

Evaluation of Living Places  
Programme Year 2  
MLA Council  
Phase 2: Executive Summary  
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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### Introduction

The Living Places Partners (Arts Council England, CABE, English Heritage, MLA Council, Sport England and DCMS) commissioned DC Research in mid-2009 to carry out an Evaluation of Year 2 (2009-2010) of the Living Places Programme.

As outlined in the Invitation to Tender, the purpose and focus of the evaluation was to understand to what extent the three aims and seven success criteria of the Living Places programme have been met, and to what extent the programme had an impact on 'place-making' in the Priority Places.

The three aims of the Living Places Programme are to:

- Align investment from the sporting and cultural sector across organisational boundaries so it can be used more efficiently for people and places.
- Provide information, advice and support on the use of culture and sport in sustainable communities to people working in local government, housing, property development, planning and a host of other fields who take the day-to-day decisions that shape communities of the future.
- Build the capacity of communities themselves so people can be empowered to bring cultural and sporting activity and infrastructure to their communities.

#### Key Conclusions from Year 2

Living Places remains a programme that is driven by a number of key individuals in places who are passionate advocates about the role of culture and sport in successful communities, and the importance of embedding culture and sport in regenerating existing communities, and planning and delivering future communities.

At the end of Year 2, there is an emerging consensus that Living Places is no longer a programme, but a focus for activity at the national level, and in five Priority Places. In essence, regional activity is now mainstreamed through regional cultural arrangements and could be seen as **a series of sensible responses to local circumstances through collaborative mechanisms**. Through Living Places alongside a range of other mechanisms, collaboration on culture is now much better established at national, regional and locality levels than was the case at the start of the programme.

Therefore at the end of Year 2, **Living Places has clearly played an active role in influencing thinking about culture and sport in place shaping**, and has delivered much through the five Priority Places (to varying degrees), and through regional partnership arrangements. However, it is also fair to conclude that Living Places has not reduced the number of separate funding streams, or embedded in the notion that services are more important than buildings. Nevertheless Living Places Partnerships can be confident that culture and sport will be well provided for in localities with good local cultural leadership.

Living Places was established as programme in a very different set of circumstances, and with quite different relationships between the cultural NDPB's. At the time it was announced, the Living Places approach was innovative and in retrospect it was prudent to take a collaborative approach.

In this context, it is fair to conclude that the **key products** (CSPT, web based resources and evidence to support the Standard Charge) **would not have happened without**

**Living Places**, and that the Programme has contributed towards improved engagement (and understanding of priorities) between NDPBs, and between NDPBs and CLG and other public sector development bodies (such as the HCA and some RDAs). In addition, Living Places has **broadened NDPB understanding of wider development and regeneration agendas**, especially at the regional and place based level.

From a Priority Place perspective, the Living Places NDPB's have delivered a higher level of time and resource-based investment than might otherwise not have occurred, as well as convincing wider national partners as to the value of cultural investment in development and regeneration.

At the end of the second year of Living Places, the notion that culture is important part of place shaping is largely accepted, and it is reasonable to attribute a proportion of this acceptance to the Living Places Programme.

### Legacy and Next Steps for Living Places

In terms of legacy, there is consensus that the Living Places Programme has coincided with significant improvements in dialogue and partnership working between the cultural agencies in localities, in regions, and at the national level. Whilst Living Places is by no means solely responsible for this development, it has provided an agenda and a set of place-based priorities through which enhanced partnership working can work towards tangible outcomes.

There are mixed views and perspectives as to the future of Living Places, with consensus being split around continuation in the consolidated form, and a cessation of programme activity:

- Living Places in a consolidated form could include the Living Places website, the CSPT and signposting; support to the regional partnerships in the provision of mainstream activity, support to eco-towns; and the fostering of a collective Priority Place network to track long-term outcomes and capture this practice.
- A contrary perspective set out by some consultees is that Living Places should not exist a separate programme, and all activity should be mainstreamed (this might include approaches around partnership working or technical planning processes).

Moving forwards, there may well be value in positioning Living Places as an example of programme work in the future. Given its history and future budgetary constraints, approaches to support collaboration and mainstreaming in localities to add value to local priorities are likely to be well received. For example:

- Corby, Pennine Lancashire and PUSH were places that had already placed significant emphasis on culture and sport in regeneration, and in the context of the locality choice driven policy direction of the new government, there is an opportunity to positively showcase the successes of Living Places – especially at the locality level.
- This could be reinforced by an argument that suggests that regional and pan regional approaches to place-based development are not appropriate or deliverable based on the experiences of the South West and Thames Gateway as Priority Place models.

Nevertheless, there is potential for LEPs to be developed in PUSH and Pennine Lancashire, and the existence of Priority Places means that Living Places thinking is well-placed to exert influence. Furthermore LEPs in North Kent, Milton Keynes and Northamptonshire will benefit from the influence and legacy of the programme.

### **Aligning Living Places to emerging locality based approaches**

Critically, it can be argued that there was demand for culture and sport based place shaping in Corby, Pennine Lancashire and PUSH, and that Living Places was able to help meet that demand. Such arguments can help Living Places align with a policy focus based on locality demand (i.e. what communities actually want). This suggests therefore that Living Places activity should focus on supporting localities to develop their 'ask' for culture and sport investment (as opposed to NDPB's developing their 'offers'). In short, national and regional partners should not be looking to directly influence activity delivered in places, but to support it.

Moving forwards, it is important that the underpinning rationale of Living Places is appropriately positioned by the NDPBs in the context of the coalition Government's policy priorities, and both CLG and DCMS are keen to see such a repositioning. It is clear that this approach must have decentralisation, locality working and local decision-making as its focus, and must not be prescriptive. Put simply, such approaches have got to be useful to local government, and need to be focused on connectivity, sharing of good practice, and the use of evidence that recognises what works and what does not.

It is therefore important that Living Places partners quickly establish what elements of the programme can support the thinking of the new government, and sit well with clear priorities about localism and local choice, and which do not. Consultees have suggested that Living Places activity has potential to be very transferable if the focus of argument and advocacy is based on Priority Place activity, and related products (such as CSPT). The progress that has been made in terms of agency place partnership working would be best presented in a mainstreamed context.

Finally, a number of consultees made reference to the preventative (e.g. health) and supportive (e.g. community development and education) role of culture and sport. This should be considered / further developed in any policy repositioning of Living Places and the role of culture and sport in place shaping to include location, place based budgeting and investing to prevent long-term problems.