shown for 20 seconds each, to ensure presentations by each creative are brief.

A First Fridays-style events night was suggested (similar to Lancaster's First Fridays format - see Case Studies).

There was scepticism around the idea of creating a new website because of costs/funding issues, while there was also concern of that any proposal of a new meeting/website did not replace what already existed.

There were also calls for more cohesion between Preston's various organisations.

### Selected feedback:

Central creative hub Facebook page

Have one strong online forum that organisations presenting all art forms would want to use. There are limited Council resources available to support this and 'creatives' contributions of self-funded time and expertise are limited. I disagree with the idea of creating a new website as there will never be funding for it to be updated ad infinitum.

Everything feels scattered. It would be good to have one central resource, maybe with a forum, links to opportunities, collaboration ideas, friendly swaps, etc.

More social activities - meaningful, open & honest conversation/debate.

We need some hub to connect all the organisations, including the uclan arts school together to circulate information that can then be forwarded to every member of each organisation with sole artists also able to sign up too.

Centralised broadbased listings

Need a place where all info can be stored and shared.

Maybe a newsletter that creative people can submit to. With info about what's on, where it's on and where interesting stuff is happening.

By removing the 'every person for themselves' mentality.

There is an issue with some creatives looking down on and not supporting other creatives.

I think there needs to be less pretension. I think there should be more openness and we should support each other more. I am thankful that I have some great support for my work on social media.

### **How can Preston's creatives improve communications to its audiences?**

Physical notice boards were mentioned as a way to communicate to audiences. Some groups (such as Friends of the Harris) stated they are happy to share information on events but state that late notification and poorly presented text can be frustrating. Again, a centralised website was suggested several times.

#### **Selected feedback:**

I'm up for a flippin huge public notice board somewhere in the city centre. (It could list event and also display an 'artist of the month' or something).

One good website.

Marketing events more and having one place to post.

Closer engagement with UCLan?

Online events/ workshops hub accessible to all, where everyone can post information - with a name that appeals to Preston people and are likely to take notice of. Don't give it a funky name that nobody remembers. Just keep it simple, Preston Events Board or something like that! Somebody needs to run it, the hub needs to be proactive in posting, mailing out, speaking to locals about what they want to see etc.

Professional marketing and Graphic Design. Better acts.

I think social media is the quickest communications channel nowadays so better information via Facebook and Instagram.

Making a more coherent and cohesive 'what's on' would be good start. A lot of the time unless you know where to look you never find out what's on.

Some ideas might be to build participation and public stakeholders, co-promotion by key providers, promote use of key shared conduits etc.

I rarely see advertisement for things that are independently run, often we hear about it after the event. But I think that is a result of the fact that there isn't a central hub and very

few of the groups get their heads together or even work together.

### **Which groups/communities would you like to see better engaged in Preston?**

A number of diverse groups were mentioned, reflecting Preston's diverse population. Some felt there was a divide between young creatives and arts societies, and that there is too much focus on the city centre and the expense of the outlying urban areas.

#### **Selected feedback:**

BLM has clearly highlighted a need for us to better understand/engage/support Black and POC communities. And COVID has highlighted long-standing issues around access (physical and otherwise) for disabled communities. I'd really like to see some crossover between arts communities and other critically engaged groups - science, wellbeing, climate, politics, mental health, LGBTQ, feminist and so on.

There is a great divide between the young active artists and the active societies who are all inclusive and have many younger members, but certain people look down on them.

Some further away from the city centre.

### **Who do you turn to for advice?**

A number of individuals were mentioned - with no single person or organisation standing out as a mentor. Some respondents stated they did not know who could support them or that they no longer seek advice.

#### **Selected feedback:**

Brewtime, Rita Whitlock (PCC Events), Birley.

I'm currently getting mentoring with a curator based in Leeds who is great. More mentoring & skill sharing opps in Preston would be fab.

I've given up and just do it myself.

Other artists for personal work. Arts organisations, UCLan, council etc.

Artists within the collective.

Curious minds.

Arts Council England, PCC, UCLan + others.

Is there someone I could turn to?

Fellow creatives / Norman Long / Lubaina Himid / Garry Cook.

No one.

### **How could you work be better supported?**

Feedback was highly critical of Preston City Council's support of artists - through spaces, seed funding and mentoring. Creatives appreciate the need for sustainability but question the council's genuine commitment to arts and culture within the city.

Fair pay for creatives was raised several times (there was a call for the city to extend the Preston Model to creatives and commit to a fair pay model, as was a call for a career guidance mentorship/advisory officer similar to the role Jenny Rutter held as Creative

Industries Officer/Business Innovation Officer.

There was also a number of requests to make more properties/venues available to creatives to show/display/create their work.

**Selected feedback:**

For arts and cultural organisations and artist collectives, bring back the Council's open grants programme so that artists and arts organisations have match or seed funding to enable them to develop their practise. There also needs to be support from the Local Enterprise Partnership and a recognition by the LEP of the great contribution that Preston's arts and culture sector makes to the County overall. It's very difficult for creatives and cultural organisations to achieve match funding from major funders such as Arts Council England without support from their local authorities. In the last few years in Preston, funding for artists or arts organisations has been limited to small scale commissions to produce work for Preston Council's own events which not all creatives are interested in being a part of. Preston Council's Planning Department could adopt a policy of free or low cost short term use of their empty properties for artists and encourage other commercial property owners in the city to do the same through financial incentives. There is still a glut of empty units in the city centre - some which have been vacant for years - artists bring life to the communities they work within and as well as developing a sense of community and local pride, increasing footfall and resulting in increased retail sales.

Brewtime has been really good - we value honesty, no bullshit, sustainability, grassroots approaches - and are in the progress of compiling for a fair practice charter (including fair pay). I'd like to see Preston artists unionise (e.g. AUE) so we better understand our rights and can collectively advocate for fair pay etc (and also understand how to support each other better - e.g. not working for free to undercut paid work). Preston institutions should make a commitment to fair practice guidelines (in line with AUE, AN) - linked with the Preston Model that could make a statement of national impact in the sector.

Access to exhibition spaces. Conversations with art curators who know their job and are interested to discover, follow and nourish artists in their development.

More support from Harris and council, everything seems too much trouble for them, or too long winded. Also why does the Harris not do regular local artist exhibitions? So much talent and creativity is shut out.

Maybe more support centrally from the arts team in the council.

More empathy required for venues trying to promote live events and arts.

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other commercial property owners in the city to do the same through financial incentives. There is still a glut of empty units in the city centre - some which have been vacant for years - artists bring life to the communities they work within and as well as developing a sense of community and local pride, increasing footfall and resulting in increased retail sales.

Quite simply, more grants and funding opportunities make more work. The bigger budget, the more scope. The more help that is provided in promoting people's work, the more money they make, the more they can do. For example, the last time I promoted work online, I tagged local creative companies, council etc in the work. But not one like/ share from them. Councils could be promoting the local businesses to schools/ public/ businesses. How about profile promotions? "This week we are following ....., does ..... in the area. Contact them on....." there are loads of marketing opportunities that could be created by throwing a little money at it.

More venues. More promoters.

More places to exhibit. More venues for workshops.

I think local news sites and other organisations could implement a structure of payment for the use of local photographer's work.

There used to be a mentor opportunity that happened at Pad Gallery where I would speak to the likes of Jenny Rutter for career guidance as a student. I'd like to see these kind of opportunities take place.

Affordable space to work. I currently work outside of Preston because I couldn't afford any space in Preston.

A well equipped maker space with metal workshop would improve the city.

Having open sessions for willing amateurs. Our work produced Preston Passion 2012 and 2017.

More help with promotion would be a must and funding to provide a few bigger events.

Money would help. We were invented by PCC to distribute small grants on their behalf. After a while we had to apply for the annual grant to disperse amongst the applicants, then we had to apply for grants in competition with other groups and eventually we were told the Council didn't have any money to apply for. We have produced Preston Arts Festival since 2002 although we have no grant and rely on what we can get having to be careful to balance the Festival books to keep it going.

### **How can Preston's cultural leaders improve their communications with you?**

Feedback highlighted Preston's lack of a coherent, focused approach to disseminating information to its creatives. There was a call for more meetings - possibly quarterly - for key figures (i.e. Preston City Council) to inform creatives of cultural news and developments and what opportunities are available. The city council's cultural department email of opportunities was criticised for its 'ad-hoc, unfocused' nature - some of these emails or screen shots from a mobile phone. The lack of visibility from those who work in the cultural department was also an issue of concern - some people simply do not know who they are.

#### **Selected feedback:**

Communications is a (increasingly important - as so much work become digital) skill that

needs to be recognised by cultural leaders; if they want to communicate effectively they need to employ somebody to do this for them.

A little more public transparency regarding decision making processes and available resources (e.g. money and spaces - even if there are none, we need to know). I've asked for this for years on the cultural board, but its slow progress. Curious Minds have been fantastic in making a website (for free) for the strategy information, and facilitating the consensus workshops. (I know not everyone is happy with that yet but you have to realise this is big progress from where we were!) The Councils arts 'mailing list' seems really ad-hoc, unfocused, and not very well informed. I know it's probably (Rita) doing her best (alongside having to run the park cafes, deal with covid, and everything else!!) but it doesn't currently inspire confidence. They need to be more visible and approachable - possibly this needs a dedicated Arts Officer which there isn't the money for... (could different orgs pool some resources to collectively fund an independent role like this?).

I've been a musician and composer for 30 years and I still don't even know who any of them are - there is a reason the arts scenes in Preston is dying. I see lots of appointed leaders planning things but nothing really gets done.

There have been some big improvements over recent years which will hopefully continue. Cultural leaders need to invest time and thought (& money if possible) into how local artists can be accessed by an audience. We have so much talent however it is almost impossible for fledgling artists to be known even locally. An investment in these artists can lead to rich rewards for the city.

Make contact!

They need to work with groups not just with their own resources and venues ie The Harris keep everyone in the loop.

More events (later). Some kind of creatives' directory would be great.

Regular emails/newsletter.

Well, I don't know who these people are so that would be a good start!

Unsure - clear announcements of opportunities. Set times to meet with other creatives and to hear plans directly from the "cultural leaders".

### **What barriers are there in Preston stopping you creating new work, developing ideas or putting on an event?**

Lack of funding was the obvious primary barrier for cultural development within the city. Lack of support in organisational procedures was also frequently quoted, along with a lack of suitable venues to show creative work.

Some creatives felt that even their entirely independently funded work faced resistance from The Harris and Preston City Council in relation to putting on events.

#### **Selected feedback:**

Funding!

Huge lack of time and help. Most orgs in preston seem to be run by one or two people doing everything they can! Are there more ways to collaborate?

The absence of engaged cultural centers, absence of easy and low fee access to spaces for exhibitions, absence of good well prepared art curators. Absence of spaces for speculative thinking.

Places to do stuff, too difficult to get permission.

It's down to money and suitable venues.

I believe 'Preston' needs to shout out more about its arts and cultural offer - previous strategies commissioned by the Council describing it as the 'Third City of the North West' indicate low ambitions and external viewpoints cast upon the city not reflected in its actual vibrant and diverse arts and cultural offer. With Local Authorities shrinking budgets and influence over the arts and cultural sector, now is the time for arts and cultural organisations to work together (as it has been doing with the Brewtime Collective), to move things forward and lead the way in raising the profile of Preston's creative assets and create opportunities for artists and arts organisations to develop their practice in the city. Cultural organisations such as the longstanding Mela and the Caribbean Carnival need to be recognised for the value and importance they hold within Preston and to have their financial support from the Council reinstated or supported through the BID or LEP (Lancashire Enterprise Partnership) - they are at the very heart of the city; they represent the strength in the city's cultural diversity, bring in thousands of visitors each year and will struggle to survive under current conditions. The same goes for the arts sector in general - without greater support, it won't thrive and artists & arts organisations will leave the city for better opportunities elsewhere.

Lack of a theatre for a City is really poor. Something medium size required that doesn't cost the world to hire. 200 seater. Lancs going for City Of Culture but no theatre in Preston! I know there are a few small venues, but when you add up the costs of creating a show they don't pay, so you won't get any larger scale work. Get that amazing looking theatre off UCLAN in Winkley Square and get it open... with free parking in the area.

Easy access to Council to grant permission too many different bodies.

Lack of an established functional public theatre space or partner org limits size of work we can produce.

There are hardly any venues for showing work.

Funding and time.

Nothing stops me working or developing ideas but The Harris And the Council have always been resistant to putting on events even when I fund them.

### **Which of these (above) do you feel are most effective in communicating your work and why?**

Facebook was singled out as the best social media platform to target local audiences, while Instagram worked better for audiences further afield. It is clear from the feedback there is still a place for printed media - with the most success coming from a mixture of both social media and printed channels.

#### **Selected feedback:**

Facebook and word of mouth.

Many people use Facebook as an event diary so this is usually essential, and twitter/Instagram for reaching further afield and younger audience.

For a visual arts audience - our social media, eventbrite and national arts listings. For a local audience - opening the doors on a sunny day and sticking a sign out. Used to do a lot of poster/flyering too (including around the university classrooms/art studios).

We use Facebook and Instagram to let specific audiences know about our work.

Facebook personal page events, as those I find interested link in and people are good at

sharing if I ask.

Facebook Ads target local people.

Direct and personal I find is the best way to connect with people (but takes the longest)

Twitter works for us. It's easy to share and has a huge reach.

Social media, especially Instagram is effective, Facebook is more local and Instagram is far further reaching.

The Arts Festival brochure works well plus posting the events on Facebook.

### **Any other comments?**

As an opportunity to re-emphasise what creatives want in relation to arts and culture in the city, this question brought more forthright opinion. Calls included more support from UCLan and BID Preston, plus the creation of a dedicated council-run Facebook page - which is one area creatives feels is lacking in the promotion of events. The Harris is also question in relation to whether it can more actively support independent creativity and events.

### **Selected feedback:**

More people need to use [visitpreston.com/events](http://visitpreston.com/events)

It is not rocket science, the council and the Harris need to decide if they want to promote the independent sector, and once they do the solutions are easy, there are plenty of people who they already know can deliver who will.

Love the arts meetings but no one has the chance to tell people what they do always what should happen. So much going on already, someone needs to list the groups which already exist and what they do.

We need to start a Facebook group and see how it develops.

It's hard making things work as an artist. I've lived here since 1994 and I have tried several times to be involved with different things. Often the person organising the event is a strong person, I guess that's why they are organising things. But that has its own problem when they have their circle of friends and if you are outside of that it can be difficult to get in. And when you have failed too many times you give up.

The university needs to do more to help the arts sector in the city. It's an enormous entity and controls a lot of public space.

No arts centre no cultural connection - simple!

I am hopeful that all this is another step to Preston Arts and Culture being influenced by local practitioners instead of overpaid consultants from faraway places.



## General public survey

### Which mailing lists/networks/groups local to Preston are you a member of?

Preston has a wide range of community groups and networks.

The Harris Museum is the most popular organisation/ mailing list for the general public surveyed (38.1%), with They Eat Culture's network being used by a quarter - 25% - of those surveyed. Preston's City Council's events team was used by 15.9% of those surveyed while the Cultural Strategy network reached 12.5% of those surveyed. In Certain Places network was used by 13.6% of those surveyed. The Larder's network was used by 12.5% of those who were surveyed.

There were a number of networks/groups for which 8-9% of respondents were a member of. These included Damson Poets, The Birley, Oxheys Mill Studios, Preston Playhouse and Action Records. Podio Magazine was a network for 6.8% of those surveyed, closely followed by Derelict Festival 5.7% and Blaze Arts 4.5%

A substantial 34.5% of those surveyed do not subscribe to any mailing list or similar group.

### How do you find out about events happening in Preston?

Personal Facebook newsfeeds (shared by friends) (58%) and Blog Preston (55.7%) are by far the most popular ways for the general public to find out about events in Preston.

Facebook was a very popular way of sharing events and information through various ways (local news pages, Facebook events sharing etc). Preston Past and Present facebook page was a source of information for 14.8% of those surveyed. Brewtime's Facebook group was used by 10.2%.

Twitter was used as a source of information by 28.4% of those surveyed, while Instagram was used by 8% - highlighting the effectiveness of Facebook.

The Lancashire Evening Post was used as a source of events information by 26.1% of those surveyed. Podio magazine was used by 5.7% of those surveyed while the Visit Preston website was used by 15.9% of those surveyed.

### What type of events do you enjoy?

Live music and theatre and performance (both 77.3%) were the most popular type of events, closely followed by art exhibitions (73.9%).

A number of other activities proved popular, highlighting the diverse range of events enjoyed the general public. These included photography exhibitions (50%), talks and lectures (53.4%), outdoor

performances 61.4% and film screenings (52.3%) art classes (46.6%) and creativity workshops (40.9%)

A number of events scored around 20% as events people enjoy - including coffee mornings and community support meetings and book signings. Pub quizzes were enjoyed by 27.3% of those surveyed.

## Further survey questions

### How can Preston improve communications about its events?

More support from local (print) media was called for. There was also a desire for a more high-profile notice board area and dedicated social media support.

Working together - organisations and independent events promoters - was also seen as a good way to increase the success and reach of all events.

### Selected feedback:

One place for all events.

[Monthly emails from an authoritative source.](#)

Sharing on social media but also need flyers in shops and supermarkets as not everyone on Facebook etc.

[Unify the local muso's, artists and entertainers under a worker Co-op banner allowing shared resources and avoiding duplication.](#)

Events at the Flag market via PCC are poorly advertised - and this is reflects in attendance. They need a nominated individual for social media marketing etc. Twin town Kalisz in Poland makes great use of their outdoor 'square' with seating and live events throughout summer months bringing all ages and a wider demographic to celebrate culture and the arts.

[Better Facebook pages \(the Preston Past page has thousands of visitors who really engage with it\) Improve Twitter interaction and with more relevant updates. Look for influencers to promote information.](#)

Dedicated social media support.

[Have one site dedicated to all event, or have free access to LEP type version online. Similar to MEN in Manchester, who provide a diverse list of everything happening over the weekend/week from each genre.](#)

Something's Brewing is a great start! but ensure the strategy has a 'vision' and some key objectives with workable action plan! Dare I say it LET the Cultural Arts sector IN Preston lead develop and run with it! WHY NOT sort out the Guild Hall fiasco UTTER DISGRACE.

[Have in place a cultural strategy and for the council to have a better understanding of the links. Between culture, economy and wellbeing. Serious investment.](#)

Reinstate a Visitor Information Centre - a city centre space where organisations can leave information about events and people (locals and visitors) can go to find out what's on. If I knew that the LEP had a comprehensive events listings once a week, I would buy that edition every week. Have a listings website that allows for detailed searches by logical categories as well as date, so you don't wade through random stuff. But have good ways to show the best of the random stuff beyond 'interest bubbles' to reach cross-over audiences. Work together, not in competition, to promote events. If everyone invested some of their effort/budget in a joint initiative, they'd reach a load more people. Communicate details of all the organisations that are putting on events, even if comprehensive listings aren't yet

possible, so people can subscribe to mailing lists. All cultural / creative organisations with a website should provide links to all the others. Don't create silos of art forms or 'approved' culture - hook people in to the more challenging/niche stuff by reaching out to them.

Communicate appropriately for a wide audience - the niche audience will get it regardless, so speak to those that will respond to open and straightforward promotion (which doesn't mean unimaginative or uncreative).

[One central place. I find it hard to know about events even though I search for them. Quite often find out about them on the day or too late.](#)

### **Which organisations do you know who put on events in Preston?**

The vast array of independent organisations named here shows how important the independent sector is to the city.

#### **Selected feedback:**

Individual pubs, the Harris, the Birley, The flag market.

[Soundskills, Derelict, They Eat Culture, The Larder, The Continental, UCLan, The Ferret, The Harris, Bernie Velvick and her crew, libraries, Penwortham Arts Centre, Preston Creative Network.](#)

Longton players, the creative network.

[The Conti.](#)

Continental.

[Continental Preston live music great place.](#)

Council, TEC, pubs, UCLan, Preston and South Ribble TUC.

[Gary Cook, The Ferret, They Eat Culture, The Birley.](#)

PCC UCLAN CONTI FERRET HARRIS MAKING A MARK.

[The Big Picture Drawing Group, Oxheys, Mela, Caribbean Carnival, The Larder, City Council, UCLan](#)

The Ferret, The Continental, They Eat Culture, Preston Council, The Harris, Action Records  
[The Harris, Oxheys.](#)

The Larder, Harris, Birley studios, in certain places

[The Larder, Preston Pride, Gary Cook, Preston Playhouse, Council, The Harris, Creative Network.](#)

Continental, Ferret, Preston Playhouse, Damson Poets, Preston Poets, Preston Arts Association, Harris, Birley, various choirs, St Georges, UCLAN, various drama groups based at churches.

[They Eat Culture, PCC, Plau, Playhouse, In Certain Places, Lancs Encounter, Harris, Heritage Days \(realise this isn't an organisation\), The Continental, UCLan, Caribbean carnival.](#)

#### **Other comments:**

Respondents were very positive about Preston as a city. Some stated they wanted the area of focus to go beyond Preston, particularly to include South Ribble which has a catchment area almost as big as the city of Preston. Concern was expressed over the relationship between organisations and independent creatives.

#### **Selected feedback:**

I think Preston punches above its weight culturally. Hooray!

[We need a comedy store back in preston.](#)

A Co-op could pitch for the opportunity to book licences events in Preston's community spaces. This would allow them to invite the hosteleries to bid for the privilege of supplying refreshments. This would reverse the Arts Labour Market dynamic.

Preston is an excellent city. It has something for every taste. Any publication should list the diverse nature of all who make up the city and not just focus on city centre events.

Get the Communication strategy at the City Council brought into the 21st century with using social media platforms short films radio text email etc.

It's brilliant that this is being looked at. Preston badly needs to work together and harness the impressive but disconnected creative and cultural activity that goes on. But what do you mean by Preston? Needs to cover activity in the 'suburbs' and rural areas - Fulwood, Ashton, Fishwick, Broughton, and beyond. And a lot of the audience - actual and potential - is south of the river (and a fair bit of activity), so don't let the Ribble and local authority boundaries get in the way of the reality of people's lives. And the questions don't seem to include any representation of the diverse cultures living in Preston. How are you engaging everyone so the responses reflect the population and the range of activity taking place?

If the people of Preston are to care about live events, then the town, councils etc need to do so also.

I really hope to see more younger people who specialise across art forms leading more arts activities in Preston within the leading organisation in Preston. As an artist & producer I feel there is a huge disconnect between the organisation and artists in Preston and Lancashire.

# Broken links and out of date information on VisitPreston.com

There are 41 Clubs and Societies listed on VisitPreston.com directory (<http://www.visitpreston.com/directory/>) with four of them containing broken links (Cinema Around the Corner, Harris LGBTQ Working Group, Preston Book Group, Preston Geek Up).

Several pieces of information on this website are out of date, also resulting in a number of broken links, particularly on The Continental's page including its co-programming with They Eat Culture which has been dissolved for some time.

Most information relating to The Continental and They Eat Culture on the Visit Preston website is out of date, including a number of broken links which take you to Continental website pages which no longer exist.

## Key mailing lists

### The key mailing lists in Preston are:

Visit Preston	2,000
The Continental	2,000
Harris Museum	1,600
Oxheys	352
Friends of the Harris	290
Anthony Padgett	250 approx
In Certain Places	232
Ludus Dance	200
The Birley	200
Preston City Council creatives	153
Happy Makes	117
Preston Arts Association	60 (includes 50 groups)
Artful Drawing Group	51
Action Records	Unavailable
Derelict festival	Unavailable
They Eat Culture	No response

## Key Twitter accounts relevant to Preston

BBC Radio Lancashire @BBCLancashire	136,800
Lancashire Post @leponline	70,000
Visit Lancashire @VisitLancashire	51,200
Blog Preston @blogpreston	24,100
Harris Museum @HarrisPreston	14,600
VisitPreston @visitpreston	16,900
UCLan SU @UCLanSU	11,500
Preston Guild Hall @prestguildhall	10,900
The Continental @newcontinental	10,500
Preston BID @BIDPreston	9,561
53 Degrees @53degrees	6,955
Winedown @winedownpreston	5,405

Our Preston @OurPreston	4,770 (no longer active)
UCLan What's On @UCLanWhatsOn	4,317
They Eat Culture @theyeatculture	4,211
Baluga Bar & Club @BalugaPreston	3,875
Preston At Night @PrestonAtNight	3,498
The Ferret @FerretPreston	3,069
Prest Fest @PRESTFEST	2,809
Action Records @ActionRecords	2,531
The Larder @LarderLancs	1,748
Friends of the Harris @HarrisFriends	1,394
Peter Kelly @cllrPeterKelly	1,256
Derelict @derelictlive	1,001

**These key individual players outside of arts and culture on Twitter include:**

Duke of Preston @DOPreston	13,900
John Gillmore @Gillylancs	11,100
Matthew Brown @MatthewBrownLan	5,109
Mark Inglis @PrestonPhonebox	2,686
Martyn Rawlinson @martynrolly	2,195
Donna Clifford @donnalclifford	1,781
Tony Worrall @TonyWorrall	1,679
Joe Gudgeon @JoeGudgeonPhoto	1,357
Paul Melling @Pjmimages	1,326

**Other significant organisations outside of arts and culture:**

Preston North End @pnafc	106,300
UCLan @UCLan	48,000
Lancashire Business View @LBVmagazine	13,000
The BIBAs @BIBAs2020	10,500
Preston Hour @PrestonHour	7,797
Disability Equality NW @DisabilityNW	5,812
St George's Centre @StGeorgesPR1	4,276
Propeller Hub @UCLanPropeller	3,549
Preston Markets @prestonmarkets	3,352
Preston Bus @PrestonBus	3,157
The Foxton Centre @TheFoxtonCentre	2,412
Waterstones @WstonesPreston	2,147
Preston Windrush @WindrushPreston	2,054
A Beer in Preston @abeerinpreston	1,858
Society One @coworksociety1	1,413
Etc Urban @etcurban	1,019

**Culture accounts no longer active**

@CulturePreston  
 @prestongigguide  
 @preston\_events  
 @OurPreston