



Isles of Scilly Manifesto for Culture

Introduction

The islands have always been an attractive and inspiring place to live and work. They hold a particular appeal to adventurous, resourceful, and creative people. The lifestyle demands a resilience and independence of character and ingenuity has been key to survival. The local economy has evolved and adapted over the years embracing ship building, flower farming and now tourism as the mainstay.

A number of enterprising creatives and designer makers have now helped establish the islands as something much more than a hobbyist's retreat, with a progressive response to the challenges of digital marketing and promotion helping to raise the profile of local creatives.

There is a significant challenge in balancing the modest home-spun charms of island culture with higher expectations and better access to quality events and activities.

For visitors, the timeless quality of Scilly is a major part of its appeal. The discovery of a studio or gallery has always been a popular part of the charm associated with the islands' way of life. But a more dynamic approach is needed to sustain visitor numbers in response to changing markets seeking new experiences.

For residents, the opportunity to experience and participate in arts and culture is a key contributor to quality of life and well-being. While resident numbers on Scilly are small, the potential for and impact of creative engagement is significant. This Manifesto will seek to maximise opportunities for the island communities, particularly young people and under-represented groups.

A creative community and visitor economy should make compatible bedfellows, and there is an opportunity to nurture this relationship and learn from successes elsewhere.

Looking across to the mainland, our closest neighbours in Cornwall have led by example and secured arts and culture as a cornerstone of both the rural and the visitor economy. This is not only about scale and visitor numbers, but a more cohesive approach to celebrating and promoting activity with an emphasis on the shared experience. Here on the Isles of Scilly we applaud this approach and look forward to working with our partners to achieve the aims set out in the Manifesto.



Scilly Manifesto for Culture

Scope and definitions

Scilly is moving towards a more sustainable future. The Council's Corporate Plan outlines ambitious proposals for a greener and more prosperous economy and several schemes are already underway to improve the local infrastructure working with regional and national partners. The Destination Management Plan sets out a new sense of direction for the visitor economy of the Isles of Scilly.

Both plans highlight the importance of culture and heritage and their significance in contributing to both the overall quality of life and the visitor economy. This Manifesto presents a timely and relevant opportunity to assess strengths and shortcomings and help identify future priorities and opportunities. The key beneficiaries will be Scilly residents, visitors and creatives. In terms of diversity, we will adopt the Council's Equalities Action Plan in all aspects of our work. There is a shared ambition to further develop collaboration with established and new and diverse partners, to look for new ways of working and attract external funding and investment.

While we do not cover the whole range of heritage functions, the role of the museum as a significant cultural asset does fall within the scope of this Manifesto and forms a major part of our future ambitions. We also acknowledge the unique contribution that heritage and the environment make to people's experience of Scilly and respect the unique character of each of the five inhabited islands.

The definition of culture that we have adopted is that used by the Local Government Association:

'Culture should be seen as not only the commissioning of arts and the production of events, but also as a tool; that builds upon the heritage of the area; that builds a shared vision and identity for the area that is steeped in history and has a wealth of cultural assets; that builds the local economy particularly in the context of tourism and creative industries; that improves the local quality of life and encourages engagement in community activities; and that provides new ways of tackling challenges around health and well-being.'

Throughout the Manifesto we refer to 'creatives'. This is shorthand for a wide range of creative people and includes artists, makers and designers of all kinds working across all art forms.

In summary, the Scilly Manifesto for Culture aims to set out some clear and deliverable ambitions, endorsed by the Council of the Isles of Scilly, supported by the Scilly arts, culture and heritage sector and other key stakeholders, and valued by the local community.



Current Provision

Professional, voluntary and community arts

Scilly's professional creative community has evolved and demonstrates the enterprise and independence necessary to sustain an effective contribution to the economy alongside a chosen lifestyle. The Arts Guide (2018) shares the breadth of creative activity which has more recently been given a greater presence online and continues to enhance the image and reputation of the islands and their appeal to visitors.

There is an enthusiastic and relaxed approach to community arts on Scilly which reflects the inclusive and participatory nature of these activities. The amateur theatre club is popular with local families and has traditionally staged an annual pantomime, a playwriting competition, and some theatre events for visitors during the summer. In 2019 an imaginative collaboration with writer Kate Rhodes saw the staging of a Murder Mystery Dinner Party in partnership with a local restaurant. This sold out several times and proved a pragmatic solution to the demise of the Council-owned Town Hall, which had previously provided a base for the organisation. Recent survey work has deemed the stage area unsafe and concerns about the structure of the building have led to a reduction in public use and access.

The annual Scilly Folk Festival has accommodated a natural combination of local musicians alongside some guest artists and bands who clearly enjoy the opportunity to visit and perform, including a regular series of lunch time sessions at several of the off-island pubs.

Traditional Mayday celebrations involving local children have been held across the islands since around 1875.

Regular touring theatre is popular and greatly appreciated with Cornwall-based Miracle Theatre bringing shows every summer. The performances are outdoors and have taken place in a number of spaces including the Chaplaincy Gardens on St Mary's. The May Creative Scilly festival in 2019 included performances by visiting theatre companies in the off-island community halls, Tresco Abbey Garden and Old Town Church on St Mary's. The recently established Island Cinema has provided film screenings in indoor and outdoor venues.

The islands have had their own local community radio station since 2007, originally known as Radio Scilly, it re-branded in 2020 as Islands FM, with a refreshed format and an increase in live shows. It broadcasts from a studio on St Mary's and output, which features local host presenters, includes news and live coverage of council meetings.

We recognise that professional, voluntary and community arts are flexible terms with movable boundaries. We hope that this Manifesto will provide opportunities for people to participate in and engage with cultural activities at many different levels.



Assets

Scilly's unique cultural, heritage and environmental assets provide inspiration for everyone to appreciate a sense of the islands' distinctive past, present and future, and in turn, the stimulus to encourage a new generation of visitors. Engagement in creativity has the potential to reveal what makes Scilly special including the spectacular landscape and seascape, the superb dark skies, the islands' history and contemporary Scilly life.

At present, the quality, location and availability of facilities and venues are a barrier to access. The closure of the museum has compounded this problem, as it was previously recognised as the only wet-weather friendly activity for visitors, as well as providing a hub for several specialist interest community groups.

The library is much loved and well used. It is an integral part of the regeneration of the Porthcressa sea front and boasts fabulous coastal views from both floors. The upstairs space has successfully accommodated book launches and literary events for audiences of up to forty people.

The Five Islands Academy, purpose built in 2013, includes a well-equipped hall with some raked seating and an outdoor amphitheatre which has been used as an open-air cinema during the summer months.

The popular and well-established calendar of evening lectures and slide shows, delivered by local specialists and experts incorporating themes of wildlife, archaeology, astronomy, maritime history and more have endured and are seen as part of a regular offer to visitors through the summer. However, the quality of experience is compromised by poorly equipped venues and restricted sight lines.

A number of the off-islands enjoy purpose built, community venues which are regularly used for both social and cultural events. However, on St Mary's, the facilities available fall short of the standards now experienced and expected on the mainland. Investment is needed to improve the offer.

For many local families, and particularly young people, access to professional theatre and live music is prohibitively expensive, necessitating a trip to the mainland; this lack of opportunity is accepted as a trade-off for island living. This has an inevitable impact on engagement, experience and potential ambitions towards progression and professional involvement in the performing arts.



Assets continued

The islands' exceptional archaeological heritage along with their marine environment and biodiversity have long been recognised as central to their character and a major part of their appeal to visitors. Although this is not a Heritage or Environmental Strategy, it is important to reference how these attributes can shape and inform future opportunities for cultural tourism and specialist educational activity. Cultural tourism is motivated by the desire to discover and experience the attractions of a destination.

The islands' archaeological significance was first brought to the public's attention by William Borlase, a renowned Geologist and Naturalist who explored Cornwall and Scilly in the mid eighteenth century. Over 60% of the islands is classified as of archaeological importance with 239 scheduled monuments, these represent over four thousand years of occupation from pre-history to the second World War.

Features range from a unique concentration of Bronze Age entrance graves through to remains of the islands' strategic importance in the successful defence of England, with fortifications spanning three hundred and fifty years. The preservation of these features, which has occurred fortuitously through both a lack of development and relatively low levels of agriculture, means they are accessible to visitors today. Many of the granite structures have weathered the elements and have remained undisturbed for centuries.

The Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust is working closely with Historic England to preserve these features, they also support the local Community Archaeology Group volunteers to regularly clear sites of vegetation.

These characteristics are underpinned by the maritime heritage and a reliance on seafaring and its inherent risks. Although much of the more recent architecture on Scilly is fairly functional the industrial and maritime past includes a legacy of lighthouses, fortifications, churches, quays and evidence of field systems and farming practices all of which hold a wealth of clues to past lives. It is also significant that some of these features are now underwater, the result of a gradual rise in sea level.

These archaeological and environmental assets are a significant part of Scilly's character, valued by residents and visitors alike. The challenge of keeping the museum alive has coincided with opportunities to develop some cutting-edge experiences using new technology, encouraging remote participation in cultural activity. Projects underway include the creation of 'The Coastal Timetriping' app, with Scilly as one of five museums working in collaboration with Falmouth University and Cornwall Museums Partnership. This will highlight sites associated with a number of shipwrecks close to the islands and will be promoted by a new Discovery Map indicating a series of pop-up exhibitions.



Cultural Destinations

Scilly was one of only a handful of places in England to be awarded Cultural Destinations funding through Arts Council England. The two-year programme has allowed two part-time coordinators to work with the Destination Management Organisation for Scilly, the Islands' Partnership, and support activity alongside the Council of the Isles of Scilly. This additional capacity has helped progress a number of ambitions outlined in the Destination Management Plan.

Achievements to date include:

- Profile-raising by helping to reveal and celebrate the islands' 'rich but hidden cultural offer'.
 - Mapping activity through the creation of the Arts Guide in print and on-line.
 - Extending the cultural programme through additional funding and sponsorship to increase the range of live events for both visitors and residents.
 - Developing the annual Art Scilly events in May to a wider festival with greater collaboration and input from mainland partners and practitioners.
 - Injecting a creative dimension to other events in the visitor calendar including commissioning creatives to contribute to the Walk Scilly programme.
- Building a more strategic relationship with Cultivator and other mainland organisations well-placed to provide professional support and advice to Scillonian Creative Industries.
 - Coordinating the 'Young Curators' partnership project with the Five Islands Academy and the Museum of the Isles of Scilly, this resulted in a publication for visitors 'Being Scilly'. The project won the 2020 Cornwall Heritage Award for outstanding work with the community.
 - Launching Walking Stories, a project which invited five established authors to create new site-specific short stories which can be accessed online or in an illustrated limited-edition publication.
 - Running three residencies where creatives were invited to develop proposals for new permanent artworks. The first of these, a specially designed glasswork by Oriel Hicks, was completed in 2020.
 - Leading the recovery plans for the museum on Scilly which has been closed due to structural issues and is now subject of a major feasibility study.
 - Securing significant funding for the museum as part of the Coastal Time Tripping digital project with Falmouth University and Cornwall Museums Partnership.



Cultural Destinations continued

This two-year cultural programme provided an opportunity to build on existing arts and culture activities, and pilot new ones. In this sense it has provided the impetus for the Manifesto, enabling us to assess strengths and weaknesses, demonstrate an appetite for arts and culture, and think ambitiously about future possibilities for Scilly. Crucially, Cultural Destinations enabled us to strengthen strategic partnerships with key stakeholders such as Arts Council England, Cornwall Council and the LEP. We recognise the importance of these partnerships in helping us achieve future ambitions.

Arts Council England commissioned SQW consultants to undertake an evaluation of the national Cultural Destinations project, and Creative Islands featured in a number of case studies.

In Case study: Resilience of cultural organisations it was noted that 'The Isles of Scilly project supported increased partnership work between cultural organisations and Higher Education Institutions, notably Falmouth University. These partnerships have resulted in increasing the Islands' online presence and sales, including in low seasons, and new commissions for local artists.'

In Case study: the use of digital in project delivery the Walking Stories project was featured as an example of good practice in creating products to enhance the visitor experience.



Our Ambitions

Our vision is for Scilly to be a place where visitors and residents can experience, create and participate in high quality arts and culture.

Our Manifesto objectives recognise the role that culture has to play in contributing to wider ambitions for Scilly around the economy, the environment, sustainability, equality and diversity, lifelong-learning and well-being.

We will use arts and culture as a way of celebrating and sharing Scilly's distinctiveness, enabling visitors and residents to find new and imaginative ways of experiencing its special character.

Whether we are working with creatives from Scilly or from further afield, we will promote, support and create cultural activities with the following principles:

- Sense of place – exploring and celebrating what is distinctive about Scilly and its environmental qualities
- Quality – presenting and supporting work, activity and experiences which are imaginative and well-executed
- Accessibility – enabling a wide range of residents and visitors, to easily engage with and enjoy what's on offer
- Collaboration – encouraging educational and creative partnerships and new connections

In order to achieve these ambitions we will focus on some key themes:

Scilly will have a thriving and sustainable community of creatives

Scilly will provide creative opportunities for creatives from further afield

Visitors will be able to experience a cultural offer which celebrates Scilly's distinctiveness

Residents will be able to experience and participate in a diverse range of cultural activity

These require actions and assets which are outlined in more detail in Our Plan. In summary they include a wide range of activities including the development of a new museum, a fit-for-purpose space for performing arts, a co-ordinated programme of cultural events and festivals, the commissioning of new work, and support for Scilly's creative economy.



Our plan

Museum development project

For fifty years the Museum of the Isles of Scilly, purpose built in 1967, provided the most significant cultural attraction on St Mary's. Housing an important collection of uniquely Scillonian artefacts, the museum was popular with both visitors and residents and regular local accessions gave a strong sense of ownership. In 2019 the building was deemed structurally unsafe and closed prior to demolition; work is underway to store and rehouse the contents and there are a number of temporary and pop-up exhibitions which maintain a presence to keep the museum alive.

This situation has accelerated longer term ambitions for a new museum for the islands. A working group including the Council, the Museum, the Duchy of Cornwall and Islands' Partnership have been meeting to explore ideas for the future. Wider consultation has now engaged the Cornwall Museums Partnership, LEP, Cultural Investment Board and others.

The aspiration to create a new museum has evolved to reflect priorities in the Destination Management Plan as a major feature to enhance the visitor economy and improve local provision. A new museum would ideally incorporate additional flexible space with integrated functionality and access to host research, live events, and exhibitions.

The ambition is to develop and build a centre with multiple functions that can be shared to provide the most significant wet-weather, family-friendly facility on the islands. A twenty first century interpretation of a combined museum and cultural centre would cater for a diverse range of users including undergraduates, regular Scilly visitors, cruise ship passengers and community groups. There is a timely opportunity to redefine and extend the traditional perceptions of a local museum.



Museum development continued

As a hub for visitors, providing tourist information and signposting activities, the new museum would animate Scillonian history and culture through multiple art forms with spaces to accommodate live events including music, theatre, dance, storytelling, literature, film and visual arts as well as providing a permanent, purpose-built home for the museum collections and archive. Classroom and workshop space would allow more bespoke research and educational events and ancillary spaces would potentially include a café bar and museum shop.

The traditional character and charm of the original museum need to be recognised and acknowledged in the new facility but there is an opportunity to reinterpret parts of the collection, and present artefacts and exhibits in a variety of ways embracing new technologies with improved access for different audiences.

A new small-scale studio theatre would be transformative as an additional space within or alongside the museum. As a hub for arts and culture this would give the islands a showroom to celebrate and share local heritage and history as well as providing a space for visiting events.

In addition, more flexible gallery space to host touring exhibitions and showcase local artists would add a contemporary dimension and increase opportunities for engagement. Space for educational activity, field study trips, residencies and participatory workshops would refresh the visitor experience and potentially attract a new type of visitor to the islands.

Work is underway with partner organisations in Cornwall and beyond to explore governance options and review successful business models. There are a number of potential funding streams being explored to support further feasibility work and consultation. This is seen to be the most significant and immediate priority in delivering the foundations of the Manifesto.



Cultural events and festivals

The additional capacity afforded through the Cultural Destinations funding has given a renewed sense of direction to the Islands' Partnership in shaping and delivering a regular programme of cultural events for visitors and residents. This has been acknowledged by both accommodation providers and businesses as a contributory factor in season extension and in particular addressing the challenges of attracting increasing numbers of visitors during the spring and autumn shoulder periods.

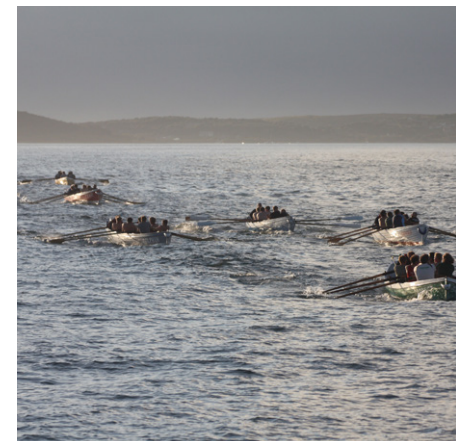
Best practice elsewhere has shown the value in developing and sustaining a regular calendar of events with specific types of visitors targeted, and Scilly has the potential to capitalise on this approach. This will include opportunities for the off-islands and their communities.

Programming reflects opportunities for established and emerging island based creatives as well as the ambition to attract performers and practitioners who are keen to share their work on Scilly.

Our aims are:

- to run an annual Creative Scilly festival in May, encompassing a range of events and activities across all artforms
- to encourage and support independently organised cultural events such as the Scilly Folk Festival
- to incorporate cultural components into the various sporting, culinary and environmental activities including gig rowing, Walk Scilly, and the Dark Skies and Low tide events
- to programme year-round events enabling Scilly residents – and young people in particular – to engage with high quality arts

This requires continuity of staffing and funding and fits well with the overall ambitions of the Islands' Partnership in delivering a high-quality experience for both new and regular visitors.



Supporting Scilly's creative economy

There is a wide range of creative people living and working on the islands, some of whom have established successful careers. However, it is more difficult for Scilly-based creatives to access the range of formal and informal professional development initiatives available to their mainland counterparts.

Our aims are:

- To work with Learn Scilly, Cultivator Cornwall and others to access business support
- To identify and provide advice on funding opportunities
- To promote the work of Scilly creatives, both to visitors to the islands and beyond



Commissioning new work

As part of Cultural Destinations Islands' Partnership launched a series of residencies, inviting creatives to explore and respond to themes relating to Scilly and to make proposals for new work. We would like to continue this approach, creating new and imaginative ways of experiencing the Isles of Scilly.

Our aims are:

- To identify funding to develop the commission proposals by Luke Jerram and Invisible Flock
- To establish an annual themed residency, open to Scilly and mainland creatives working in a range of artforms including but not limited to visual art, digital work, film, music, dance, literature and theatre
- To run inclusive community-based arts projects which draw on the experiences of our residents and encourage creative participation



Partnerships

Our remote location and limited resources mean that we neither have the capacity nor desire to deliver our work unilaterally. The Cultural Destinations programme was significantly enhanced by working with other organisations and agencies on Scilly and on the mainland, both at a delivery and strategic level. We recognise that in order to achieve the aims set out in this Manifesto we will need to work collaboratively and collectively.

Our strategic partners on Scilly span the culture, environment, education and tourism sectors and include the Council of the Isles of Scilly, Islands' Partnership, Isles of Scilly Museum, St. Mary's Library, the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, Five Islands Academy, and the Duchy of Cornwall. We will work alongside the numerous creatives and small creative industries based on Scilly.

We have benefited hugely from expertise and collaboration with a number of mainland organisations and institutions and will continue to build these relationships.

Arts Council England's new strategy, Let's Create, has a clear commitment to developing creative people, cultural communities and a creative and cultural country. We aim for our Manifesto to make a meaningful contribution to these aspirations.

Cornwall's Creative Manifesto has recently been launched and sets out an ambitious vision for mainland Cornwall's creative economy. We share the key aims and will actively pursue opportunities to work jointly to achieve shared objectives.

We will build on and extend our working relationships with Cornwall Council, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP, Cornwall Museums Partnership, Arts Council England, Creative Kernow and its umbrella organisations, Falmouth University, University of Exeter, University of Plymouth. We look forward to developing new relationships with key cultural organisations in Cornwall and the South West.



Our Key Actions

1

We will work with all stakeholders and the community to advance the development and delivery of a new Museum for Scilly.

2

We will continue to identify ways of supporting and promoting creative industries on the islands.

3

We will ensure visitors are encouraged to experience and enjoy local arts and culture.

4

We will work with residents and families to provide access to a diverse range of high-quality cultural activities.

5

We will share our achievements and celebrate success to develop the profile of island culture through existing and new channels.

6

We will continue to engage influencers and partner organisations to access new funding streams which will help progress and sustain these ambitions.



The Manifesto for Culture has been produced to support the work of a partnership made up of the Council of the Isles of Scilly, The Isles of Scilly Museum Association, the Duchy of Cornwall and the Islands' Partnership.

The Manifesto has been endorsed by many local partners including:

49 Degrees
Bell Rock Hotel
Bryher Campsite
Bryher Shop
C J Mumford newsagents
Come2Scilly
Community Archaeology Group
COSMOS St Martin's
Dibble and Grub
Fay Page Jewellery
Garratt Studio
Garrison Lane Makery
Glandore Gallery
Hell Bay Hotel
Hillside Farm
Hugh Street Café
Island Bakery (St Martin's)
Island Cinema
Island Makers
Island Properties
Islands FM
Juliet's Garden
Learn Scilly
Longstone Lodge
Mincarolo
On the Quay
Phoenix and Providence
Phoenix Studios
Richard Hand Haulage
St Mary's Bike Hire
St Mary's Gig Club
St Mary's Theatre Club

Sandpiper
Scilly Look Out
Scilly Now and Then
Scilly Spirit
Scilly Walks
Sibleys Island Homes
Star Castle Hotel
Tamarisk Gallery
Tanglewood Kitchen
The Five Islands Academy
The Foredeck
The Isles of Scilly Steamship Group
The Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust
The Mermaid
The Scillonian Magazine
The Scilly Folk Festival
The Shepherd's Hut
Toots Taxi
Tregarthen's Hotel
Tresco Island
Troytown Farm and Campsite
U3A

For more information please contact
enquiries@islandspartnership.co.uk



Image Credits:

Alex Bagnall
Articulate
Chris Hall Photography
COSMOS, St. Martin's
Creative Scilly festival
Ebby Tremain
Emma Eberlein
Emma Humphries
Fay Page
Ian Dunn
Island Hall, St. Agnes
Liz Askins
Mo Love
Museum of the Isles of Scilly collection
North Farm Gallery
Oriel Hicks
Piers Lewin
Pot Buoys Gallery
Richard Pearce
Rogue Theatre
Rough Island Band
Scilly Folk Festival
Scilly Socks
Stephen Morris
St. Mary's Library
Story Republic
Tamarisk Gallery
Tony Plant
Twisted Bobbins
Vickie Heaney
Wild Hive
Wyl Menmuir