

Introduction

Arts Network Sutton (ANS) aims to promote, champion, nurture and act as a voice for the diverse range of arts in the London Borough of Sutton. As a registered charity, ANS also seeks to advance the engagement of local residents in culture, most specifically the arts, and aims to support an increase in arts activities.

At the centre of the network is the Executive Committee, chaired by Alan Fitter. The voluntary committee acts as the network hub. It organises networking events; offers development opportunities to local artists and organisations; provides information on local initiatives and opportunities; promotes through an online calendar and media activity art events within the borough; encourages and helps facilitate collaboration; works with the local authority to support arts development.

Background

ANS has a long history of supporting arts in the Borough. The organisation originated in 1951 as the Carshalton & Wallington Arts Council. Then in 1965, when the three local Urban District Councils came together, it re-named itself Sutton Arts Council. More recently, in 2012, it restructured as Arts Network Sutton. A new constitution was created in 1 April 2014. An interim executive was set up to cover the period to the AGM in June 2014, when the original Trustees ceased to hold office.

A new committee chaired by Alan Fitter was established in November 2016; it consists of six members bringing with them a range of skills including: design and architecture, dance, film and radio production, craft, visual arts, local government, arts education, creative and festival programming and organisational development. The London Borough of Sutton is represented by two councillors, Cllr Steve Cook and Cllr Steve Penneck, who sit on the committee as observers.

In January 2017 members were invited to share their priorities for the network and the Borough. These were taken to an independently managed away day for the ANS Executive at the end of that month. Out of this, our priorities and this strategy has developed.

ANS is funded by the London Borough of Sutton and has reserves of circa £34,000. A large sum of the reserves is made up from an endowment from Neil Hayes. These funds are not restricted but did come with a request to support networking and social events.

Culture Definition

Culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, heritage and arts. For the purposes of this document and the work of ANS, when we talk about the arts we mean that to include: visual arts, craft, theatre, drama, dance, street arts, music, digital and moving image, combined arts; when we talk about culture we mean that to include: heritage, museums, archives, libraries; when we talk about the creative sector we mean that to include: architecture, design, film, radio, TV, fashion.

Objectives for 2017-2020

ANS embraces arts and culture as a life-enriching necessity for everyone and it is a central part of our ANS responsibility to see it fostered, developed and promoted. We want to see the arts, artists and arts organisations in the Borough better supported and their contribution further recognised. The Borough is rich in talent and has an emerging community arts scene yet this remains somewhat hidden, we want to shine a light on this work and help develop audiences for it. A better networked, up-skilled and more ambitious arts sector is our end goal and a more vibrant, revitalised, higher profile and better valued local arts scene will be the result.

Through improved networking and communication, through strategic investment and training, and through its relationship with the Council and other important stakeholders, ANS will capacity build and support the professional development of Sutton's arts and cultural providers. ANS will focus its energies on events and activities that have potential to reach large audiences and can influence a cultural shift in the profile and perception of the arts in the Borough.

The London Borough of Sutton is entering a period of growth and change. Local government plans for 2031 see the Borough, and in particular Sutton Town Centre, redeveloped and better known for strong local heritage and a 'bustling range of cultural activity and entertainment for people of all generations'¹. ANS shares this aspiration for the Borough to be recognised as a cultural destination, renowned for its vibrant arts scene as well as for its history and heritage. ANS will develop the network, its reputation and its members to help realise this aspiration and to allow local artists and organisations to fully benefit from and flourish within a revised and rejuvenated local cultural context.

ANS will work to support strategic development of the arts across Sutton. There is an opportunity in the years 2021-2026 for Sutton Council to build and open an arts centre in Sutton town centre. The ANS Executive will work with members to ensure that plans for such a development are fit-for-purpose and reflect the needs and aspirations of local artists, cultural organisations and residents, communicating our collective skills and strength. The Executive will act as a voice for the arts community in discussions with the council and developers.

Throughout this time ANS will work to ensure that culture is recognised and promoted as a primary good, not merely as a support to regeneration and business services. It will work to increase the perceived value of culture and to engender more engagement in arts activities in the Borough. It will support the development of a more challenging and knowledgeable market place, attracting more artists to live and work in the Borough.

The profile and the aspirations of the cultural sector in the Borough need to be raised. Work is needed to enliven the Borough through increased and better supported and promoted cultural activity. Supported outputs will celebrate the Borough's rich and diverse cultural life and develop community involvement.

Priorities for the forthcoming strategic period 2017 – 2020 will be to enhance the effectiveness of the organisation and governance of the committee, bolster the creative sector through using the network to develop critical mass and one voice with which to represent the Borough's artists, upskilling members, inspiring and activating the membership to deliver high quality events and to work more collaboratively. We will do this by defining four key strands of development.

Network Development

- Developing network connectivity through improved communication and offering increased opportunities for networking.
- Through more effective and efficient working of the Executive Committee.
- Improving organisational governance.

Arts Development

- Enhancing the skills, personal development, outputs and profile of artists and arts organisations in the Borough.
- By encouraging and supporting large and medium-scale events that have Borough- wide impact and profile.
- By encouraging increased arts activity in the Borough.
- Enhancing the arts offer in the Borough, encouraging and supporting the development and delivery of high quality inclusive events that have potential impact across the Borough and raise the profile of artists/arts organisations.

Influencing Local Policy

- Working with the London Borough of Sutton Culture Team to support events and arts development within the Borough. Lobbying for increased value and support of the arts.
- Working in partnership with the London Borough of Sutton on the development of the Market Place Sutton, Cultural Hub and Local Plan.
- Establishing ANS as a significant local stakeholder.

Working in Partnership

- Creating strong, sustainable and strategic partnerships and alliances, internally and externally across the Borough, with our neighbours and other cultural providers.
- To extend the influence of the network and to advocate for the arts across the Borough, create strong, sustainable and strategic partnerships and alliances within and outside the Borough.

The backdrop for the vision is a time of continuing challenges for the nation. The economic climate is likely to remain difficult, with limits on money to be had from public funds or corporate sponsorship. ANS plans are predicated on the assumption that we will increasingly need to develop revenue streams through collaboration and entrepreneurship. We are keen to listen to advice as to how best to work with others to lever maximum value for our resources, and to explore opportunities which may best be pursued in collaboration with others.

This strategy is created at a time of great change for both ANS and for the London Borough of Sutton. Consequently, it is likely that a strategy refresh may be required before 2020, a revitalised network with a more effective committee will allow for a strategic re-think within three years.

¹Draft Masterplan, Consultation Document February 2016, London Borough of Sutton