



Cultural Strategies and Sustainable Development

Gardens as the new selling point for the North West
A case study



GARDENS AS THE NEW SELING POINT FOR THE NORTH WEST.....**Parks and Gardens - a potential source of cultural prosperity in the North West?**

Football, the Grand National, The Beatles, Chester, Tatton Park. These are some of the many national and international names from the world's art, heritage, culture, leisure, tourism and sport which enrich the region and are part of our culture. Over 300,000 people work in cultural sector, tourism trips in North West generate £5 billion a year, local authority spending on culture estimated at £260 millionbut what proportion of this is targeted towards and taken up by gardens?

The building blocks: Regional Cultural Consortium.

The North West Cultural Consortium was established in 2008 by the UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) which was designed to bring together all of the principle public and private sector organisations involved in developing and delivering cultural activities, as well as driving regional economic and social regeneration. Partners cover the arts, heritage, museums, libraries, archives, media, sport, tourism, creative industries and representatives from 46 local authorities to ensure 'joined up thinking' across the cultural sectors in the region. The aims include:

- Raise the profile of culture
- Develop strong partnerships with region wide organisations e.g. NWDA, GONW
- Stimulate cultural development and better working practices across cultural policy makers

UK administrative system**Local**

The UK administrative system operates on 2 levels: Unitary Authorities (centred around large urbanised areas) operating one tier of government, and outside these areas a two tiered system is in operation, the district authority, the smallest administrative: made up of very small areas known as parishes or wards, dealing with issues of a local nature

Sub Regional *Above this, encompassing a number of districts, is a County. The County deals with issues of a more strategic nature which may effect several districts, and which may require a co-ordinated joined up approach*

Specific Topic Groups

Task groups of the Cultural Consortium organisation were developed to drive forward specific projects such as Creative Enterprises, Education, Research Management and Communications. Specific to gardens includes:

Historic Environment: brings active organisations in the heritage sector together to promote better understanding of the historic environment. It aims to demonstrate the value, importance and contribution of heritage assets to the socio-economic/environmental well-being of the region; develops integrated marketing; and aims to influence the development, review and implementation of key regional strategies.

Key Policy Frameworks developed by the Cultural Consortium organisation**Regionally**

The *Cultural Strategy for England's Northwest* was produced as a result of work by these specific topic groups, and creates a long-term vision which sets out the key strategic objectives for the region, along with a set of initial key tasks outlined as part of a corresponding 'Strategy Action Plans 2002-2003' which interprets the Cultural Strategy into a manageable programme of action with targets and outputs.

The Cultural Strategies bring together organisations across the region to

- Raise the profile of culture
- Develop strong partnerships with region wide organisations e.g. NWDA, GONW, large organisations and voluntary groups
- Stimulate cultural development and better working practices across cultural policy makers

How does this Cultural Strategy fit with other strategies present in the region?**Regional**

The region encompasses a number of counties and/or Unitary Authorities and applies to the administrative area for each region of the UK e.g. North West. The region provides guidance, advice and decisions that may have an impact on the whole region, and is often a principle source of funding to the unitary, county and district authorities.

It has been developed in line with other partner strategies including:

Locally: works alongside Local Authorities, and 2 Counties have developed Sub-Regional Cultural Strategies reflecting the regional framework.

Regional/Sub Regional: reflects the objectives of the two regional agencies NWDA and NWRA, as well as the Cultural Consortium Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance. Cultural Strategy designed to support the regional Tourism Strategy.

Nationally: reflects the policies of DCMS and the initiatives of DTI and ODPM, co-ordinated through Government Office North West.

Internationally: the strategy has been evaluated against the Action for Sustainability NW, based on the guidance from EU on sustainability.

Challenges to address: The strategy identifies the strengths and weaknesses of NW culture which include:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Cities Internationally recognised	Regional rivalries and competition for profile/support
Critical mass and variety of cultural infrastructure	Core funding problems with capital funding not matched by necessary revenue.
Range of exceptional flagship cultural events/festivals	Uneven quality and ad hoc funding arrangements preventing forward planning
Exceptional built heritage in cities and urban environments	Underplayed and undervalued; badly managed and significant rural/coastal economic decline
Exceptional rich/diverse natural rural environment and landscape	Significant under utilised and decayed resources, need for community and public sector action to rebuild rural economy
Political structures and leadership and emergence of strong regional voice	Need to ensure co-ordination through dynamic structures with cultural understanding and ownership

(Cultural Strategy for England's Northwest, 2001)

It is these strengths which the resultant strategies and actions plans work to make central to economic prosperity and build on what makes places distinctive. 5 strategic objectives and opportunities are identified. These include:

1. **IMAGE:** making culture central to external marketing of the region as a place to live, work, visit and do business.
2. **CULTURAL ECONOMY:** developing sustainable creative economy
3. **ENVIRONMENT:** promoting heritage and landscape as central to culture of region creating pride in diversity, history and sense of place.

The actions outlined under these strategic objectives are very widespread and generalised but specifically impact on gardens through the following:



Firstly in the **Image** objective actions include positive press and media coverage of the region's culture with campaigns to illustrate all aspects of North West culture. In Cultural Economy developing integrated joined up approaches to understanding and responding to these assets is key with recognition of contributions from both the urban and rural environment. The main objective concerning garden heritage is Environment, where examples of best practice are sought, better and more consistent signage across the Cultural sector from agencies operating in the tourism, heritage and countryside sector, and programmes to develop and support rural and urban initiatives concerning cultural management.

Sub Regional: Cheshire and Warrington Cultural Strategy

Following on from this the County and District Councils of Cheshire and Unitary authority of Warrington worked together to develop a strategy for the sub region to provide a framework for local and sector specific strategies and plans, to link locally produced and regional strategies, and articulate sub-regional aspirations to influence sub-regional, regional and national thinking, whilst providing a common voice for the sub region with the regional cultural consortium and influential development agency. This document provides a crucial link between the broad regional visionary cultural strategy and the local district strategies and programmes which reaches out into the community at a very grassroots level.

The Sub Regional Cultural Strategy utilises the six themes of the regional cultural strategy, to maintain common links from a higher to lower level. The strategy provides for cultural enhancement of gardens specifically through the '**Environment**' theme which promotes the heritage and landscape as central to culture, and promoting access to these assets, whilst encouraging planning authorities to ensure a cultural dimension is included in all Local Plans. The '**Image**' theme also promotes the increased profile of cultural activity on a regional and national scale.

An action plan accompanies the strategy and under the **Environment Theme** the current EGHN project is identified as a key action to support, along side other cultural heritage and management actions, and alongside key actions in '**Advocacy**' with the inclusion of cultural actions in Community Plans and other localised strategies. The strategy is driven forward by a sub regional Cheshire and Warrington Cultural Consortium. Following the publication of this sub regional, broad cultural strategy, the importance of gardens was further acknowledged by the publication of a sub regional strategy solely for gardens.

Are gardens really a source of cultural prosperity and what roles do they play?....

Gardens as an important asset for Cheshire

The high standard of garden assets offered by Cheshire means the County can have a unique claim as England's Garden County. There is a ream of statistical evidence to support the acknowledgement of the contributions that gardens make, with just a few listed below:

- Cheshire has 21 gardens on the national register, and 300 of heritage value
- 103,000 paying visitors spent more than £5.5 million in the five days of the RHS Flower Show.
- More garden centres than any other English County.
- Direct activity across the garden sector in the County is over £48m.
- Cheshire has the most visited gardens in the Britain, the most vibrant gardening economy in the UK and unrivalled potential for growth and development
- Gardens have been recognised as offering a superlative opportunity to generate economic benefits.

Development of an innovative strategy for Cheshire



Although the economy and visitor profile of the County is significantly underpinned by that generated through the garden industry, efforts to exploit this potential have been piecemeal and under resourced. As such little have been done to pursue this resource in the past, which is surprising, given the potential for enhanced regional profile and tangible immediate benefits. A strategy underpinned by gardens as a cultural resource was recognised as a unique step forward in terms of innovative cultural development.

In view of this, in summer 2002, following the work undertaken by the Cultural Consortium and publication of the Regional Cultural Strategy, a study was commissioned by Cheshire County Council on behalf of regional and sub-regional partners (overseen by the North West Cultural Consortium) to consider the creative, cultural and visitor potential of gardens in Cheshire and Warrington. Research and consultation took place in 2002, involving a wide range of organisations and regional representatives.

Gardens as a source of cultural prosperity study

The strategy suggests there is unequivocal evidence that, with focused investment and initiatives in this sector, gardens could be at the heart of cultural development for the region, and has the potential to draw together a broad partnership at regional and sub-regional level.

Objectives:

- a) To establish appropriate brand, and find a distinct position for this brand which marks it out from the competition
- b) Identify potential of partnership structures that enable a co-ordinated approach to planning together.

Models for Future Development and case study

3 levels of activity were identified as part of the study, in order to take forward actions and produce targeted projects, which were:

- Major new flagship events
- Smaller programmes
- Better branding and marketing of existing strengths.

Alongside this, a series of case studies are identified as a means of identifying suitable areas of activity for future support.

1) Major events (examples of case studies suggested):

Case study: Garden brand

This reflects the success of major events in driving regional regeneration which the North West has enjoyed considerable success, emphasised in the Tourism Green Paper. Large events have substantial international profile with diverse and significant economic benefits. The strategy therefore suggests that the conurbations of Greater Manchester and Merseyside combined with the green counties of Cheshire, Lancashire and Cumbria offers a unique possibility for the region to develop a diverse gardens brand.

With relatively modest marketing investment the County could readily command the '*England's Garden County*' brand, which is a major USP for the region, linking into the tourism strategy.

Case Study – The Peace Garden

The county could take a decisive position as part of an international network of gardens of peace, structured as a series of festivals across the world focusing on gardens for peace, conciliation and meditation, using culture as a tool for international exchange and reconciliation.

Actions could include:

- The rebuilding of gardens as a gesture of rebuilding trust among partner countries
- Commissioning public art in gardens across the network, as well as Islamic gardens in the west and western gardens in the Islamic world, to symbolise international collaboration, understanding and shared experiences.
- The development of gardens building on themes and brands recognised in Cheshire and extending them internationally.

2) Smaller Programmes:

One suggestion is to develop a wide range of different projects and initiatives under a garden brand including:

- The use of Tatton Park as a showcase for garden activity across the County
- Garden activities in the range of arts festivals including public art and artist in residence Museum exhibitions/presentations on garden related themes e.g. the productive garden using local produce, wartime gardens, organic gardens
- Trails and open days.

One of the actions relate to the current EGHN project:

"The development of the **European Garden Heritage Network**, the development of new rural/urban environmental regeneration initiatives building on existing strengths – the Royal Horticultural Show at Tatton Park, garden centres, allotments, Britain in Bloom, etc. and including **designs on gardens**' with a Festival and a range of 'green' initiatives linked to the Countryside Agency and other rural agencies." *Gardens as a source of Cultural Prosperity*.

These could be gathered into an annual 'England's Garden Celebration' which could span the summer months carefully planned around a schedule of larger and smaller events. They could also have the potential for marketing short stay visits to out of county audiences.

3) Better branding and marketing of existing strengths

This action addresses some of the weaknesses identified in the cultural strategy, and aims to meet the objectives suggested in the regional tourism strategy. This would consider the target market for the campaign and examine the way gardens are presented, to try and move away from traditional older garden visiting market. Suggestions include building up a brand for the County as a place of activity and creativity rather than just limiting the attention to gardens themselves. This could include use of imagery and language from innovative projects to illustrate the broad range of activities on offer.

Case Study – Cheshire England's Garden

- New contemporary brand and marketing strategy aimed at diversifying the garden visit market
- New marketing campaign for garden destination scheme
- New itineraries and trails linking a coherent series of attractions and drawing in other cultural facilities
- Annual calendar of activities drawing together garden events with arts festivals, food festivals and other cultural activities.

Expected tangible outputs:

The study suggests that given the right marketing, focus and support, gardens and the associated activities should make a very real contribution to the region. Estimates include the following:

- 1) It should be possible to drive up out of region visitors by 100,000 a year
- 2) A full season event should add a further 350,000 visitors
- 3) Expected new spending to be generated up to £16m
- 4) In terms of jobs, this should have the potential to create 460 direct jobs

Links to Tourism Strategy

The Gardens as a Source of Cultural Prosperity report has positive links with the **NorthWest Regional Tourism Strategy** in improving tourism product infrastructure and boosting tourism businesses performance. The clear acknowledgement of the value of gardens is evident from the focus of key strategies/activities including:

- Under the programme of **winning themes**, special themes cover 'the countryside' –
- Promoting a green region of world class countryside. Access to the countryside is a key aspect of the vision. A closer working relationship between those preserving the quality of the environment and those involved with tourism.
- Promotion of world class facilities for rural recreation and tourism displaying the quality of the environment.
- identification of target markets for thematic brands to enhance thematic tourism packages products and services

There are evidently clear broad objectives which identify green spaces as making important contributions to a region however what specific role parks and gardens take in the general contribution of green spaces to a region is not as clear or well supported by policy and investment

Preliminary findings from secondary research of Tatton

The initial indications of the performance of Cheshire's principle garden asset at Tatton Park, based on the suggested areas of activity in both the Cultural Strategies and the Cheshire and Warrington Gardens strategy are set out below:

The garden was already one of the most visited of the National Trust's properties and a significant contributor to the area's tourist and cultural economy of Cheshire and the wider locality.



More targeted advertising and public relations campaign for 2003 saw a 50% decrease in advertising spend and some major successes in event attendance, including an increase of 50% attendance to the Medieval Fair through a sustained media programme and leaflet distribution to key target markets. The RHS show at Tatton Park attracted 108,000 visitors in 2003 with neighbouring Knutsford supplying more visitors to the park than anywhere else, but high levels of visitors also from Manchester, Warrington and Stockport.

Tatton Park employs 50 core staff and a further 35-40 seasonal staff, including 14 gardeners. Many of these live in neighbouring towns and villages confirming the park as a major local employer. 14% of surveyed visitors to Tatton in 1998 responded that they would be going to local shopping centres as part of their visit to the park, whilst in terms of spending to Tatton 42% of visitors surveyed had visited the restaurant, and 12% the farm shop.

Other examples in the UK

In general terms most regions have Cultural and Tourism Strategies designed to utilise and build on their cultural and heritage assets, as advocated by the Central Government Department of Culture, Media and Sport. There are regional variations between the approaches taken with some having greater value to regions than others. Similar issues are raised across the regions. In the Regional Cultural Strategy for the South East parks and gardens are typically recognised for their recreational value and the contribution they make to the urban scene, but only in the sense of adding to an image of the region. No specific weight is given to the value of a garden in attracting visitors and users to the garden, visitor spend, and the effect of large numbers that gardens can attract on local towns and economies. Surrey Cultural Strategy identifies a challenge of contributing to a sustainable natural and man-made environment, under which objectives include developing with sensitivity the use of the Countryside for cultural activities. However this strategy follows the general trend of many regions in failing to recognise specific qualities that gardens possess and failing to understand the full contribution the gardens make to the attractiveness, and thus the prosperity of a region.

Conclusion

Suggested way forward



In order to move forward, new resources will be needed to build up the national profile of this Unique Selling Point. In particular, it could be suggested that ownership needs to lie in three bodies:

- A) Regionally:** Cultural Consortium and RDA will need to consider the place of this theme in the overall offer of the region, either through the recognition of a Cheshire USP within the regional marketing mix, or through the extension into regional events and profile
- B) Sub-regionally:** Cheshire and Warrington Cultural Consortium will be a key forum for the development/sharing of projects, discussions of ideas and organisation of practical stages of action.
- C) County Council:** should play a pivotal position in the development of a strategy and action plan, a new brand and action projects will run County-wide, and it is only at this County wide level that a coherent operation of the strategy will be possible.

The success of gardens being recognised as a source of cultural prosperity is evident from the recognition gardens is now receiving in the cultural, economic and tourism sectors. The links between the gardens as culture, and gardens as sources for economic investment and tourism potential are recognised and embraced by the strategies from the Regional Tourism Authority, and the Regional Economic Strategy, and some sections of the tourism strategy has been examined in this paper. It is crucial that there is positive co-ordination between the strategies to ensure that gardens are successfully marketed to create a winning theme for the region and a unique selling point as an element of the region's culture.



September 2004

This case study has been carried out by
Emma Williams (Cheshire County Council)

within Action 1 "Spatial Strategy"
of the INTERREG IIIB NWE Project
European Garden Heritage Network

(Photographs by: Cheshire County Council and
Prof. Ed Bennis (Manchester Metropolitan University))

