Cultural Destinations was an initiative delivered by Arts Council England and VisitEngland. The overall value across two investment rounds was over £6 million.

In 2016, Stoke-on-Trent’s Cultural Destinations partnership was established, which involved Stoke-on-Trent City Council - including Visit Stoke, Cultural Services and Potteries Museum & Art Gallery; Appetite, Stoke-on-Trent; B-Arts; British Ceramics Biennial; Middleport Pottery; Staffordshire University; The Trentham Estate and World of Wedgwood. The partnership secured £300,000 of investment towards a three-year development programme, supported by match funding from Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

This period, which began during the City’s bid to be crowned as City of Culture 2021 saw significant additional investment in culture across the City, with 1418NOW’s Weeping Window at Middleport Pottery; the extension of Appetite, Stoke-on-Trent’s project funding, and the award of two new Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations - British Ceramics Biennial and B-Arts.

This report highlights the impact that Cultural Destinations had on Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire. The publication has been produced by project evaluators The Audience Agency.

Dear Stoke-on-Trent
Thank you for making us always feel welcome.
It’s well known how loving and friendly you are.
We talk of you often to anyone who will listen,
We share your culture, your history, your heart.

From ‘The City That Grew Us’ by Gabriella Gay
There’s no doubt about it that the impact of the Cultural Destinations project on Stoke-on-Trent has been significant.

Following on from the city’s bid to become the UK City of Culture 2021, Cultural Destinations provided an opportunity for us to better align sectors and for culture and tourism organisations to work collaboratively together. Joining together for the first time to target the lucrative domestic visitor market with a strong year round cultural offer, showcasing the city’s culture rich offer and key seasonal highlights.

Cultural Destinations in Stoke-on-Trent has made some of its most significant progress in partnership development, and it’s fantastic to see how so many cultural and tourism organisations have worked together towards the same goal.

As a city, we’ve delivered some outstanding activity over the last three years with highlights including Poppies: Weeping Window, that attracted national attention and more than 122,000 visitors from far and wide over a six week period in 2018; Light Night in Stoke-on-Trent’s mother town Burslem that saw the town spectacularly lit up and come alive at night with light artworks, projections and illuminated performances that took over the town centres streets and historic buildings in the coldest depths of winter.

Despite the minus temperatures, the cultural activity saw more than 3,000 participants over three nights attract almost 16,000 visitors which is no mean feat; and of course, the beloved British Ceramics Biennial festivals which take place at various cultural venues across the city, attracting in excess of 60,000 people bi-annually to the city, demonstrating the importance of ceramics to the city.

Stoke-on-Trent Cultural Destinations large scale public engagement campaigns have tied into this enhanced cultural and arts offerings and campaigns such as Summer in Stoke, My Stoke Story and the ‘Throw Open’ weekend have contributed towards the generation of around £9.7m worth of economic activity in here in North Staffordshire.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council has been and remains committed to the cultural sector, and the magnitude of its importance to us in reaching new audiences from residents of the city, as well as attracting new visitors to the Potteries has never faltered. Cultural activity for us is significant for place making and attracting investment, and we will continue to invest in this on top of the £3m already invested in the last 3 years. Arts Council investment in the city continues to be incredibly important to us and we’re forever grateful for their commitment to National Portfolio Organisations including Appetite, B Arts, BCB & the New Vic Theatre.
Following the groundswell of support and activity generated through the UK City of Culture bidding process, the Arts Council funded Cultural Destinations programme enabled us to raise the city’s profile and attractiveness as a cultural tourism destination by strengthening its rich, year-round cultural offer and improve the overall visitor experience.

A key feature of Cultural Destinations has been its ability to bring together partners, provide leadership and strategic direction, embed new ways of working together, coordinate skills development and training workshops, grow digital capacity, increase networking and promote collaborative engagement within and between arts, culture, tourism and destination management organisations.

By investing in new cultural tourism products, and through targeted campaigns such as ‘Summer in Stoke’, the inaugural ‘Throw Open’ weekend, a coordinated cultural concierge programme, joined-up ambassador and influencer marketing, familiarisation visits, themed itineraries, and the ongoing city-wide ‘My Stoke Story’ campaign, Cultural Destinations has increased the reach of those experiencing arts and culture, boosted the local visitor economy, and helped culture and tourism organisations to become more resilient, sustainable and fit for the future.

In terms of legacy, Cultural Destinations partners continue to play a prominent role in the region’s visitor economy growth plans. We will use the commissioned bespoke market research and evaluation activity as a platform to work alongside Visit Stoke to power up the city, inform and help shape the development of the emerging Stoke Creates partnership, and engage with local, regional and national organisations to improve the productivity of the cultural tourism sector and position the city as a distinctive destination for domestic and international visitors.

From arts, literature and music, award-winning theatres and museums, festivals and contemporary arts events, to the outstanding Creative People and Places, Stoke-on-Trent’s Cultural Destinations journey has reminded us that we don’t need permission or a badge to celebrate being a vibrant city of culture with a wonderful array of cultural tourism attractions, events, venues and experiences.

A new cultural destinations legacy video includes a full reading of the poem ‘The City That Grew Us’ by poet Gabriella Gay, will help the visitor economy to recover post pandemic.
The following outcomes were agreed by the Cultural Destinations partners, at the start of the project and provided the framework for the evaluation:

• The potential of arts and culture to drive growth in the domestic visitor economy is developed and cultural engagement increased.

• A cross sector vision and approach to cultural tourism will be realised and partnerships sustained.

• The arts and cultural offer are enhanced, with focused quality product developed for the domestic market.

• Perceptions of North Staffordshire are improved, with the cultural offer embedded in the narrative of change about the area.

• North Staffordshire is recognised as a visitor destination with a strong cultural offer, attracting more day visits and overnight stays from domestic visitors.

• Domestic visitors experience consistent and informed welcome through digital and physical visitor gateways.

• The tourism industry is more engaged in the promotion of North Staffordshire’s tourism, arts and cultural offer.

The evaluation of this project was carried out by The Audience Agency, focusing on research of audiences and visitors to the partner venues and sites. The author of this report was involved in the project from the beginning, attending the regular project meetings and activities and supporting the group with both formative and summative evaluation.
DELIVERING A CONNECTED VISION

Through the City of Culture bidding process, new cultural networks and partnerships began to thrive. Cultural Destinations investment meant that ideas could be tested, and the emergent plans from collaborative working could be realised. The many activities delivered by the Cultural Destinations partners were developed as part of a 3-year strategic vision, as well as in response to market opportunities as they arose.

Highlights of activities the project delivered included:

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

• Campaigns included the launch of the Summer in Stoke Campaign in Summer 2018 and launch of the My Stoke Story Brand Campaign in 2019.

• Familiarisation Trips for local and national social media influencers.

• National press campaigns by British Ceramics Biennial, Staffordshire Hoard Festival and Claybody Theatre.

• Targeted out of area visitor campaigns to support British Ceramics Biennial 2019 and City of Culture legacy project Light Night.

• Attendance at the UK Travel and Trade show in London in 2019 and planned for 2020 (postponed due to Covid-19).

• Promotional video stock footage of Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire to use in future campaigns.

CULTURAL ACTIVITY AND OFFER

Cultural Destinations was able to contribute towards the development of new cultural offers across the City, including:

• Claybody Theatre’s new production, The D Road.

• British Ceramics Biennial’s multi-site exhibition, Four Sites.

• Staffordshire Hoard Festival, celebrating 10 years since the Staffordshire Hoard was discovered. The festival was led by Potteries Museum & Art Gallery.

• Throw Open Weekend - a Cultural Destinations commissioned event in March 2020.

• Light Night - a Lumiere event which took place in Burslem in 2019. The event was funded via the City of Culture legacy fund from Arts Council England and delivered by Appetite, Stoke-on-Trent.

• Summer in Stoke and Christmas Events programmed across partner venues.

• Destination Stoke, Festival Stoke launch weekend, March 2020.
IMPACT OF COVID-19

- Several activities are to be rescheduled due to Covid-19, these include a promotional campaign for Middleport Pottery and Emma Bridgewater with a focus on the public events programme.
- Restoke’s, Mother was a new dance performance piece which explored themes around motherhood. Cultural Destinations funding was to assist Restoke in developing regional/national audiences.
- Festival Stoke, is a local festival in Stoke Town Centre. Cultural Destinations supported the team with new ‘performance-based tourist guides’ and supported with marketing activities. Festival Stoke was able to move some of its programme online when Covid-19 delayed activities.
- Led by British Ceramics Biennial, the partnership was also due to attend Ceramic Art London, reusing the pavilion created for the exhibition as part of the legacy plan.

TRAINING

- Google Analytics training was delivered, including support to help venues to secure Google grants worth $360,000 per annum.

NETWORKING & PARTNERSHIPS

- Organisations were invited to attend a new Cultural Concierge event at Emma Bridgewater in partnership with Visit Stoke.
- Partners were invited to a networking event at World of Wedgwood, hosted by Visit Stoke, the event included several speakers and case studies from the project.

RESEARCH & EVALUATION

- Appetite consulted on a city-wide cultural volunteering scheme.
- The Audience Agency provided partners with insights into their audiences and reported on activities across the project.
- The Audience Agency also delivered Groups & Travel Trade Research study to understand the barriers for group travel bookers visiting Stoke-on-Trent.
IMPACT OF CULTURAL DESTINATIONS IN STOKE-ON-TRENT AND NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE

The following impacts are drawn from summary reports written by The Audience Agency between 2017 and 2020, using a mixed methodology research approach to evidence the outcomes against the aims of the project.
### THE STATISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Economic impact of Cultural Destinations, Stoke-on-Trent investment in the local area</strong></th>
<th><strong>Google Grants worth $360,000</strong></th>
<th><strong>£82,000</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£8,525,762*</td>
<td>per annum secured for Stoke-on-Trent’s cultural organisations</td>
<td>Advertising Value Equivalent for British Ceramics Biennial 2019 Festival</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>26%</strong></th>
<th><strong>97%</strong></th>
<th><strong>69%</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>increase in visitors to Stoke-on-Trent</td>
<td>rated visitor experience as ‘good’ to ‘very good’</td>
<td>of visitors had a positive opinion of Stoke-on-Trent following a visit, an increase of 26% from pre-visit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **17** | **5.7%** | **#MyStokeStory** |
| articles in The Sentinel | increase in unique visitors to the website | • Campaign page 4,557 views |
| **9** | **3,644 mentions on Twitter** |
| national influencer reviews | | • 2,219 mentions on Instagram |
| **15** | **local influencer reviews** |

---

*Using The Audience Agency’s Economic Impact Calculator*

**Equivalent to £262,000 per annum (March 2021)**
The potential of arts and culture to drive growth in the domestic visitor economy is developed and cultural engagement increased

Cultural Destinations provided an opportunity for partners to collaborate to target the domestic visitor market. Partners saw an overall increase of 26% in visits to Stoke-on-Trent during the project. Visitors broadly came from two distinct drivetime distances, within North Staffordshire itself, and within 70 minutes, with other hotspots in Stafford, Telford, Cheshire East and West.

Visitors had positive experiences of their visits with 97% of visitors indicating their experiences were good to very good, this was highly like to convert into repeat visitors and positive word of mouth marketing which played an important factor in decisions to visit.

Key motivations for engaging with Cultural Destinations venues changed over the course of the project, in 2018/19 learning and education were prominent motivations, whereas in 2019/20 this changed to social aspects of visiting attractions to spend time with friends and family.

The economic impact which can be attributed to Cultural Destinations in the North Staffordshire conurbation was estimated to be £8,525,762, indicating the impact that cross partner working and small amounts of investment can have on the area.
Cultural Destinations has helped to forge new partnerships across Stoke-on-Trent, resulting in the establishment of the Cultural Compact, Stoke Creates, and the cultivation of new collaborative opportunities such as High Street Heritage Action Zones.

For tourism partners there was clear evidence that ‘cultural audiences’ should be considered a key target market, this market may be further prioritised as part of Covid-19 recovery and staycations.

For both tourism and cultural partners, the opportunity to participate in joint campaigns ‘Summer in Stoke’ and ‘My Stoke Story’ provided a common purpose, in addition to an increased marketing investment in the area.

Investment in digital training greatly benefited partners. Several venues secured Google Ad Grants **worth $360,000 per annum.** This large ongoing investment for Stoke-on-Trent will continue to provide opportunities to implement new digital skills.
The arts and cultural offer is enhanced, with focused quality product developed for the domestic market

The consortia commissioned several new offers across the project. Investment took the form of grants to cultural organisations including:

- **My Stoke Story - Throw Open Weekend** (14-16 March 2020)
- **Claybody Theatre - The D Road** (October 2019)
- **British Ceramics Biennial 2019** (7 September - 13 October 2019)
- **The Potteries Museum - The Hoard Festival** (July 2019)
- **Festival in Factories** (March 2020 launch. Due to be rescheduled due to Covid-19)
- **Destination Stoke, Festival Stoke, launch event March 2020**
- **Restoke - Mother** (March 2020. Due to be rescheduled due to Covid-19)

Many of the commissions provided a contemporary view of Stoke-on-Trent through quality arts programming. It was evidenced through the project that this programming approach attracted new cultural tourists to Stoke-on-Trent.

The programme also helped to generate significant press and media coverage. British Ceramics Biennial’s 2019 festival generating over **£82,000 AVE** (advertising value equivalent), this is an important contributor to changing perceptions and narratives around Stoke-on-Trent.

“BCB is one of the most innovative ceramic exhibitions in the UK. The setting of Spode makes for a fantastic exhibition...”

Audience member to British Ceramics Biennial 2019

Images: Clockwise from top...
BCB, 2019 • D-Road, Claybody Theatre • Festival Stoke
Perceptions of North Staffordshire are improved, with the cultural offer embedded in the narrative of change about the area

Culture has significantly helped to change the perception of Stoke-on-Trent. **Overall, 69% of visitors had a positive opinion following their visit, an increase of 26% from pre-visit.**

Contributing to this was sustained year-round press campaign including a regular column in The Sentinel, in addition to a national press and social media influencers campaign. The pilot of a new local influencers programme to support the My Stoke Story campaign saw three local influencers appointed to produce content about Stoke-on-Trent. Collectively, this generated a large digital media reach.

Promoting the destination at major trade and travel shows was a key part in the strategy for changing perceptions. The consortia attended the British Tourism and Travel Show in 2018/19 and due to the success, were due to return in 2019/20. However, the British Tourism and Travel Show and Ceramic Art London were both cancelled due to the impact of Covid-19.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council leader Councillor Abi Brown was invited to talk about culture-led regeneration, with other national tourism and cultural leaders. This acknowledgement in the work taking place within Stoke-on-Trent was an important indicator of the change in perception nationally.
Domestic visitors experience consistent and informed welcome through digital and physical visitor gateways

Engaging local stakeholders and visitor gatekeepers, from hoteliers to travel providers was a key objective. A Cultural Concierge event was hosted at Emma Bridgewater to announce the launch of the My Stoke Story campaign, with 16 organisations in attendance. Further to the event, seasonal information was shared with organisations and stakeholders, better connecting visitor gatekeepers with the cultural offer in Stoke-on-Trent.

Building digital engagement on cultural organisations websites and other digital channels was also a key focus. Website visitors increased by 9.2% in year 2 of the project before reducing slightly. Website traffic did increase by 5.7% in 2019/20 indicating a greater interest in cultural organisations and their offers.

The digital marketing strategy included the Google AdWords campaign; new digital content and improved digital tracking. The My Stoke Story campaign page received 4557 page views, and four of the consortium partners received 6621 referrals from partner websites.

From launch, the #MyStokeStory hashtag achieved 3644 mentions on Twitter. On Instagram, #MyStokeStory was used to share visitor experiences or to share visitors own ‘Stoke story’ and received 2,219 uses of the hashtag during the campaign.
The tourism industry is more engaged in the promotion of North Staffordshire’s tourism, arts and cultural offer

As awareness of Cultural Destinations grew, so did engagement from tourism partners. Some who hadn’t previously engaged with Visit Stoke and the cultural sector offer committed to do so in the future.

Chair of Stoke-on-Trent Cultural Destinations Paul Williams was an active member of several boards and projects in the area, the benefits for this meant that the project vision was represented in other place-based strategies.

The then newly formed Stoke-on-Trent Business Improvement District was one example, with priorities for the Stoke-on-Trent City Centre BID focussed around place marketing - culture, tourism, and heritage. All connecting to the work of Cultural Destinations and Visit Stoke.

Early on the consortia identified the importance of influencing regional policy if it were to have a legacy. The inclusion of visitor economy and in particular place branding in the LEP strategy is a positive alignment with Cultural Destinations.

At the time the project concluded, the UK was beginning the first Covid-19 lockdown. What was unknown in March 2020 was the longevity of Covid-19 and the impact this would have on the visitor economy. The legacy of Cultural Destinations continues through the ongoing My Stoke Story campaign delivered by Visit Stoke, and the work of the new cultural compact Stoke Creates. This legacy will be ever more important as part of both the sector and place-based recovery roadmap.

Looking beyond the crisis we wouldn’t be as well placed as we are now without Cultural Destinations. We should have confidence that we can make a significant difference...as part of the citywide recovery plan...

Consortia Partner
CREDITS

Thank you to partners who contributed their time during Cultural Destinations.

FUNDERS

PROJECT PARTNERS

- Appetite, Stoke-on-Trent
- B-Arts
- British Ceramics Biennial
- Middleport Pottery
- Staffordshire University
- Visit Stoke
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Cultural Services
- Potteries Museum & Art Gallery
- Gladstone Pottery Museum
- The Trentham Estate
- World of Wedgwood
**SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS**

- Arnold Bennett Society
- Barewall Gallery
- Best Western Moat House Stoke-on-Trent
- Canal & River Trust
- Chatterley Whitfield
- Claybody Theatre
- Destination Staffordshire
- Emma Bridgewater
- Etruria Industrial Museum
- Fenn’s Barns
- Festival Stoke
- Ford Green Hall
- Hanley Bus Station
- Heritage Network
- Make it Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire
- Moat House Hotel
- National Memorial Arboretum
- New Vic Theatre
- Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
- Quality Hotel
- Regent Theatre & Victoria Hall
- Spode Museum Trust
- Staffordshire Film Archive
- Stoke Minster
- Stoke-on-Trent City Centre BID
- Tollgate Hotel & Leisure
- Trentham Monkey Forest
- Valentine Clays
- Virgin Trains
- Wedgwood Museum
- Intercity Taxis

**SUPPLIERS**

- Creative Tourist
- Ian Weightman Media Services
- Kerry Endsor Marketing
- Stephanie Brown Marketing
- The Audience Agency

**PHOTOGRAPHY**

**Front cover:** Always Drinking Marching Band at The Big Feast. Image by Clara Lou Photography.

**Inside front cover:** Mr Wilson’s Second Liners at The Big Feast. Image by Andrew Billington Photography.

**Page 9:** Block from the Big Feast 18. Image by Malcom Heart.

**Page 14:** D-Road by Claybody Theatre, 2019. Image by Andrew Billington.


**Page 14:** Tourist Guides, Festival Stoke. Image by Brent Sutton.

**Page 18:** Light Night, Burslem. Image by Andrew Billington Photography.