

INVERCLYDE CULTURE COLLECTIVE

An abstract graphic design featuring a solid blue background. Overlaid on this are several organic, wavy shapes in shades of orange and yellow. One prominent shape in the upper right has a checkered or quilted pattern. Another shape in the lower left has a wood-grain texture. The overall composition is dynamic and layered.

INVERCLYDE ARTS & CREATIVITY —
WHERE ARE WE NOW?

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This research is part of the Inverclyde Arts & Creativity Action Plan (2021-23) and funded by the Inverclyde Culture Collective programme. [Culture Collective](#) is a network of 26 participatory arts projects, shaped by local communities alongside artists and creative organisations. Funded by Scottish Government emergency COVID-19 funds through Creative Scotland, these projects will take place across Scotland from March 2021-October 2022. In December 2021, the Minister for Culture in her statement on 'Supporting Culture in Scotland' announced a new commitment of over £4m specifically for Culture Collective, to be allocated from emergency funds by March 2022 to continue the 26 current projects for another 12 months (until Oct 2023). Inverclyde Culture Collective will be funded up to 72% of original award to continue existing projects or develop new activity.

[Inverclyde Culture Collective](#) is being delivered by various local partners and organisations including: Inverclyde Council, RIG Arts, Beacon Arts Centre, Inverclyde Youth Theatre (Kayos) and CVS Inverclyde. The project is being managed by Alana Ward – Inverclyde Council Libraries, Educational Development and Arts Manager; Kat Boyle – Inverclyde Creative Producer; Jack Stancliffe – Inverclyde Culture Collective Activities Coordinator, and the Inverclyde Culture Collective Steering Group who meet monthly.

The intention for Inverclyde Culture Collective is to create a context for artists to experiment with alternate modes of sharing practice. The activity is primarily routed, at this stage, on piloting new local partnership and community projects that offer a window into new collaborative ways of working including residency and artist exchange process. There is no predetermined outcome however there are opportunities for artists and the community to reflect and evaluate across a national network.

Inverclyde's Outcomes Improvement Plan identifies key priorities for 2017-22 including arts and culture. Inverclyde Cultural Partnership (ICP) is the delivery group working to take these priorities forward. The ICP is made up of members invited from a variety of arts, culture and heritage organisations and communities of interest and has a remit to take forward all aspects of cultural activity in the area.

The Arts Sub-Group is an open forum made up of local arts organisations and creatives, facilitated by the Creative Producer, and oversees Inverclyde's Arts & Creativity Strategy (2017). Across 2020, this group collaborated to create an '[Inverclyde Arts & Creativity Action Plan 2021 -2023](#)' – a set of priorities for improving outcomes for the cultural landscape of Inverclyde. Partnership, community, and a collective approach to culture are at the heart of these actions.

Within the Action Plan (PRIORITY 1: VISIBILITY & VALUE), Action 9 covers the basis for this research:

ACTION 9. SWOT Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses of Arts in Inverclyde

Updated analysis or 'snap shot' of Cultural Assets and Cultural Investors in Inverclyde, e.g. Venues, Organisations, Buildings, Artists and Individuals. As well as time limited projects already funded or confirmed for Action Plan timeline (2021-2023), e.g. from Inverclyde key cultural stakeholders to identify project delivery gaps in provision. Analysis in new context of COVID19. Make sure above local cultural stakeholders are represented on ICP and/or Arts Sub-Group.

Many of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that came up during the process are already known and often referenced in the existing plans and strategies. That said, there is value in their repetition as it highlights either an ongoing concern or cause for celebration, or in some cases highlights where positive changes haven't been communicated to the wider cultural sector clearly enough.

This research was undertaken by [Sarah Longfield](#), who is a freelance coach, facilitator and creative producer with extensive experience of arts engagement, creative collaboration and participatory arts practice.

Sarah invited over 50 individuals and in the end spoke to 21 people with specialisms in sculpture, painting, glass, cartoons, street art, theatre, photography, film and music and representatives of a range of local arts, heritage and cultural organisations – both employees and trustees and some freelance artists who also represented small organisations too. It's certainly not uncommon to wear a few hats within the cultural sector.

The points below are the common themes which have come from the conversations. Much of what came up in the conversations for this research is already mentioned in the Inverclyde Arts and Creativity Strategy & Action Plan. Some themes are naturally reoccurring, but the repetition of other issues or opportunities, perhaps highlights something that still hasn't been effectively addressed.

Through all the conversations, there was a positivity and consensus that the cultural sector (both arts and heritage) in Inverclyde is continually improving. Post-lockdown, there was a shared desire to continue to work together and build upon progress made in creating a more collaborative, connected sector.

The following sections share the points raised when asked about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to culture in Inverclyde. Some are already well known, however the repetition shows that it's still an important theme, or in some cases, highlights where progress hasn't been communicated to all across the arts/heritage sectors.

Many who took part talked about the rare and unique landscape of the region and some felt that not enough was done to make use of that creatively. Private companies having a monopoly on the waterfront is an ongoing problem which impacts on the region's artists and communities being able to fully connect with the coastline.

The sense of place also has a positive in that it's not like a big city: *"It's like working in a big village"*.

However, the issue around being from Inverclyde rather than, for example, Greenockian or Portonian, continues. This is covered comprehensively in Priority 6 of the Arts & Creativity Action Plan: acknowledging that the geographical identity of Inverclyde is a relatively new thing, yet much cultural activity through available funding streams is delivering Inverclyde-wide so it is an ongoing focus to ensure that people can make meaningful connections and sense of identity within these Inverclyde-wide initiatives.

"The arts and creativity offer could be strengthened by the regeneration of some of those physical spaces that still retain the relationship between Inverclyde and its former identity of making. Investing in this rich heritage, the warehouses, sheds and workshops which have been so significant to people locally, can provide a focal point for all kinds of cultural activity" (Arts Action Plan – Priority 6)

Looking at neighbouring regions, several noted that there's far less going on creatively in North Ayrshire *"we're spoilt in comparison to Beith"*. And many said that there was a lot going on creatively in Inverclyde if you knew where to look.

SUITABLE SPACES TO CONNECT, CREATE AND WORK

The theme of artists networking and having space to meet and develop their practice came up a lot. Some felt there were lots of opportunities if you looked for them. Others felt there was nothing out there. Many wanted niche opportunities, for example, for specific art form, for emerging artists or for established artists. The pandemic has had a big impact on this, undoing a lot of the progress already made.

Also, on the theme of space/place, there have been some issues with public art investment and lack of proper consultation and engagement which may have damaged the reputation of the arts in the area. Examples given were the Port Glasgow sculpture which has had many difficulties with location and cost, and although there was extensive community consultation some time in the past, this is not widely known. Also, Ginger the Horse (who is apparently not modelled on a work horse).

However, the new [Greenock Waterfront public art](#), funded in 2021 by Sustrans and Inverclyde Council Great Place Scheme (which was in turn funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund), is an example of excellent community consultation and goes far in redressing that issue.

The lack of suitable spaces came up a lot, but so did lots of new initiatives including the developments at [Inverclyde Sheds](#), [Vanishing Point](#) potentially moving to the area and the burgeoning visual art scene in Kempock Street in Gourock.

There was a general consensus that there has been a shift towards deeper and more meaningful partnership working and collaboration than before. The [Climate Beacon](#), [Dandelion](#) and the [Culture Collective](#) all mentioned as examples.

There is an energy and appetite for more of this from those involved and also those not currently linked in.

Inverclyde Council and lead partners have extensive experience in supporting and stimulating artists to develop their own ideas through provocation. Inverclyde Council have previously delivered large scale cultural place making projects such as The Place Partnership (2014-17), Great Place Scheme (2018-20), Create:Networks (2020-21) and Inverclyde Culture Collective (2021-ongoing). With Culture Collective specifically there is more opportunity to build better relationships with local independent creative practitioners. With most funded projects being time limited and the pandemic limiting the number of networking opportunities, building a network of creative freelancers can take more time to establish.

The coming together of groups, organisations and artists is supported across the board, with positive words about the current [Galoshans Festival](#) which is led by RIG Arts and the Galoshans Consortium, made up of a cross section of local community partners who have been delivering the festival annually since 2014 and is a highlight in the local cultural events calendar. Also mentioned as a model to keep developing is the Film Festival led by [The Waterfront Cinema](#) where there is ample opportunity to build on the Inverclyde Film Festival Test Pilot that was funded by Regional Screen Scotland in 2020 and delivered in partnership with the Great Place Scheme.

“There is now less competition and more collaboration.”

Some felt there has been an ongoing issue with a lack of creative confidence across the area and it's been a little bit parochial with a limited outlook. There were differing opinions on bringing in artists from outside the area and engaging local artists: some wanted Inverclyde to look up and out more and connect further with the rest of Scotland and beyond. Others wanted to celebrate and nurture the talent that lives in the area.

The arts and culture sectors in the region have ample opportunity to develop new narratives which might counter the broader perceptions of Inverclyde.

Many are bored of the romanticisation of the industrial heritage in the area and want to broaden out the stories. There is also a problem here around diversity and people hearing stories they can connect to: a focus on industrial heritage tends to tell the stories of white men at the exclusion of others.

“There are lots of interesting stories that haven't been told”

“We need new stories”

“There's more ex-IBM workers than ex-shipyard workers”

POINTS OF VIEW

There is a view that some organisations locally *“love leaping on bad news”*, like being the Covid Capital of Scotland, in order to get more funding, but many feel this is having a detrimental effect to the reputation of the region and pride amongst locals. Many spoken to would like to redress this with a greater emphasis on more positive stories, the cultural sector being perfectly placed to lead the way.

There has been a move away from local arts politics of the past which held back progress, towards a happier and more fruitful culture of collaborative working. The pandemic has created a greater sense of the importance of community, of partnerships and the sense of achieving and being greater than the sum of our parts.

TOO MANY MEETINGS?

The reporting for the various groups and committees was mentioned as too onerous.

Really clear messaging is needed for freelancers to know which are the important meetings to be at, in order for creatives to have more power in decision-making structures.

And questions emerged such as, how can a sole trader be part of something like Culture Collective?

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON?

09

There is huge potential for the region when the Ocean Terminal opens. What happens in that space when there isn't a ship docked? What could be? This could significantly scale the economic model for the cultural sector: affluent visitors looking for new experiences and adventure. The George Wyllie Foundation's Wyllieum within the terminal will be a hub for driving this growth and great opportunity for further cross-art collaboration.

“There are also a lot of funding sources, not yet tapped into”. How can the Cultural Partnership and the Arts Sub Group continue to grow and develop further collaborative models for the benefit of many?

SWOT ANALYSIS



STRENGTHS

- Community spirit
- Location & landscape
- Lots going on in comparison to neighbouring regions
- Recent progress on collaboration and attracting larger funding bids
- Pockets of brilliant creative engagement
- A recent (2-3 years) improvement on connecting the dots and keeping all engaged and informed, particularly the work through the Inverclyde Cultural Partnership and the Arts Sub Group
- Previous competitive and occasionally hostile attitudes, which damaged the reputation of the arts, have massively reduced
- National companies regularly perform at the Beacon Arts Centre with three of the five companies presenting productions across 2022-23

WEAKNESSES

- Focus on industrial heritage stories is preventing other stories being heard
- Same issues surfacing despite progress being made, however, not everyone knows what that progress is
- Lack of region-wide identity
- A tendency to be under confident or parochial
- The negative press having an impact on local pride
- An assumption that the negative press has a reputational impact on a national level
- Projects are often time bound and one-offs, making it difficult to create long term impact

OPPORTUNITIES

- Furthering the collaborative model to reach up and out, connecting nationally and internationally
- Development of new spaces (e.g. Greenock Ocean Terminal, Vanishing Point, Inverclyde Sheds). If there's a clear way for people to engage and collaborate and if people feel welcome and it feels like "it's for them", these could be hugely impactful
- Opportunity for working better together, in a more joined up way and aligning with other sectors through the Tourism Strategy, through Corporate Comms/Discover Inverclyde.
- Further work on creative pride across Inverclyde and identifying being part of that collective area
- Genuine willingness and ability to collaborate and be greater than the sum of our parts from all stakeholders
- Further development of festivals – in particular Galoshans and the Film Festival

Arts Action Plan, Priority 6: Geography & Accessibility, Action 34 *"...At present there is a continued need for accessible and neutral places, maps, databases and forums for creative people to network and share information. By considering ways to bridge this gap between artists, we can explore the potential for extending those networks to include venues, commissioners and distributors, linking local artists and makers with supply chains. Communal spaces provide an opportunity for the cross pollination of ideas and the sharing of resources between artists. This often happens organically as a result of regular and collective use of a communal space. Informal sharing and contact between creative people and practitioners could play a vital role in the sustainability and development of an independent local arts network."*

THREATS

- Continuing fallout from the pandemic
- Reduction of resources for the arts
- Those driving the collaboration and partnerships stop doing it and no one else picks up the work

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

- Develop a clear communication plan (aligned with the Comms Plan for the Inverclyde Cultural Partnership – priority 2: connectivity and communication, Actions 13, 14 & 15) with appropriate allocated resource to ensure artists and arts organisations are aware of networking opportunities and spaces/places that already exist.
- Further develop the review of arts decision making structures so it is clearer for all and increases efficacy whilst decreasing number of meetings.
- Consider funding more “good news” projects to counter the negative stories about the region to counter people’s views that outwardly the news is often negative about the region. Acknowledging there is already some great work happening, but again it’s a communication issue to share this widely with confidence.

Building on this from the Arts Action Plan. PRIORITY 2: CONNECTIVITY & COMMUNICATION, action 17. Positive Inverclyde Cultural Press - Articles and Publicity: Build on momentum of Inverclyde expanding cultural offer to create positive news / feature stories in national papers written by trusted arts writers. Potentially speaking to BBC Social to suggest an Inverclyde ‘Snapshots’ series of different successful arts projects/ case studies in Inverclyde.
- More projects around different local/ heritage stories, expanding awareness and diversity of narrative. As referenced in the Arts Action Plan: 30. Inverclyde Born: Historically Inverclyde has been birthplace to a number of famous artists, composers etc. as well as unique local traditions and lesser known/ represented artists. Look at other potential themed years or programming thematics that are unique to Inverclyde. Out with and complementary to the Event Scotland themed years.
- Keep connecting the dots and ensure adequate resource is given to ensure the current momentum can be kept up.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

- Review current networking and artist spaces provision, identify tangible gaps and seek funding to address those (continuing the work in the Arts Action Plan – Priority 4: Regeneration and Employment).
- Share the Public Art Charter, Engine Shed Report – An Action Research Project on the Creation of Public Art in Inverclyde 2017 more widely, so that it can be easily accessed for anyone leading on a public art commission.
- Develop the culture and tourism offer to expand entrepreneurial possibilities to increase sustainability for the arts sector.
- Link up effectively with the national companies who should all have a commitment for working in and serving the area, furthering the work started through the Arts Action Plan, Priority 5: Confidence, actions 32 ('Festivalization' of Inverclyde. What new regular events, festivals and programming can occur in Inverclyde e.g. build on Galoshans Festival) and 33 Outward National and International Focus.
- Make plans now for what happens to the Culture Collective website/social media channels if/when the current project ends to avoid the next collaboration having to set it all up again. How can it be light on its feet and easily adapted to keep the audience, but work with different project models?

INVERCLYDE CULTURE COLLECTIVE

INVERCLYDE ARTS & CREATIVITY — WHERE ARE WE NOW

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Inverclyde
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