

**Milton Keynes Arts Strategy 2007**  
**Pre-Strategy Stakeholder Workshops**

As part of the initial research for the drafting of an Arts Strategy for Milton Keynes, 2 workshops were facilitated by Lucy Bedford (Cultural Development Officer) & Marie Kirbyshaw (Senior Public Art Officer) on 23<sup>rd</sup> October & 22<sup>nd</sup> November.

Participants were invited from the wide Milton Keynes Arts Community offering us a broad 'arts-aware' audience. The following networks were used to invite people to the workshops:

- MK Media Circle
- MKweb COIN database
- MK Cultural Alliance Membership
- Online forum 'google group'

24 people attended and a list forms an appendix to this report.

The workshops were designed in a SWOT format to create a better understanding of the arts climate from the perspective of arts organisations and artists. The workshop used the term 'flourishing' as an aspiration for the arts in Milton Keynes. It was discussed what was meant by this, and the following emerged.

- "Blossoming not growing"
- "Has external recognition"
- "The difference between flourishing and just growing at a pleasant steady rate and never making anyone go ooohh! ;0)"
- "Able to realise all of the good ideas without artificial barriers"

In summary of the findings of the workshops, it was clear that arts organisations and artists wanted the arts to outwardly flourish. This term has informed thinking towards a possible vision statement.

Below are responses to the 3 questions. Where possible, the wording and terminology is taken directly from the workshops participants.

**1. How have you flourished within the arts sector in Milton Keynes?**

Marketing	- E-newsletter by MK Arts Association
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lots of enthusiastic people</li> <li>- Excellent networking and reliable mutual support</li> <li>- Passion by individuals, all doing it free of charge (and at cost to self)</li> <li>- Through hard work and dedication of people</li> <li>- High percentage of young people which creates local talent</li> <li>- Open &amp; Sharing community</li> <li>- Always going out on a limb</li> <li>- MK arts community can be very supporting</li> </ul>
Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organisations are continuously developing and evolving</li> <li>- Offering added value to events i.e. MK4U incorporating sports and dance</li> <li>- Doing 'new' things</li> <li>- MK Theatre as the most successful theatre outside of London</li> <li>- A dedicated 'culture' team within the council</li> <li>- More opportunities for young people than ever before (its a growing sector)</li> <li>- Individuals are growing and developing as they have confidence and determination</li> <li>- Local bands (rock etc) are expanding</li> <li>- There is open access to the Arts</li> <li>- Growth of the city and changing environment</li> <li>- MK has something unique to offer artists – it is an international city</li> <li>- Theatres are doing well with the Chrysalis recently opening and MK Theatre planning expansion</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Young people are involved in running events</li> <li>- Training and workshops are offered to up skill volunteers</li> <li>- Arts are affordable/accessible due to home technology/ guitars/PCs etc</li> <li>- We are nurturing our own</li> </ul>
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MK Cultural Alliance, bringing together arts sector for strategic development</li> <li>- Culture Team</li> <li>- Accessing other sectors through arts and creative engagement</li> <li>- Support from culture team and contact with people within MKC</li> </ul>

The art forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Well-balanced range of diverse arts activity, music, dance, dram, story telling, visual arts</li> <li>- Many Successful arts companies, in particular amateur theatre</li> <li>- Huge variety of groups/choice/diversity</li> <li>- Large amount of amateur arts organisations (mainly in old areas of the city)</li> <li>- Good track record of achievement/ audience support/ involving young people/high quality</li> <li>- Recognising difference between art forms</li> <li>- Bringing artists to MK and identifying opportunities to do so</li> <li>- A belief in artists in MK and in what they can do</li> </ul>
Collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaboration between professional and amateur groups</li> <li>- MK Theatre and its relationship with the local amateur dramatics</li> <li>- We network and are open &amp; sharing</li> <li>- Financial support is offered from professional partners i.e. thecentre:mk</li> </ul>

## 2. What prevents us from flourishing?

Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- External perspective of Milton Keynes</li> <li>- Not enough mediums supporting/prioritising arts i.e. newspapers</li> <li>- Getting audiences</li> <li>- Communications</li> <li>- Our artists need to be better connected (networking) – there isn't a place for artists to go</li> <li>- Marketing – their's no central point</li> <li>- We need to be more culturally overt</li> <li>- Arts are not accessible, you need to know where to find it</li> <li>- Low profile for arts in Milton Keynes</li> </ul>
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognising the small voices</li> <li>- Inward-looking</li> <li>- Under 35s participation in arts (outside school setting)</li> <li>- There is a 'What's in it for me mentality'</li> <li>- We don't take risks</li> </ul>
Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of venues</li> <li>- Lack of infrastructure</li> <li>- Lack of live music venues</li> <li>- No University for MK – keep our own, bring in new</li> <li>- We don't encourage entrepreneurs</li> <li>- The offer for artists to come and work/live/create in MK is weak</li> <li>- CMK at the expense of old towns</li> <li>- Arts need to regularly be in CMK</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There's nothing for young people once they've finished school</li> <li>- Involving young people</li> <li>- Bottom up growth (into professional)</li> <li>- Accreditation – learning agenda – nurturing young people into the arts sector</li> <li>- Pathways/education/technology need to be created</li> <li>- Grow our own talent/Losing our young people</li> <li>- Interconnectivity through education (a university)</li> </ul>
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No Artform development agencies</li> <li>- We don't look at wider picture and the impact on individual areas</li> <li>- Lack of Outreach</li> <li>- Peer groups locally and nationally</li> <li>- No umbrella licensing</li> <li>- Too much consultation</li> <li>- Making the economic case for more funding</li> <li>- Council members don't understand and officers are not on board</li> <li>- What are the benefits of arts – economic, social, health – how can they be sold politically</li> <li>- Lack of strategic positioning</li> <li>- Not enough business cases</li> <li>- Recognise the importance of arts vs. statutory provision</li> </ul>
The art forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conflicting</li> <li>- Creditability</li> <li>- Lack of willingness to take risks</li> <li>- Too much focus on visual arts</li> <li>- Councillor support – attendance at events</li> <li>- Working in silos – music, dance, drama</li> <li>- More choice opportunities, be all inclusive, more grass roots</li> <li>- Unconventional results through experiment</li> <li>- Focus on mainstream</li> <li>- Arts and new media aren't linked</li> <li>- Projects are always about the community not the artists</li> <li>- Based on tradition not need</li> <li>- We need to make our experiences different</li> <li>- Structure of cultural alliance is not engaging</li> </ul>

Collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Professionals working in MK</li> <li>- MKC commitment and support to projects – attending events</li> <li>- Support and advice</li> <li>- Reaching out – use community mobilisor model for the arts – arts champions?</li> <li>- Relationship with arts and business</li> <li>- Organisations not working together effectively</li> </ul>
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- financial stability</li> <li>- Funders are risk oversee, there's too much criteria</li> <li>- Resources (competing)</li> <li>- Funding</li> <li>- Commitment to projects</li> <li>- MKC using VCS as income-generator (i.e. charging license fees for events)</li> <li>- Rehearsal space too expensive</li> <li>- Financial instability not allowing risk taking</li> <li>- more support and advice from Local authority</li> <li>- Redesigning the wheel (canning festivals and then reinventing them)</li> <li>- Unsympathetic H&amp;S – licensing</li> <li>- Risk from funders and organisations</li> <li>- Business lack of support for the Arts</li> <li>- Council criteria for funding is not clear</li> <li>- Grant-aid recipients not pushing the boundaries</li> <li>- Grant funding needs to be reviewed</li> </ul>
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Art school needed - Newport academy</li> <li>- Studio space needed</li> <li>- Public transport around/within MK needs to be enhanced</li> <li>- An artists colony should be formed</li> <li>- Lack of suitable venues for risk taking and new works</li> <li>- No arts quarter</li> <li>- Art cinema needed</li> <li>- Art space needed</li> <li>- Theatre district is a mess, it needs developing</li> </ul>

**3. Imagine that Milton Keynes is an 'arts utopia'; the sector is flourishing. How has this happened?**

Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Arts newspaper, widely distributed both electrically and digitally – not just for MK</li> <li>- Full visibility of full range of arts</li> <li>- 1 Arts forum</li> <li>- Advocacy – in a way people understand</li> <li>- National and international recognition</li> <li>- Specialist arts medium – newspaper / magazine / website</li> <li>- A formal network of arts professionals</li> <li>- External promotion by MKC</li> <li>- Carefully planned calendar of activities including anti-clash</li> <li>- Communication between all interested parties</li> <li>- Giving MK its own voice</li> <li>- Taking this work beyond MK</li> <li>- Promote MK artists outside of MK</li> <li>- Dissemination and distribution networks across the city</li> <li>- Website connecting 100 local artists – watch them working/talking/ask them questions – they are review and changed monthly</li> <li>- Work on MKs reputation as a creative and cultural city</li> <li>- Arts helping to brand/support traditional market towns of MK</li> <li>- Encompass the full arts offer</li> <li>- Support networks for creatives – informal, personal and relaxed</li> <li>- Marketing of the arts</li> </ul>
<p><b>“We should welcome artists from outside the city and promote MK artists outside of Milton Keynes” (artist session)</b></p>	

People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opportunities in arts for all ages within all financial brackets</li> <li>- Recognition of all voluntary arts organisations by Council, specifically: in the provision of funding to assist the development of arts groups and production of arts-related events/projects/initiatives</li> <li>- Lack of reliance on voluntary organisations and members to 'do everything for nothing' with no financial assistance</li> <li>- Open-minded about what arts is and what agenda it belongs to</li> <li>- Arts professionals welcomed to the city</li> <li>- Creating 'accidents'</li> <li>- Critical mass and production</li> <li>- Commitment to quality</li> <li>- Belief and integrity</li> <li>- Artists as necessary maverick. They are not creating what already exists they create something totally new</li> <li>- For MK to be the place artists want to come and work</li> <li>- For the people who make the decisions get out and see what is happening</li> <li>- Taking Risks</li> <li>- Value artists; understand that it is good to bring artists from outside the city</li> <li>- Welcome new people</li> </ul>
<b>"I'd love one of those revenue fund things. Just even say £250 a year would make an EXTRAORDINARY difference to us. Imagine that! :0)" (Mat T, monkey kettle)</b>	
Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Growth by audience and participants as key early investment in community art – created demand for flagship organisations</li> <li>- Non-mainstream shopping</li> <li>- MK has a reputation as a creative city (not commercial city)</li> <li>- Stop Dabbling – lets do it</li> <li>- Level of competition and raise the standard/raise the bar/add challenge</li> <li>- Bring new communities together</li> <li>- An area of MK that's like Paris – buildings for artists, small craft shops</li> <li>- Designing without the burden of history</li> <li>- The old towns offer the artistic/heritage/cultural quarter</li> <li>- Let CMK be the 'shiny' we want artists to be visible in our market towns</li> </ul>
<b>"I want to be exhausted from the choice of attending arts events" (Sue Quinn)</b>	
Training/ Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advice – financial and artistic available at reasonable (break even) rates</li> <li>- MK as a training centre of excellence i.e. University City to encourage the young to move up to the next stage and the stay there</li> <li>- Variable meeting of demands of home grown talent (pathways)</li> <li>- Greater enthusiasm for young people to participate in arts rather than sports</li> <li>- Case of access to professional training and support</li> <li>- Education – more interaction with the arts while at school, whether it's deliberately appealing i.e. graffiti art or more complex art – i.e. classical. A city where young people choose poetry over 'heat magazine'</li> <li>- Increased op for engagement &amp; personal development</li> <li>- MK University - bring people here &amp; keep people here – create a hive of activity – a buzz</li> <li>- Enable ongoing training and support for local event organisers (especially young people)</li> <li>- Employ professional arts support people who can get involved in the nitty gritty</li> <li>- Training opportunities</li> <li>- Access to professional training for all that want it – affordable and accessible</li> <li>- Mentoring &amp; nurturing local talent</li> <li>- Post grad programme with residency</li> </ul>
<b>"I want a City where kids want to buy poetry or arts magazine rather than heat (or whatever)"</b>	
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provision of information/data collection to avoid clash of events</li> <li>- Arts team offering direction for stat collection and assist in formulating data</li> <li>- Peer-networking</li> <li>- Dedicated arts department /keyworkers at MKC</li> <li>- Independent evaluation – top down by arts council</li> <li>- Dedicated arts department /keyworkers at MKC</li> <li>- Arts seen as important part of actions in LSP &amp; LAA policies</li> <li>- Transformational (intrinsic) by local decision makers, businesses and the community</li> <li>- Recognition of the importance of the arts many benefits; social, health,</li> <li>- Easy Council Processes</li> <li>- Get artist led organisations on the cultural alliance or some other steering group</li> <li>- A city that doesn't just cater for, support, plan for, fund, celebrate and focus on the mainstream</li> <li>- One art promoting organisation (too many today)</li> <li>- Artist-led organisations on the MKCA</li> <li>- Support by EP for ambassadors in arts at all levels – artists and promoters</li> <li>- Arts Champions</li> </ul>
<b>"For MK to be The Place that artists want to come and work" (artists session)</b>	

The artforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Professional Dance Company</li> <li>- Diverse and plentiful – both artists ad audiences</li> <li>- High quality delivery</li> <li>- Vibrant</li> <li>- Innovative – unique to MK</li> <li>- Grass Roots – more local public art, festivals, live music locally</li> <li>- Music performed across the city everyday in the atriums, shopping centres, churches etc</li> <li>- Lots of innovative, creative, diverse, high quality arts and artists residencies to challenge, inspire and excite me.</li> <li>- An annual Brighton/Manchester/Edinburgh-type festival: international, multi arts, mainstream and fringe.</li> <li>- MK as a national/international centre of excellence for an arts specialism (artform/arts practice), incorporating a research/conservatoire dimension.</li> <li>- Remove 'them &amp; us' mentality (professional v amateur)</li> <li>- MK Audience is willing to take risks – progression routes</li> <li>- Professional groups are thriving</li> <li>- Professional theatre companies devising new work</li> <li>- Production companies in MK – radio/tv etc</li> <li>- An outlet for all expressions</li> <li>- Inclusive arts within everyday life: songs/poetry/drama in workplaces, at lunchtime, in shops</li> <li>- Take our passion to the audience – not wait for them</li> <li>- Flourishing professional sector, based in Milton Keynes but of regional /national (international?) profile</li> <li>- Creating work in Mk which tours</li> <li>- Strong amateur sector, networking and sharing work</li> <li>- Artist in residency in CMK</li> <li>- Head of Industries appointed – an independent – strategic &amp; budget holder</li> <li>- We become exhausted by the number of arts events</li> <li>- Arts schools with studios / creative hubs/ workspaces</li> <li>- Whitewall continues to support artists developing work to a high standard.</li> <li>- Turning every roundabout into an artistic environment</li> <li>- A film festival based around an arts cinema</li> <li>- An 'artist room' in every school</li> <li>- An arts discovery trail – orange plaques (all types of art activity)</li> <li>- High profile showcase of the Arts</li> <li>- I want to be exhausted from the choice of attending arts events</li> <li>- Stop dabbling; be serious; go for it!</li> </ul>
<b>"MK as a training centre of excellence i.e. 'University City' to encourage the young to move up to the next stage and then stay here" (Pat Haig, MK Arts &amp; Music Festival)</b>	
Collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have professionals in residence to raise the standard</li> <li>- Sharing of information with schools and organisations</li> <li>- MK Commercial sector are supportive of arts</li> <li>- Genuine partnerships collaborations – not hampered by competition for resource</li> <li>- Take advantage of new media/technology</li> <li>- Working Collectively / celebrate practices and work / no silos</li> <li>- Libraries hosting more arts events</li> <li>- City centre and the market towns benefit from each other (not detract)</li> <li>- MKG Expands its gallery and studios and is more available for partnership work</li> <li>- Ambassadors in the arts (supported by EP)</li> <li>- Good to see the libraries are hosting events but that has been promoted bu artists</li> </ul>
<b>"An outlet for all expressions" (Mark)</b>	
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Links with businesses and investors both nationally and internationally to deliver projects</li> <li>- Resources – lighting, costume, instruments, electronic (sound) equipment</li> <li>- Arts Resource Centre – marketed and used by/available to all</li> <li>- MKC recognises the arts in MK by providing real funding to local organisations</li> <li>- Supported by – funders, decision makers and planners</li> <li>- Availability of financial support</li> <li>- Revenue Fund - £500 pa</li> <li>- Money easier to get – evidence base to create PIs for partner strategies – advocacy (it's a cycle)</li> <li>- Grant aid more inclusive</li> <li>- Funding – set up a cross-party arts support group of councillors to support the Arts Strategy sign up to percentage for arts policy</li> <li>- Persuade MK Community Foundation to set up a revenue fund for local organisations (£500 plus for 3-years rolling programme for insurance, admin, hire etc)</li> <li>- Financial stability (to enable groups to take risks)</li> <li>- Sharing of resources and expertise</li> <li>- Funding</li> <li>- Less justification for ticking boxes in applications for wider benefits</li> </ul>
<b>"Music performed across the city, everyday in the atriums, shopping centre, churches, family centres..." (Anna Denny, Mk City Orchestra)</b>	

Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wide range of venues with flexibility in catering for audience/exhibition size and good parking</li> <li>- Venue with variable costing relating to: nature of charity, quality of events, ticket sales, how well the organisation is established</li> <li>- Central Arts Centre for rehearsals and performances</li> <li>- Affordable venues and more of them</li> <li>- Arts hub – physical and virtual</li> <li>- Variety of flexible, affordable performing spaces</li> <li>- Increased resources incl. performance spaces</li> <li>- Infrastructure development – an overview of planning &amp; development</li> <li>- Nationally/internationally recognised live music venue, bringing in artists from outside MK but also promoting our own home grown</li> <li>- A touring venue!</li> <li>- An easy, on-line way of finding out what's on where, and buying my tickets.</li> <li>- One central location where I can "drop in", meet like-minded people, pick up Arts information, buy cheap standby tickets for that day's performances throughout MK.</li> <li>- A central Arts Development agency supporting and resourcing the development of programming and best practice, including its own on-line training/arts delivery resource.</li> <li>- Live music venue</li> <li>- Wide variety of performing and rehearsal spaces</li> <li>- Sufficient venues to fit all</li> <li>- More venues</li> <li>- Arts orgs in closer geographic area i.e. interaction and Living archive in same building</li> <li>- An Unplanned arts city</li> <li>- Art house cinema</li> <li>- Artists space to show and sell work; a constant space where public 'learn' to visit</li> <li>- Café Culture</li> <li>- Platform for artists to expand and move their practice on .</li> <li>- Creative hub with stakeholder organisations working separately but together generating debate and creative energy</li> <li>- Stops for art school opportunities with studios set up in one or multiple buildings</li> <li>- Arts are displayed in Central Milton Keynes as a showcase, like Heritage Showcase.</li> <li>- Artist space – an area where artists can display and sell work to the general public</li> <li>- An art college/university/ education establishments that bring in young people that focus on diversity that brings conversation</li> <li>- Café culture/bar culture that isn't a chain – that can offer exhibition space/perf space/ music &amp; comedy space</li> <li>- Non-mainstream shopping – rent is reasonable so that one-off shops/boutiques/small businesses can offer something different and thrive</li> <li>- An art-house cinema</li> <li>- Smaller venues with flexible spaces for theatre, art, live art, spaces, poetry, comedy, live music</li> <li>- Need to have something to fill the gap that an art school would play in developing a flourishing arts community</li> </ul>
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A steering group was set up as an outcome of this session. The group has 2 representatives from each stakeholder workshop; members will offer advice on their specialist areas and attend 2-3 meetings. The first meeting is scheduled for Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> December.