

# HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM ARTS COMMISSION

## BRIEFING PAPER 7: ART AND CULTURE IN EXTRAORDINARY TIMES

## CONTEXT

The Covid-19 crisis is an unprecedented public health emergency. It has had a devastating impact on individuals, families and communities, here in the UK and around the world. It is first and foremost a human crisis which has affected London more acutely than anywhere else in the UK. Without a vaccine or a cure for the varied symptoms of the disease, we will be making adjustments to our daily lives for many months to come. Certain groups within our society are more likely to be at risk of the catching the virus (key workers and front-line staff in public services) and others are most at risk of dying from the disease (the elderly and those with underlying health conditions). The policy response in the UK has caused immense disruption to many households and sectors of the economy. People are suddenly having to look after their children or finding themselves unexpectedly out work. The cultural sector has been especially hard hit.

It's mid-May 2020 and all our theatres, libraries, art galleries and festivals have been forced to close. Their functions – to bring people together for shared experiences – are now considered a risk to public health. A return to normal is likely to be far off in the future. This paper is an attempt to capture what is happening in the cultural sector, what is happening in the borough, and their implications for the Arts Commission. The paper is deliberately pithy. Our predictions and interpretations are delivered with some big caveats and some of this content will age very quickly. In all of the gloom and trauma this moment is also presenting opportunities to think afresh about what we've discussed in the Commission. We are eager that those opportunities be grasped before they disappear.

So much has changed since the Arts Commission started its deliberations a year ago. However, much of what we have discussed is still relevant, despite (or perhaps because of) the moment we're living through. Here is a quick recap:

In Briefing **Paper 1** we outlined the demographic characteristics of Hammersmith and Fulham and offered a modest sketch of the range cultural activity underway in the borough. We identified three clusters of activity, four anchor institutions, and a patchwork of affluence and poverty that shaped how people engaged with culture.

In Briefing **Paper 2** we looked at the social impact of arts and cultural activity and the ways in which small specialist and larger more general arts providers might work in partnership to deliver against an agreed set of local authority priorities. We identified the following as over-arching areas where arts and culture might have a positive social impact:

- climate change

- adult social care
- tackling pollution and local environmental issues
- mental health
- affordable housing
- food poverty and homelessness
- children's safety
- local hospital provision
- social integration and tackling racism

In Briefing **Paper 3** we looked at the way that inclusion and diversity is conceived in the arts and how that does or doesn't chime with current local authority priorities in Hammersmith and Fulham. We outlined the Creative Case for Diversity that is used by the Arts Council, and presented some of the key statistics in the borough as well as some ideas for best practice.

In Briefing **Paper 4** we focused on the identified town centres of Shepherds Bush, Hammersmith, Fulham Broadway and White City, explored the extent to which each might be identified as a cultural hub, and examined other examples where culture has driven a sense of placemaking. The examples in this last paper were further amplified by expert witnesses providing case studies of culture-led regeneration in London and further afield.

In Briefing **Paper 5** we took a long-term strategy and some of the mechanisms Hammersmith and Fulham has its disposal to develop and promote arts and cultural activity across the borough. These included:

- clarity and guidance on, and more strategic use of Section 106
- further development of BID's in the borough
- the development of a realistic, costed, prioritised arts strategy
- cultural districts and cultural compacts
- opportunities with the GLA's London Borough of Culture initiative
- new financial instruments e.g. endowments, percent for art etc

Covid-19 changes some, but far from all, of the debate and recommendations that have underlined this process. This paper, written to reflect a significant moment in our history, attempts to explore three big questions:

- **What are the short-term implications of Covid-19 on individuals and communities, and on arts and culture in Hammersmith and Fulham?**
- **How are local authorities and arts organisations preparing for a 'new normal' of social distancing?**
- **What might a post-pandemic period look like for arts and culture? What might look and feel familiar, and what might be radically different?**

## COVID-19

On Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March the UK government followed many others in Europe in ordering an immediate lockdown. Under the banner of 'stay at home, protect the NHS, and save lives' people were immediately instructed to restrict all non-essential movement, work from home, and to close much of our civic infrastructure. On the same day in mid-March, and with little notice, all arts and culture venues were closed. Performances and exhibitions have been cancelled or postponed, and buildings locked for the foreseeable future. This followed a period of public health advice to self-isolate if anyone had symptoms, to exercise good hand hygiene. Even in early March people were cautious about going out and engaging in cultural activities.

At the time of writing almost quarter of a million people have tested positive for Covid-19 in the UK, and 35,000 have officially lost their lives to the virus (although this figure is suspected to be much higher). The measures designed to reduce its spread have already triggered an economic decline larger than anything since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Lives and livelihoods have been lost, millions have been furloughed or face the loss of their employment, and freelancers have seen work fade or disappear completely. The scale of impact on all walks of life is unprecedented.

This has led to severe consequences for everybody who works in and around the cultural sector. It has consequences for audiences too. Culture is still here: but it's in our homes, on our screens and coming through our headphones.

To be frank, we are still trying to understand the implications of these closures. The rapid and seismic shift in operating procedures is unprecedented in our lifetimes. Some of the pain brought about by the lockdown and social distancing measures has been compensated for by government schemes and creative entrepreneurial work-arounds. However, these are not sustainable, and so what we see today will change as we go through the remainder of 2020.

At the moment everyone in the sector is trying to make sense of the situation: to understand the present and to make some sort of forecast for the future. We are all operating with limited data. Many in the arts sector are driven by their public mission: they don't want to put people at risk, they want to be responsive to community needs. But it's hard to say what the community want or need in these circumstances: many people are scared and are behaving in unusual ways.

To help us in our deliberations we have broken down the chronology of the response to the pandemic into three phases: crisis management, the 'new normal', and post-pandemic.

## PHASE ONE: CRISIS MANAGEMENT

### Mid-March – early May 2020

#### The response of cultural organisations

The past six weeks have seen all arts and cultural organisations – at all scales and levels of funding – fundamentally change their operating models. For building-based companies – The Lyric and the Bush, Bush Hall, the Eventim Apollo, libraries and galleries – this has principally required shifting to ‘low power mode’.



This phase has been characterised by:

- building closures
- furloughing staff
- redeploying staff
- rapidly reducing overheads
- maintaining dialogue with stakeholders
- refunding ticket-buyers
- applying for emergency funding / business support loans / mounting fundraising campaigns
- making content available online

Hammersmith and Fulham Borough Council has created a digest of the implications of Covid-19 on all of its arts and culture institutions on its [website](#). Local organisations are being energetic and responsive although their circumstances have changed and their futures look precarious.

*“We all need to do everything we can to support our popular arts and culture venues during this terrible*

*pandemic. They are the backbone to our vibrant arts and culture scene. Together we will build on the success of our Arts Strategy and continue to make H&F one of the leading local art scenes in the country.”*

Cllr Andrew Jones, H&F Cabinet Member for the Economy

### Lyric Theatre



For The Lyric this phase has meant immediate closure. At the time of writing bookings are being taken for the Lyric panto, Aladdin (14 November to 3 January 2021), with “early-bird offers” until the end of May.

The Lyric has had to furlough around 80% of its current staff (and 95% of casual staff) to maintain the lowest possible operating overhead. A skeleton staff is rapidly modelling a range of different scenarios and maintaining a building that this July will celebrate its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Like many cultural venues their public-facing work has moved online: there was a free screening of A Doll’s House, Rachel O’Riordan’s acclaimed 2019 production of Ibsen’s play, on 20 May ([available on YouTube](#)).

The theatre continues to work in the community with initiatives such as the Key Workers Project (in conjunction with H&F Council), designed to stimulate children’s imaginations via playwriting (with playwright Simon Stephens). Full details on the [Lyric's website](#) along with a major focus on an emergency fundraising initiative (something else that venues are busy doing) at [Lyric Recovery Fund](#).

The Executive Director at the Lyric hopes that the company’s deep roots in the local community will sustain the organisation through this crisis and out

the other side. This “values and mission-based approach” to thinking through the company’s future is an essential part of the senior management team strategy.

In the short term the Lyric’s financial position is reasonably resilient. The company isn’t applying for the current round of ACE emergency pandemic funding, but will expect to apply at a later round. Core funding from ACE is guaranteed and The Lyric has every expectation that H+F will maintain its current level of support through this crisis. Without it the organisation’s survival would be immediately in jeopardy. It is hoped that The Lyric can further develop partnerships within and without the local authority to support the community through this pandemic. The current work with the Education Department is an exemplar of how the Lyric would like to work qacross the Council to develop resources for people in need at this time. The company is also partnering The Bush and LAMDA on other locally focused projects in the medium term.

### **This New Ground**

Hammersmith and Fulham’s leading learning disabled arts organisation has moved quickly to announce [Isolation Art](#) – a series of weekly workshops to develop approaches to inclusive art-making across digital platforms. The company has also been successful in its application for emergency funding from ACE to develop new models for digital collaboration within the learning disabled community, to stabilise its finances, and to pump-prime new initiatives for online collaboration.

### **Bush Theatre**

For The Bush lockdown has meant developing online masterclasses, reworking content for podcasts, and honing its fundraising ask.





Like many building-based companies The Bush has had to furlough the majority (75%) of its staff, leaving a core team of 11 to look at scenario planning for the future.

The company is currently looking at a range of options that include reopening in September (it's acknowledged across the team that this is increasingly unlikely), reopening at the end of the year with a combination of socially distanced live work augmented by a digital strand, and a longer period of closure with a stronger digital offer through the interim. The company has felt very well supported by the Arts Council (cashflow and finances are sufficient until September) but has yet to engage in meaningful dialogue with the local authority.

### **Libraries**

The borough has a well-used library service across 5 sites (1,123,187 visits in 2019/20). In the short term most staff (31 FTE) have been redeployed to 'frontline services'. In the longer term the library service is looking to develop its online offer, both to support users in this crisis and beyond. The additional costs of these shifts to an online portal will be offset over the next year by a reduction in opening hours. In April 2020 'electronic issues' of reading and listening material were double those of the previous year. The library service is also looking at delivery services for isolated members of its community as well as building on its successful events programme (while incorporating social isolating).

### **The response of artists**

Many artists, musicians and writers are self-employed and are currently without support from government or employers. They have been waiting in anticipation for support which will arrive (if they are eligible) in early June. Many artists are not eligible for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, either because of their complex portfolio of income streams (some freelance, some salaried teaching, etc.) or because they only recently turned to freelancing. Some of the better paid and well-known names will pay themselves as directors of their own 'personal service companies' meaning they will be ineligible for all government support.

A [survey of 4,000 artists in the UK](#) has some pretty stark results:

**“82% of respondents have had upcoming work cancelled, including events, performances and**

public activities, and a further 59% have had to cancel their own work activities.

96% of respondents indicate income reduction as a significant immediate impact of the pandemic, with 60% expecting income to be down over 50% in 2020. Those working in craft and applied arts and performance, as well as those based in rural locations, predict the greatest reduction.”

Artists have therefore been applying in high numbers to support grant schemes from the Arts Council and other agencies. They have also been applying for Universal Credit (currently £410 per month for a single person over the age of 25) or forced to seek alternative work. Those working in the gig economy are facing an extremely uncertain future.

#### **The response of ‘the rest of us’**

For many people the leisure time devoted to going out or painting or reading has evaporated as household duties have taken over – home-schooling, running errands, caring for loved ones.

For those with disabilities, those that rely on social care or personal assistance and those who have been advised, or feel the need to shield themselves from this disease, this situation is especially harsh, and likely to have implications over a longer period than the majority in society.

Access to good affordable digital services and connective devices that create a good user experience are a privilege that everyone in the borough does not have.

Many people who have remained working have had to juggle increased care responsibilities, personal anxiety and a less secure financial future. Many in our borough have poor housing, live in restricted spaces and will have experienced the lockdown as extremely confining.

However, for those with time to fill (or with a need to infuse the home-schooling with some expert content) then the internet has become a place of unlimited creativity. Just as “PE with Joe” has got people jogging on the spot in front of the TV so things like [Grayson’s Art Club](#) or the BBC’s [Lockdown Orchestra](#) have invited people to get creative in their own homes,

making pictures, doing dance routines, singing along in virtual choirs or orchestras.



Grayson Perry's Art Club, C4

Prior to lockdown, the notion of everyday creativity was gaining traction. Initiatives like [64 Million Artists](#) January Challenge, [Fun Palaces](#)' annual festival and [BBC Get Creative](#) were contributing to a growing sense of the importance of everyday participation, and the role of amateur arts practice as a central plank of a healthy society.

There is growing evidence that regular creative practice makes a positive contribution to individual mental health with just 20 minutes of art-making every day helping support individuals suffering with low mood, anxiety, stress and depression.

These pre-Covid shifts in our understanding of the role of everyday creativity that have largely underpinned the new focus expressed in Arts Council England's ten year strategy [Let's Create](#). And while much of the new direction suggested in Let's Create will necessarily be put on hold as ACE redirects funding to propping up its infrastructure with emergency funding, the principles of everyday participation are here to stay.

Many arts organisations have made their existing content available for free online. The National Theatre at Home is the highest profile initiative in the UK regularly attracting an audience of just under one million for its weekly release (Jane Eyre attracted 976k viewers on YouTube the week it was released).

There is a sudden wealth of content online – from the BBC's Culture in Quarantine and Performance Live strands, to work from The Lyric, the Young Vic and other theatres and concert halls around the country. And there's

evidence that we're watching more online – a useful summary of audience attitudes to online content is [here](#).

Accumulate (the '[art school for the homeless](#)') has been sending 500 Art Kits out to young people in hostels and shelters in London and accompanying them with online mentoring and tutorials. Youth clubs and youth workers are having to turn to online activities to keep people creative and away from harm. Up in Liverpool ComicsYouth (who would normally hold regular get-togethers) are sending out care packages and have started [an online radio station](#).

Art galleries that have been forced to close are putting their exhibitions online but also sending out kits and packs and other goodies to local families. The schools, families and outreach programmes at these institutions are often supported by local authority funding.



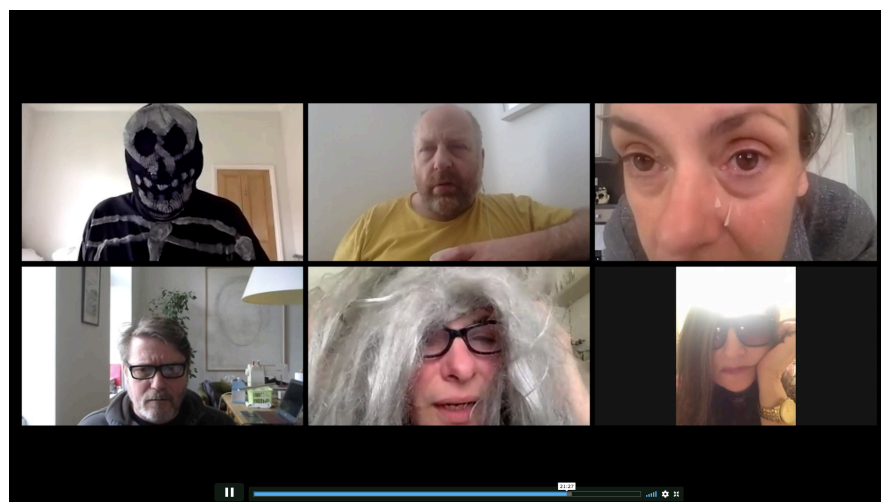
Towner Gallery 'Art Packs', Eastbourne

There's much to celebrate about the wider availability of a vast archive of online culture now available to stream. And some early warnings too:

- there is a general perception that the marketplace is already crowded, and for many impenetrable
- while content filmed by the BBC or National Theatre is high quality, high definition, multi camera capture, much is not – a poor viewer experience is bad for perception of the arts and culture sector

- many arts and culture operators are rushing to establish themselves in the digital sphere when their expertise lies elsewhere
- we need to remember that many people in the UK do not have ready access to high speed broadband, smart TV's or internet-ready hardware – sticking content online risks further stratifying socio-economic divides
- Many children only experience things like painting and music while at school, so it is likely that inequalities around access to space, expertise and equipment will be further exacerbated in lockdown
- most content is free to air – the long-term implications are not sustainable and arts and culture organisations are desperate for earned income\*

\*interestingly some artists (e.g. [Daniel Kitson](#)) are starting to monetise their back-catalogues with some success (limiting online audience numbers, charging a nominal fee for access, encouraging simultaneous viewing).



Forced Entertainment, End Meeting for All – April 2020

### The response of funders

**Arts Council England** – is widely considered to have acted well, with clear messaging, decisive action, and a staged approach to supporting its portfolio and the independent sector. Under the leadership of Darren Henley (whose blog is cited as an exemplary approach to the crisis) ACE has repackaged its project funding for emergency measures, relaxed all funding agreements, improved organisational cashflow, and worked across the ecology to build a strong case for continued support from government.

**Local authorities** – there are some examples of good practice but culture is generally taking a back seat to other social services ([Bournemouth Council](#), [Cornwall County Council](#) and [Preston Council](#) are cited as leading the field).

Notwithstanding the devastating impact of a summer with few tourists, **Cornwall County Council** has been busy collecting [data](#) and strategising for the sector. The **City of London** is more typical of what London boroughs are currently capable of: signposting to resources and help elsewhere on its [website](#). A lot of local authorities are taking their cultural offer online:

The [Leeds Discovery Centre](#), has been using Facebook to deliver videos by their Learning and Access Officer, examining artefacts from the city collection. The [City Art Gallery](#) is also making videos available about artists, their style and techniques.

The **City of York Council** has provided library service partners (Explore York) £17,000 of funding to expand the range of virtual services available. This comprises an extended range of e-books and e-audiobooks, access to newspapers and magazines, hosting local book groups online, and artists spaces are in the future), and support for residents who are isolated, vulnerable and/or residents with limited access to virtual content.

In **Manchester** the city council has supported [United We Stream](#), leading the fight back on behalf of all our restaurants, pubs, theatres and venues and will showcase our world class cultural talent. Every night they stream live bands, DJ's, singers and performers in a UK first, to "entertain, educate and enrich you in your home".

At the **Greater London Authority** the Mayor has launched [a new emergency £2.3m fund](#) to support culture and creative industries at risk due to the impact of the coronavirus. It is providing £450,000 to the Music Venue Trust to support up to 147 grassroots music venues and £225,000 to support up to 56 LGBTQ+ venues. There is £1.5m to the Creative Land Trust to support 200 artist studios workspaces and £150,000 to the BFI to help up to 25 of London's independent cinemas.

**Trusts and foundations** – many have already made a commitment to only supporting charities with whom they have an on-going relationship, effectively shutting the door (temporarily at least) to new recipients of funding. There is also emerging evidence that the endowments upon which trusts and foundations rely have been severely hit by recessionary pressures on the financial markets.

Many of the big trusts who fund cultural organisations in London have clubbed together to form a partnership between trusts and foundations, recognising that together they form a powerful collective pool of support for civil society organisation – these may or may not include artists or cultural

organisations. (Funder's priorities have been re-oriented away from genre or sector and more towards the communities who face the greatest need). They have coalesced into [Covid19funders.org.uk](https://Covid19funders.org.uk) who say:

“We recognise that the covid-19 outbreak is an exceptional event that will have an impact on civil society groups, and want to offer reassurance that we stand with the sector during this time.”

- What are the short-term implications of Covid-19 on arts and culture in Hammersmith and Fulham? What should the local authority do in order to support its art and culture? This could include:
  - engaging the arts and cultural sector in pan-local authority conversations to establish need and see where this sector might be able to support
  - convening local arts and community leaders to share expertise and make plans (recognising the central and civic value of arts and culture to our local communities)
  - providing emergency funding for individuals and organisations at risk of bankruptcy
  - turning over vacant space that might be more appropriate for socially distanced arts engagement to artists and arts professionals eg shopping malls, open public spaces etc
  - easing licensing restrictions to enable free festival activity across the borough once lockdown restrictions are lifted.



## PHASE TWO: THE 'NEW NORMAL'

### **The next 3 or 6 or 12 months....**

This second phase sees art and culture organisations rethinking their medium-term roles in a society where social distancing and other restrictions are likely to be the 'new normal' for the foreseeable future. Building-based companies are starting to plan for scenarios that might see their doors closed for a considerable period. Social distancing is incompatible with any venue that normally thrives on the intense energy of the collective experience.

Longer-term, the gig at the Apollo, the Chekov at the Lyric, the blockbuster release at the Vue Westfield, the new play at the Bush Theatre... all of them are unlikely to be recognisable until we see the complete relaxation of all restrictions. And this in turn is unlikely before either the spread of the virus is under control, the widespread availability and take-up of a vaccine, or the availability of medicines and procedures that limit the symptoms and infectiousness of Covid-19. None of these seems likely within the next 18 months, and so building-based organisations are going to be forced to completely rethink what they do and how they reach their audiences.

In a general sense, governments around the world are preparing conditions for arts organisations to restart their work – many of them will be working without an audience.

And more widely society and the economy will be significantly altered by the impacts of the disease and the measures taken to prevent its spread. Arts leaders of NPOs (at the time of writing) are preoccupied with:

- Future of furloughing
- Impact on box office
- Arts Council resources
- Trusts and foundations

Those working in festivals, community settings, and with young or Deaf and disabled people are focused on:

- Already depleted local authority resources
- Competing pressures for frontline spend
- The impact of the closure of schools
- People with decreasing leisure time and / or increased childcare responsibilities
- Finding ways to replicate the benefits of cultural participation that come from face-to-face contact
- Reaching those who are not digitally savvy



Socially engaged artists and cultural leaders will be looking to play a role in addressing the likely impacts of:

- Global recession and its consequences
- Mass unemployment (within and without the cultural sector)
- A burgeoning mental health crisis born of grief, anxiety and the impact of lockdown
- Potentially rethinking the way we organise our society, our capital city, our lifestyles.

It's fair to say that in general arts leaders are struggling to comprehend what things might look like in a 'new normal'.

### **The Young Vic**

The key to reopening will be an end to social distancing. "It's almost impossible economically to socially distance a theatre," says Kwame Kwei-Armah of the Young Vic.

"In order to social distance at 2m, we would lose three quarters of our audience. And then we have to work out how you create safe space for the rest of the staff - backstage and in a rehearsal room.

"And then we have to work out what the public appetite might be towards coming back into a theatre."

"It will then take three months to get back up and running, taking staffing and rehearsals into account", he adds.



The Young Vic Theatre thrives on the buzz of 550 people crammed into its bars and foyers

The Young Vic is planning different reopening scenarios up to next April - more than a year after going dark.

The venue has furloughed most staff but has continued some work - reaching 100 members of its young directors' scheme online every day, and running a local playwriting programme. Staff are also making food deliveries for a local charity.

Orchestras in Berlin have been advised that they will be rehearsing (not performing) with [the following conditions](#) which include:

- Hand disinfection at least when entering and leaving the workplace
- String players to be 1.5m apart, wind section players 2m apart, with plexiglass protection around the brass section
- Daily self-examination of players for clinical signs indicative of COVID-19

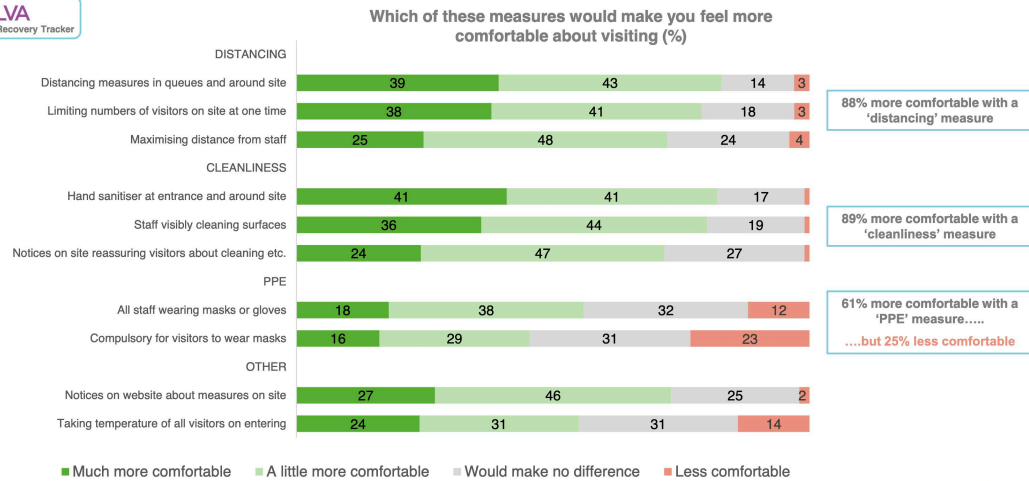
The International Council of Museums has produced [the following guidance](#) for museums thinking of reopening, it includes:

- Consider ground markings to ensure social distancing in the gallery
- Close cloakrooms
- Ensure hand sanitiser is available
- Systematically disinfect audio guides and other devices
- Closing down any installation that is interactive

Movie theatres in one German state are reopening but requiring people to leave three empty seats between each other.

This isn't to predict that there will be the same conditions applied here in the UK once we're deep into the summer. It's to merely highlight that even if cultural venues like galleries and theatres are to re-open it will be under very strict conditions – many of which will feel unusual to audiences, and may even be off-putting enough to entice people back.

People are scrambling to understand what will make people feel comfortable enough to return to cultural venues. There are a few surveys of the public in circulation right now. They all show a similar picture:



Recent data from the Association for Leading Visitor Attractions (UK)

## Cultural democracy

We've talked before about Cultural Democracy – the idea that art and culture is unbounded, and encapsulates all kinds of activities – from the personal to the collective, from grime to opera, knitting to line dancing, the West End to fringe to gardening, cooking and everything in between. Cultural democracy underpins a culture that is debated, designed, made...by, with and for - everyone. In the first phase of this crisis it is those companies that have taken a culturally democratic approach – listening to the needs of their stakeholders – that have perhaps fared best (see Eden Court case study below). And arguably it is these artists and companies – socially engaged, inherently civic, democratic – that might have the best chance of working this through this crisis intact. Those arts organisations that have resolutely stuck to an old-fashioned, top-down approach to arts and culture that are now struggling to reconceive of a role in the medium term (the new normal).

- How can local authorities and arts organisations prepare for a 'new normal' of social distancing? This might include:
  - making changes to the physical fabric of the borough like widening streets or pedestrianising areas to allow crowds to congregate safely
  - changes to licencing to allow the temporary alternative use of available venues
  - establishing a calendar of events in the borough which all conform to distancing guidelines
  - establishing a credit or voucher scheme for people to spend supporting local arts venues)

## PHASE THREE: BEYOND COVID-19

### 18 months from now

Arts leaders are currently engaged in thinking about their long-term plans. It is presumed, that at some point the pandemic will fade, and that some kind of normality will return. For this phase, which could be as far as two years away, what will artists and companies keep from their old operating models, and what will they do that's different and informed by the impact of Covid-19 on their communities?

Arts and culture often thrive on intimate social interaction, and until there is a reliable and widely administered vaccine, or we come to terms with the likely risks of infection and its consequences, then social distancing (whether mandated or self-chosen) will remain a feature of British life.



Is a drive-in theatre culture around the corner?

Arts organisations with a clear sense of core purpose may be able to redirect their activity in new ways that work within a world of social distancing. But many – especially those with a reliance on significant box office receipts for their survival – will struggle to emerge from this crisis. Individuals and organisations with a focus on community cohesion, specific interest or demographic groups, or on deaf and disabled communities, may well be at the vanguard of recovery from the economic and health impacts of the pandemic, but at present it seems that their ways of engaging with people will have to be radically different from current approaches. Artists and companies across all scales are already recognising their strengths within local communities and how their civic roles might be a driver for hyper-local resilience.

All across the sector people are seriously concerned about the long-term outlook for building-based cultural institutions. (These same people have privately acknowledged that the pre-Covid model of survival was unsustainable.) Across the country, a decade of austerity has taken its toll on arts and culture. Increasing reliance on finite project funds, continued pressure to find private or commercial revenue, and vastly reduced local authority budgets have contributed to a cultural ecology that was feeling vulnerable to an economic shock of this sort.

Some commentators suggesting that it might be time for a radical reinvention of the UK's arts and cultural offer. The end of WW2 and the establishment of the welfare state contributed to an arts and cultural ecology that has survived for 75 years. What impact might a pandemic that has similarly impacted public life have on arts and culture in the Hammersmith and Fulham?

Perhaps the Commission might consider a range of longer-term options for the borough. What bold moves might H+F make to repurpose the borough as a destination for socially distanced arts and culture?

What about:

- Making Westfield entirely "Covid-proof" and using the space to showcase theatre and arthouse cinema in the Vue and other spaces
- Pedestrianising King Street and giving it over to the display of artists galleries and empty shop installations
- Having all the street signs and advertising hoardings repurposed by artists to deliver public health messages
- Reimagining Shepherds Bush Green as an outdoor performance environment hosting a festival every weekend from May to October 2021

The circumstances we are living through are constantly in flux. However, there are some 'assumed truths' we imagine will shape cultural engagement in the years ahead:

There will be increased social deprivation and inequality which will put pressure on organisers to reach all audience segments through such measures as discounting or free tickets, increased isolation for those with disabilities and older people, higher digital take up as people are more comfortable using their computers and phones to interact with the programme, some enduring travel restrictions for artists and audiences meaning consumption happens closer to home and in smaller groups.

- What might a post-pandemic period look like for arts and culture?  
What might look and feel familiar, and what might be radically different?