

Creative Industries Mapping in Wiltshire and Swindon

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Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

This report sets out an overview of the Creative Industries in Swindon and Wiltshire. It is commissioned by Wiltshire and Swindon Arts Alliance (W&SAA). Based on a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology, it provides evidence of the profile and scope of the sector and highlights the significance of the sector across a *value range* that includes agendas in economic development, planning and social cohesion. Overall, the Creative Industries is positioned as a major value-adder to these strategic agendas, as well as an emergent economic sector in its own right.

The Creative Industries and wider Creative Economy have the potential to play a significant and influential role in Swindon and Wiltshire. With a diverse geography that spans rural and heritage landscapes, areas of rapid urban change, multiple small towns and villages, and two major centres in Swindon and Salisbury; the area provides for a mix of environments that in turn offer a mix of creative opportunities. Assets include:

- A strong and committed grassroots arts and cultural sector exists across Swindon and Wiltshire, with voluntary engagement embedded across most art forms
- The unique heritage offer – from Stonehenge and Avebury to Salisbury Cathedral, the White Horse(s) and Swindon's railway past – provides a globally-known identity upon which a contemporary creative economy can be built

- An increasingly connected fabric of creative infrastructure, with arts centres, theatres and festivals driving change and delivering new sector development opportunities
- An improving learning and skills offer, with particular excellence in music and dance education and growing commitment to informal and work-based learning
- A growing commitment to re-positioning the major urban centres, with opportunities to place culture and creativity as key drivers of change
- Some evidence of growth-orientated creative businesses settling in the sub-region, with different types of business located in rural and urban areas
- Processes of digitalisation and the increased fragmentation of larger creative companies are increasing opportunities for establishing knowledge-based industries outside of London and the South East, with connectivity achieved virtually rather than physically.

However, the report shows that through strong partnership, connected approaches and a rich fabric of cultural infrastructure, the 'creativity dividend' of Swindon and Wiltshire can perform far more effectively – both as an economic sector (the Creative Industries) and as a value-adder across a broad *value range*. **Critical here is the role of W&SAA – coordinating activity, brokering**

partnership, supporting innovative new projects and programmes, and taking a lead in processes that mainstream culture and creativity as a central policy and delivery tool that extends far beyond the arts and Creative Industries.

W&SAA is well-positioned to connect the role of the Creative Industries and wider cultural sector across the value-range, focusing on overcoming 5 key challenges and responding to 5 key opportunities outlined in this report. In short, these are:

The 5 Major Challenges:

- Swindon and Wiltshire have an underdeveloped Creative Economy, with a lack of depth and breadth in sector activity
- Swindon and Wiltshire have weak networks, under-connected infrastructure and an overall infrastructure deficit
- The Creative Industries sector in Swindon and Wiltshire suffers from low levels of self-confidence and, in some locations, negative stereotypes
- The Creative Industries, arts and cultural sector has lacked strategic leadership and effective partnership
- Swindon and Wiltshire provide a challenging physical and economic geography for the development of high energy, deeply concentrated Creative Industries activity.

The 5 Major Opportunities:

- Swindon and Wiltshire are home to an increasingly active, vocal and high quality Creative Ecology
- Parts of the sub-region provide a unique physical terrain for culture-led development
- The sub-region is already changing in many positive ways
- The sub-region is benefiting from new levels of spirited leadership and partnership
- Swindon and Wiltshire can benefit from a transformation in the conceptualisation and delivery of learning and skills.

Section 1 introduces the strategic rationale for considering the Creative Industries as much more than an economic sector: as a driver of economic growth and competitiveness, as a force for distinctiveness, and as an integral provider of quality, confidence and vision. The Creative Industries is located here as operating across a strategic value range and thus requiring status and support that sees the sector embedded in mainstream economic, social and planning policy – such as in Local Area Agreements, Local Development Frameworks, and a range of planning and visioning processes.

Section 2 explores the strategic context for the Creative Industries – from a local to national level. It locates the sector within existing policy and identifies how it can be supported more effectively across the value range.

Section 3 provides an overview of the headline statistics for the Creative Industries in Swindon and Wiltshire. This is complemented by a further qualitative analysis of the sector profile – based on a questionnaire survey. This shows that while the sector is not large in its own right, it has potential to grow substantially with an effective focus on demand and supply factors, and it is a major value-adder to other sectors and agendas.

Section 4 further explores the key strategic opportunities and challenges for the Creative Industries in Swindon and Wiltshire, identifying how a better coordinated, more innovative approach to policy and intervention can make a real difference. Key here is reconceptualising the role of existing infrastructure while introducing new approaches that bridge gaps in provision.

The report exposes how the dynamics and profile of the Creative Industries (and its impact across the value range) vary by location, with particularly marked variations between rural Wiltshire and Swindon. While emphasising common themes and strategic opportunities across the value range, local differences are recognised. In turn, these are related to the opportunity that W&SAA has to connect localities where there is a cultural and commercial logic to do so. The geography of Swindon and Wiltshire is divided into **four locational categories**:

- **Swindon Borough:** largely urban, relatively diverse, with significant planned/anticipated economic and demographic growth
- **Salisbury:** as a prominent historical and contemporary centre with a strong cultural infrastructure and large hinterland

- **Rural Wiltshire:** including Salisbury Plain and northern Wiltshire – with low population density, a relatively hidden cultural and creative offer, and challenges of mobility and connecting people/assets
- **Wiltshire Towns:** including the many small towns across the County, with an emphasis on West Wiltshire – places with emergent creative economies, strong opportunities to exploit the value-adding role of creativity (such as in place-making and planning), but under-developed strategic approaches.

Though imperfect in their delineation, these categories allow us to explore in a controlled way sector dynamics and to point to the interdependencies between different places – such as across rural areas or rural to urban. They also allow us to identify where it makes sense to develop partnerships and connected approaches and where it does not. In Section 4, sector SWOTs are provided for each of these locational categories.

Section 5 re-addresses the key opportunities and challenges for the Creative Industries in Swindon and Wiltshire. These are linked to a set of strategic considerations for W&SAA if it is to continue to develop its role in Swindon and Wiltshire. Central to this role is leading a process of cultural and creativity planning in Swindon and Wiltshire: positioning the Creative Industries and wider cultural sector as a mainstream tool of social, cultural and economic policy and as a critical ingredient for place-making. This requires that a set of effective policy tools be developed – conceptualised here as a **cultural planning tool kit for Swindon and Wiltshire** that maximizes existing assets, connects them together more effectively, and enables their better use to deliver a wide (value) range of policy agendas.

This report highlights how the Creative Industries need to be positioned as part of a series of interdependencies that contribute to effective creative place-making in Swindon and Wiltshire. These include high quality cultural infrastructure that encourages the co-development of innovation and creativity, a distinctive and open public realm, and an emphasis on cultural tourism. The focus here is on how such cultural planning tools lever the value-adding role of creativity (such as to cultural tourism agendas, through convergence, and via design), and are crucial for a successful and sustainable Creative Industries sector. It identifies how the conditions for Creative Industries development and growth – a 'Creative Place' – can be effectively measured and nurtured across Swindon and Wiltshire.