




COMMUNITAS  
CYMRU

CREU CONWY  
CREATING THE SPARK

A social impact evaluation  
- Summary -



DIWYLLIANT  
CONWY  
CULTURE



Funded by  
UK Government



CONWY  
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COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL



# Summary

## Background and aim

### Creu Conwy – creating the spark

is Conwy County Borough Council's cultural strategy, which aims to put arts, culture and heritage at the heart of community life in Conwy County. The strategy's original timescale was 2021 to 2026. It has been extended to 2028 to ensure the objectives are met, despite the economic challenges.

Through Creu Conwy, the Council believes in the power of the arts, culture, and creativity in supporting individual and community well-being, and that the culture sector can develop creative solutions to the challenges which face our communities.

The delivery of Creu Conwy is predominantly being resourced through grant-funding, including £1.2m from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, after receiving UK Community Renewal funding to scope the feasibility of the work planned. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is also supporting the delivery of the Conwy Library and Information Strategy 2021-2026.

To ensure that culture and creativity is a common thread running through everything that happens in Conwy, it's argued in Creu Conwy, that the cultural sector needs to be valued and resourced both for its own intrinsic value and as an important area of prevention work - reducing costs and pressures further down the line for other Council and health services<sup>1</sup>.

Communitas Cymru were commissioned by Conwy County Borough Council to undertake this evaluation to both evidence the impact of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment and Creu Conwy, the Council's cultural strategy.

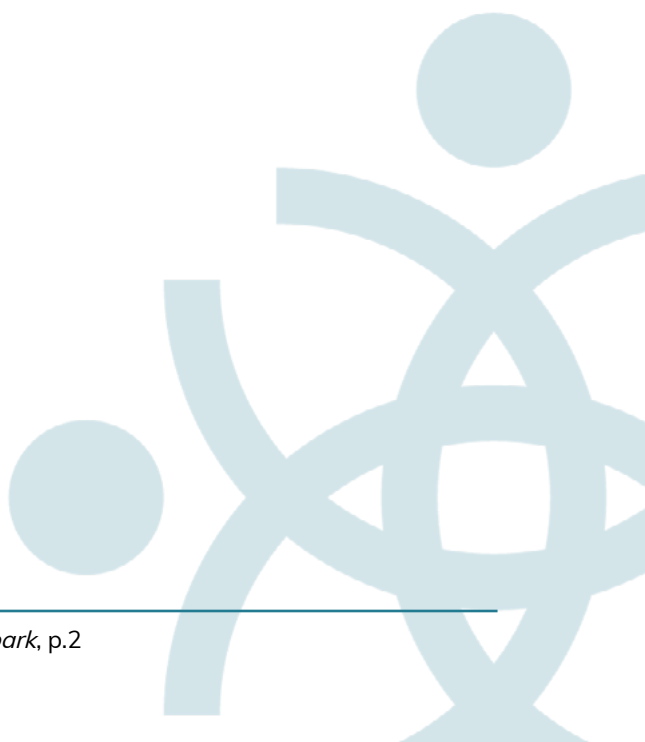
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1 Conwy County Borough Council (2021), *Creu Conwy: creating the spark*, p.2





## Methodology

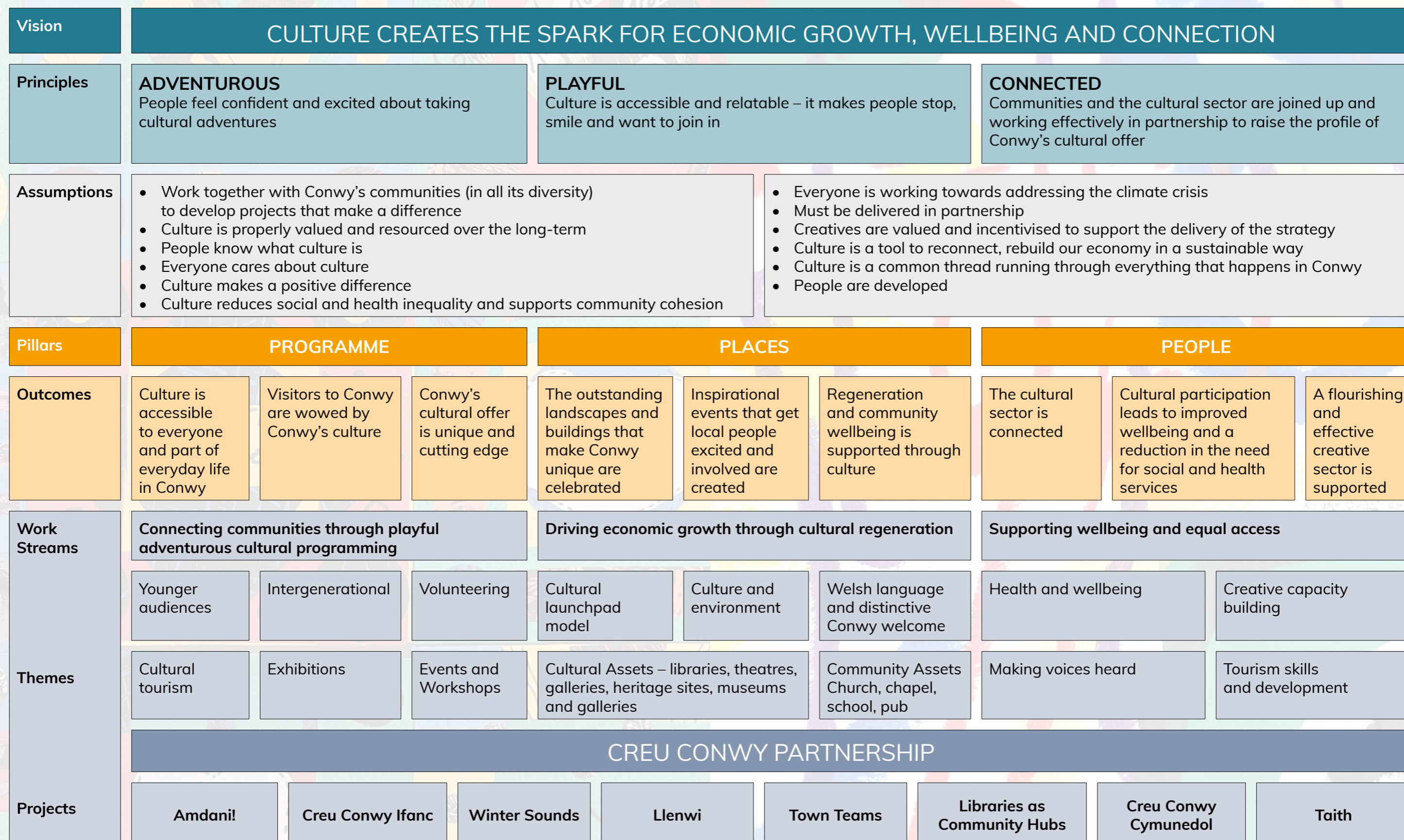
The evaluation has been carefully designed so that it will be rich in evidence and offer actionable recommendations for Conwy County Borough Council. We have used a mixed-methods design, co-creating a Theory of Change from which to develop an evaluation framework, and triangulating insights from data collected through the projects and activities, data from specific project evaluations, and semi-structured interviews.

Through this combination of methods, we sought to:

1. Describe what Creu Conwy hopes to achieve and the activities that will contribute towards achieving it.
2. Define the scope and context within which Creu Conwy sits.
3. Develop evaluation capacity and capability in Conwy County Borough Council's project teams through the production of guidance and evaluation tools.
4. Draw insights from the other evaluators' work.
5. Understand the impact of Creu Conwy.

The methods used were complementary and interlinked, with the intention of providing a holistic understanding and evidence the impact on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment and Creu Conwy.







# Summary of Creu Conwy activity

The following is a summary of the activity that has been supported through the UK Shared Prosperity fund:

## 1. An ambitious programme of cultural activities and infrastructure projects throughout Conwy County

- An extensive cultural programme of events, activities, exhibitions, performances, and workshops in a range of community settings designed to enhance access and remove barriers to participation.
- Llenwi, a 'Destination Signage' project funded through Welsh Government's Brilliant Basics Scheme. Five artwork installations (sited in Abergele, Colwyn Bay, Conwy, Llandudno and Llanrwst) that celebrate sense of place and Welsh Language.
- New portable events infrastructure (staging and other equipment) made available for community hire to enable high quality and accessible events.
- New exhibition cases so museum objects of local interest and importance are available to the community, supporting a sense of connection and place.



## 2. Cultural regeneration programmes developed and delivered at community level by cross-sector 'Town Teams'

- Supporting locally led groups, comprising of local businesses, community leaders and creatives to harness the transformational power of culture in Conwy's five largest towns (Abergele, Colwyn Bay, Conwy, Llandudno and Llanrwst) and beyond - through a hub and spoke model.
- Utilising placemaking approaches to deliver projects that respond to local interest and need, increase footfall, enhance vibrancy and contribute to an improved perception of place across Conwy's five largest towns and surrounding areas.



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### 3. Building the resilience of Cultural organisations through capacity building for ‘Town Teams’, and independent and community-run cultural institutions, including community libraries, museums and galleries

- Training, networking, and knowledge exchange opportunities, including learning journeys and familiarisation visits, collaboration events, and volunteer recruitment.
- In addition, supporting peer-to-peer learning between organisations to enable effective knowledge sharing and collaboration within the independent cultural sector.

### 4. Skill Building and Business Support

- Training, networking and development opportunities for creative freelancers.
- Seven cultural apprenticeships to support home-grown talent, and prepare the next generation of professionals, boosting employability, and supporting more people into work in the creative industries.
- Developing Conwy Archives’ offer to support local businesses to use cultural heritage to build a distinctive brand and authentic sense of place.



## 5. Wellbeing through Culture

- Through Taith – Creative Journeys to Wellbeing, and with funding through Arts Council of Wales, develop and deliver a programme of Artist-led activity to offer people experiencing mental health difficulties a route to improved wellbeing.
- Working with health and social care partners to trial new approaches to referral and social prescribing supporting the preventative agenda with the aim of reducing the need for health and social care interventions.

## 6. Libraries as Community Hubs

- Partnership working and digital infrastructure improvements to deliver a 'Libraries as Community Hubs' model that supports digital inclusion, access to services and cultural participation opportunities through our library buildings and home, mobile and digital library offer.





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## Conclusions

This evaluation has shown the very existence of a cultural strategy stimulates conversation around culture – what it is, what we want for culture in Conwy and who is going to enable it. It has raised the profile of the importance of culture and the role it has in society. It has also provided a more defined direction of travel for all stakeholders.

The infrastructure that has been put in place – whether this is the capital investment into the physical infrastructure (e.g. mobile events equipment, Oriel Colwyn, digital infrastructure in libraries) or the infrastructure like the Creu Conwy Partnership and the Town Teams, has enabled opportunities for participating, connecting, networking and collaborating, and has provided cultural friendship – solidarity and support within a challenging financial climate.

The Shared Prosperity Fund has supported cultural organisations' learning and development and has harnessed and developed the talents of local creatives and helped people to follow a career in the arts.

It has also enabled a local and diverse provision of inclusive cultural activities to take place. Connecting to other resources locally and collaborating with others has helped to extend the reach of cultural engagement.

Cultural participation has enabled people to feel more integrated into their local community, combating feelings of loneliness and isolation, and reporting improved mood and a greater sense of purpose. Connecting with others and feeling a sense of belonging among a group had a profound impact on people's mental health and wellbeing.

This sense of belonging also relates to place, heritage, and culture. Creu Conwy activities have brought a greater sense of connectivity and pride with the wider community. They have also sparked cultural participation, reawakening an engagement of art and creativity.

There is a distinct frustration felt by citizens, partners and artists of missed opportunities to promote or better connect activities. This is a running theme at all levels of delivery, whether it's specific community activities, Town Teams' work, or more strategic pieces.

There is a risk that without effective marketing and communication, that there is an inequality of opportunity amongst citizens to take part and benefit in cultural activities.

Town Teams did not feel connected with each other—operating in isolation. They would welcome more spaces for networking, sharing information, and planning and exploring opportunities to connect and integrate activities.

Similarly, artists saw value in being aware of what other artists are doing and with who, so that they could collaborate and connect and optimise their collective impact.

At a strategic level, members of Creu Conwy Partnership saw inherent value of having a space to share information. They felt, however, that they are not strategically leading culture in Conwy, that there needed to be space for strategic connections and integration to be made and developed within and across partnerships.

Linked to this, it was felt that increased storytelling – the practice of using narratives to convey information, values, and experiences of culture – and particularly effective storytelling against a backdrop of budgetary pressures would be helpful.

It was recognised that a significant amount of the activity has been enabled by the Shared Prosperity Fund. Whilst this has sparked cultural activity and connections, there is concern that without continued investment that this won't be sustained or developed. Added to this, chasing grant-funding, adhering to the complex and time-consuming requirements of funders, and managing the instability that this provides, risks the opportunity to embed cultural activity into the lifeblood of Conwy for generations to come.

Political and senior leadership support is key to enabling the impact of Creu Conwy to be optimised over the short, medium, and long-term at both an operational level and a strategic level. There is a role for the Council to be enabling, convening, connecting, co-ordinating, and collaborating.

In the following section, we set out three recommendations for consideration by Conwy County Borough Council that aim to build on the strong foundations developed by Creu Conwy.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations set out a suite of actions that could help to both provide a platform for Conwy County Borough Council to lead the way in enabling a flourishing cultural ecosystem and ensure that the benefits of culture are realised for generations to come.

The recommendations respond to themes identified in the evaluation.

**Recommendation 1: Conwy County Borough Council instigates and leads conversations about the development of a regional cultural body, similar to the former North Wales Arts Association, with the aim to foster, develop and promote cultural activity across North Wales.**

There is lots of cultural activity taking place across North Wales and huge potential to better co-ordinate and develop this and realise improved outcomes for citizens, communities, artists, and cultural organisations. This is particularly timely with the development of more regional working through the North Wales Civic Engagement Partnership, which aims to break down some of the complexities in current ways of working and drives ongoing collaboration and change by focusing on better coordination, sharing resources, and developing a clear collective commitment to foster a partnership infrastructure across North Wales.

**Recommendation 2: Fostering a political and strategic partnership culture that visibly welcomes and values culture, is clear about its purpose, and that is accountable for the part they play.**

Political and senior leadership support is key to enabling the impact of Creu Conwy to be optimised over the short, medium, and long-term at both an operational level and a strategic level. There is a role for the Council's senior leaders across portfolios to be strategically enabling, convening, connecting, co-ordinating, and collaborating within and across the regional partnership landscape to raise the potential for culture.

**Recommendation 3: Better connecting, promoting and storytelling activity so that there is an equality of opportunity and impact, at all levels, is optimised.**

By both connecting activity (strategically and operationally) and crafting and sharing stories that resonate with employees, stakeholders, (potential) partners, and citizens, will support Conwy County Borough Council to help build a strong identity, foster engagement and emotional connection around culture, better integrate opportunities, be more efficient with resource, thereby enabling increased positive impacts for Conwy's people and places.



Please scan to watch an animated film summarising the findings of the evaluation or click [here](#).



# COMMUNITAS CYMRU

Dr Rachel Hughes



**DOTIAU**  
EXPLORING • CONNECTING • CREATIVELY

Ena Lloyd

**Ena Lloyd Consulting  
& Coaching**

Tanya Nash



**Future  
Clarity**

**April 2025**

**Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg hefyd**