

DESIRE
LINES

A CALL TO ACTION FROM
EDINBURGH'S CULTURAL COMMUNITY

Simon Patterson, *Landskip*, Calton Hill, Edinburgh, 2005.
Photo: Alan Dimmick © The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2005.



DESIRE LINES : INDEX

- 5 EDINBURGH: A CREATIVE CITY IS A SUCCESSFUL CITY
- 6 MAPPING THE DESIRE LINES
- 9 THE EDINBURGH CULTURAL PROMISE
- 11 DESIRE LINE 1:
ARTICULATE THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF ARTS AND CULTURE IN EDINBURGH
AND MAXIMISE THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO HELP IT THRIVE
- 13 DESIRE LINE 2:
ADOPT AN ENABLING ATTITUDE TO VENUE REGULATION AND CULTURAL
PROVISION THROUGHOUT THE YEAR
- 14 DESIRE LINE 3:
SUPPORT GREATER PARTNERSHIP WORKING ACROSS THE ARTS AND
CULTURE SECTOR ENABLING IT TO FLOURISH YEAR ROUND
- 17 DESIRE LINE 4:
ENSURE THAT EVERYONE HAS ACCESS TO WORLD CLASS ARTS AND
CULTURAL PROVISION
- 19 DESIRE LINE 5:
INVEST IN ARTISTS' DEVELOPMENT, AND SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN THE LOCAL
ARTISTIC COMMUNITY
- 21 IDEAS FOR ACTION
- 25 MAKING IT HAPPEN



'Edinburgh is widely recognised as a cultural city, with massive potential to create new works, to showcase local and visiting culture and to energise the people who live here.' SURVEY RESPONSE

EDINBURGH

A CREATIVE CITY IS A SUCCESSFUL CITY

Arts and culture are a vital part of any healthy city. In Edinburgh they are of especial importance: here, the arts and culture are fundamental to citizens' wellbeing and they are also central to the city's international reputation and its economic success.

As creators, producers, spectators and participants in the city's cultural life, our unifying belief is that everyone, regardless of age, socio-economic status or background, should have opportunities to benefit from and contribute to creative activity. Our collective desire is to put inclusion and participation at the heart of Edinburgh's cultural provision. That ambition is supported across public and private sectors, within arts and healthcare organisations, and amongst artists and citizens themselves. And if we use our resources to deliver creative education and opportunities for all, we can release individual potential at every level, enabling every resident, as well as every visitor, to share in the city's remarkable artistic achievements.

Desire Lines is a dynamic city-wide conversation. A conversation that has produced this call to action: a series of clear aims and actions proposed by the cultural community, to be delivered in partnership with the wide range of organisations and individuals who have Edinburgh's best interests at heart.

'A sense that anything and everything can happen.'

MALCOLM FRASER, ARCHITECT –

Every city, in nurturing culture, talks about the value of its people; but what Edinburgh has, over and above those people, is its violent geology and the genius that has built with it. The success of the Festival is dependent on this, the physicality of the city: firstly its 'just-right' size, small enough that the Festival lights it up but big and intense enough that it burns very brightly; but also the collective nature of its urban spaces, the Courts, Yards, Mercats and Gardens that we gather in. These were the places that nurtured the Enlightenment: the particularly egalitarian nature of the Scottish urban form which jumbled the classes up, often on top of each other, so that they could not help meeting and discoursing, exchanging ideas and challenging each other. This is the city as arena for cultural exchange, and it is this same creative urban intensity that so happily excites the swirls of performers and audiences out in the Festival today.

'Edinburgh wouldn't be the city it is without culture, it is part of the city's heart and soul, its DNA.'

MAPPING THE DESIRE LINES

Desire lines are paths of common consent, made by many people walking on the same course, without the need for external direction.

In May 2014, City of Edinburgh Council invited members of the cultural community to advise them on their review of their cultural policy. The group agreed to help determine a cultural policy for Edinburgh by asking as many individuals and organisations producing and participating in culture in the city as possible the question:

'WHAT MAKES EDINBURGH A CULTURALLY SUCCESSFUL CITY?'

.....
STEERING GROUP

Nick Barley (Edinburgh International Book Festival); Fiona Bradley (The Fruitmarket Gallery); Karl Chapman (Usher Hall, CEC); Ken Hay (Centre for the Moving Image); Duncan Hendry (King's and Festival Theatres); Adam Knight (Edinburgh Playhouse); Jenny Langlands (Dance Base); Faith Liddell (Festivals Edinburgh); Frank Little (Museums & Galleries, CEC); Janine Matheson (Creative Edinburgh); Cerin Richardson (King's and Festival Theatres); Carol Sinclair (Cultural Enterprise Office); Donald Smith (Scottish Storytelling Centre); and Jan-Bert van den Berg (Artlink); Project management: Lisa Kapur (CEC)

.....
EVENT

The question was asked at an event chaired by Joyce McMillan (journalist) at Summerhall in December 2014, with invited provocations from Malcolm Fraser (architect); Caitlin Skinner (The Village Pub theatre); Morvern Cunningham (LeithLate); Olaf Furniss (Born to be Wide); Linda Irvine (NHS Lothian); Neil Cooper (journalist); James Anderson (Baillie Gifford) and an open discussion with the 151 people who attended.

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SURVEY

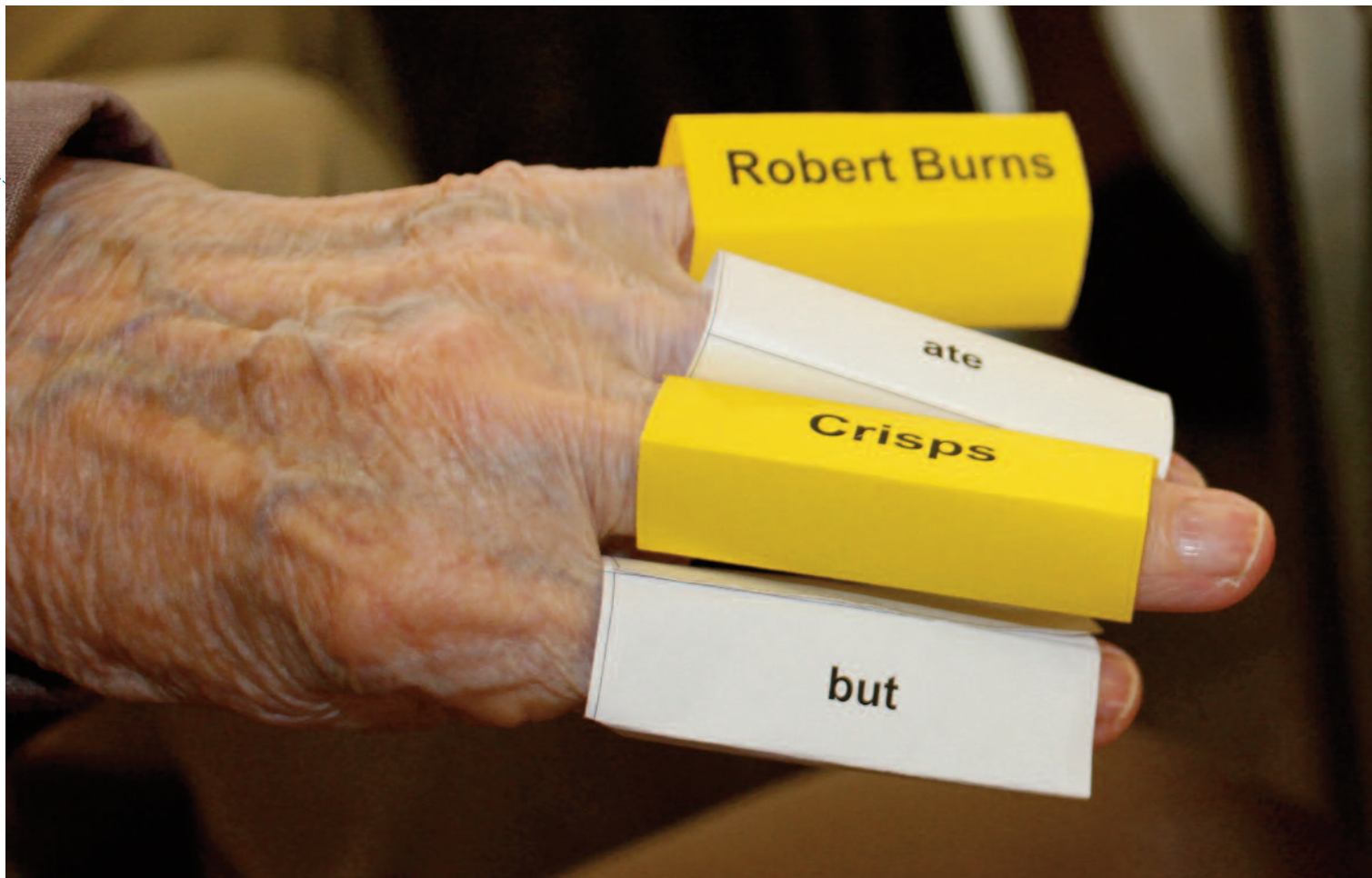
An online survey, completed by 292 people, asked further questions:
'What excites you about Edinburgh's cultural life?'
'What three things might make Edinburgh's cultural life better?'
'What is the biggest challenge to improving the cultural life of Edinburgh?'
(Quotations from the survey responses are included throughout this document.)

.....
WORKSHOPS

The survey and the event gave rise to 'desire lines' which were debated by 167 people at two further events at the Assembly Rooms in February 2015.

.....
AND NOW, THIS DOCUMENT

A call to action which highlights the key issues raised by the 610 members of Edinburgh's creative community who have contributed to the process, and reflects the spirit of co-operation and openness which has characterised it. We hope it signals the beginning of a new approach to cultural policy development in the city, in which all interested parties can participate and be heard.



'Accessibility, affordability, cross-generational activity.'

**CAITLIN SKINNER, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR,
THE VILLAGE PUB THEATRE -**

Affordable and in-kind rehearsal and performance space is so important for artists making fringe work. Sometimes it is the only thing you need to make something happen, but it's a real challenge for Edinburgh based artists. Rent is high in this city and running an arts building is expensive, but there is an additional challenge for us because every pub, church hall, restaurant and hotel is used to making money out of artists during the festival. In August they can charge artists as much as they like to use their back room, but the rest of the year artists don't have any money so these events don't happen. There needs to be a shift in this kind of mentality.

In the last few years, I've noticed an increase in opportunities for emerging theatre makers at some of the city's arts organisations, but as far as I'm aware these organisations are under no obligation to keep doing so. If there is a change in leadership these opportunities could disappear. Many of the organisations in Scotland that do have a remit for developing artists are based in Glasgow, and the commute is expensive. It would be great if organisations and institutions in Edinburgh were encouraged to keep supporting local fringe artists, even outside the August festival period.

'Edinburgh may be a small city but it's crammed with incredibly talented people.'



THE EDINBURGH CULTURAL PROMISE

Through a series of public conversations and consultations, Desire Lines has produced this call to action, which is built around the following aspirations. Together, they add up to what we are calling The Edinburgh Cultural Promise. We are calling for the citizens, agencies and organisations of Edinburgh to agree the following:

We will articulate the positive impact of arts and culture in Edinburgh and maximise the resources available to help it thrive; strengthening the case for cultural investment and developing new methods of support and investment for culture.

We will adopt an enabling attitude to venue regulation and cultural provision throughout the year; making imaginative and effective use of physical assets, advocating for change to regulatory and fiscal approaches, and identifying areas for infrastructure development.

We will support greater partnership working across the arts and culture sector enabling it to flourish year round; identifying areas of mutual benefit and support, widening artistic programming into new places, and incentivising local production and presentation.

We will ensure that everyone has access to world class arts and cultural provision; signposting cultural opportunities, and working across young people's services, health & social care, and voluntary & peer-led initiatives.

We will invest in artists' development, and support and sustain the local artistic community; creating comprehensive and active networks across art forms and neighbourhoods, and providing opportunities for artists to take their work into new contexts.

What do you think Makes Leith Creative?



MORVERN CUNNINGHAM, DIRECTOR, CURATOR AND PRODUCER OF LEITHLATE -

I believe grassroots arts activity is vital to any thriving cultural scene and is an indicator of a city's cultural health; it's a reflection of the confidence of our artistic community, and contributes to key cultural objectives such as community engagement with the arts, opening up underused spaces to present work to audiences in new ways, and providing a crucial platform for emerging artists and practitioners. Well-run and ambitious grassroots activity can also provide inspiration to established organisations, livening up their regular programme and enhancing audience development.

Edinburgh's grassroots practitioners have been operating in spite of a difficult environment of late. I believe that support should come (if not financially) via an informed understanding of the needs of Edinburgh's cultural community and additional frameworks of support, such as reduced rents for properly constituted not-for-profits and arts charities, and removal of red tape when it comes to producing grassroots activity. Perhaps a 'How To' manual could be produced by the council with information on how to get the necessary permissions, insurance and other necessities for pop-up shops and gigs to take place? We need support to inspire and empower the current and next generation of creatives to go out and put on a variety of grassroots events of all sizes, as only this will ensure that the future of Edinburgh's cultural scene is in rude health.

DESIRE LINE 1

ARTICULATE THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF ARTS AND CULTURE IN EDINBURGH AND MAXIMISE THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO HELP IT THRIVE

The key role of arts and culture in the economic, social and cultural development of Edinburgh is significant. Yet the contribution of these industries towards improved health and wellbeing and in driving economic investment and tourism is not always fully recognised. Our vision is that everybody in the city – from citizens to decision makers – has an increased understanding of the value and impact of culture on individual lives, communities and businesses, and that it is made a priority across our agendas.

By demonstrating the long term value of investment in the sector, we also aim to collaborate with the Council and other funders to develop new and innovative approaches to resource allocation, ensuring that amidst tough decisions on public spending, access to creative opportunities is increased rather than diminished. We are determined to ensure that short term funding pressures do not become a barrier to future artistic excellence and public engagement in culture.

The Desire Lines process has identified four strategic objectives that will enable us to support and resource Edinburgh's culture sector, including the need to:

- create a more cohesive sector, drawing on evidence and expertise from a range of different fields and disciplines;
- establish a compelling evidence base that demonstrates the positive impacts of arts and culture on the economy and society;
- raise the profile of arts and culture in Edinburgh and beyond; and
- increase resources and revenue for arts and culture across the city and develop innovative approaches to income generation.

'What is exciting is when great art takes place despite the financially-driven mainstream Edinburgh culture.'



OLAF FURNISS, JOURNALIST AND FOUNDER OF BORN TO BE WIDE -

*'The most exciting thing
is when art and music
created here has
a chance to shine.'*

Desire Lines' remit includes exploring where savings can be made, so we need to take a long hard look at how our money is used and consider who is targeted. I suggest we start by pursuing developers who do not properly soundproof their buildings, or whose actions lead to footpaths being closed, depriving thousands of locals and tourists of an amenity. This is surely more important than one person who thinks a gig sign is more detrimental to an area's appearance than a neighbouring tanning salon.

Above all, it is time for music to be accepted as something which enhances the city for the vast majority of locals and visitors alike. Not only will this develop an artistic climate with the potential to spawn another Mercury Music Prize winner, it will also ensure that the victor has something much better to say about where they came from.

DESIRE LINE 2

ADOPT AN ENABLING ATTITUDE TO VENUE REGULATION AND CULTURAL PROVISION THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

The Desire Lines process has demonstrated that there is a vibrant group of practitioners, promoters and audiences who care passionately about the cultural life of the city and who wish to ensure that infrastructure, regulation and support are in place to ensure that the sector can thrive. However, feedback has also highlighted a number of issues relating to the regulation and licensing of venues, as well as gaps in the types of venues available. In particular, there is considerable anger about recent decisions to close music venues in the city due to single noise complaints, and a view that venue licensing, which is dealt with in a flexible and pragmatic way during the summer festivals, becomes much less straightforward outside of this period.

A variety of solutions have been suggested in response to these issues, with many advocating for a more enabling attitude with regards to licensing temporary venues, and supporting the 'agent of change' principle, whereby venues are given precedence when they pre-date residential developments (and vice versa). If progress is made through these and other actions, our vision is for Edinburgh to have a first class mix of traditional and contemporary venues from small to large scale, encouraging a lively cultural life throughout the year.

The Desire Lines process has identified three strategic objectives in the area of venue provision and regulation, including the need to:

- adopt an enabling culture for licensing of events and venues all year round;
- provide high quality, affordable venues for rehearsal and performance of music, drama, dance and for the visual arts; and
- develop a new venues strategy that clearly articulates the city's priorities for the creation of new spaces and the refurbishment of existing ones.

'A greater appreciation and understanding of the value of cultural practice by city leaders and the business community that leads to real support for practitioners, greater investment in infrastructure and year round activity.'

DESIRE LINE 3

SUPPORT GREATER PARTNERSHIP WORKING ACROSS THE ARTS AND CULTURE SECTOR ENABLING IT TO FLOURISH YEAR ROUND

Contributors to the Desire Lines Survey responded overwhelmingly that the most exciting thing about culture in Edinburgh is the diversity, range and quality of activity on offer throughout the year as well as during the August festivals. Time and time again, world-class cultural programming was marked out for approval, particularly by the festivals but also from year-round organisations including independent theatres, dance centres and concert halls, art galleries showcasing top-quality international as well as home-grown artists, and the thriving grassroots scenes in all art forms.

There was some concern about the dominance of the festivals, but the majority felt that we should continue to harness their success to promote Edinburgh as a desirable destination for culture year round. Nevertheless, it was felt strongly that artists, cultural producers, presenters and venues should not have to brand themselves as part of a festival to receive investment and support. It should be made financially easier for local presenters and producers to participate in the festivals, but also the work of those who actively avoid this period should not be deemed inferior or less valued by the city.

The Desire Lines process has identified three strategic objectives to ensure quality provision year round, including the need to:

- use the 'festival effect' as one of the attractions of Edinburgh for artists, audiences and participants, in venues that programme year-round as well as during the festivals;
- explore artistic programming in new geographical spaces, creating events and participatory initiatives under a festival brand at different times of the year in collaboration with other cultural organisations; and
- ensure that local artists and cultural producers have easy-access routes to present and promote their work all year round, including participating in the festivals if they wish.

*'Invest in art that is rough
and dangerous, not smug,
overblown and complacent.'*



'Genuine, long term strategic investment and generosity around cultural planning.'

'I love that so many people want to visit the city I live in.'



**LINDA IRVINE, STRATEGIC PLANNING MANAGER
FOR MENTAL HEALTH, NHS Lothian -**

My job is to develop strategy to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the population of Lothian and make sure this strategy is implemented. This includes thinking about how to promote positive mental health, how to prevent ill mental health, and how to care for and treat people who have mental health problems.

We began a few years ago to think about the importance of art in terms of promoting mental health and wellbeing. 'A Sense of Belonging' is our Lothian strategy, as many people tell us that having a sense of identity and belonging is really important to their mental health and wellbeing. One really effective and creative way of providing this is through the medium of art.

A number of people who have worked with us have actually visited city venues they had never been to before; places they felt excluded from suddenly opened up. People see that they've got a right to come to these venues and a right to participate. I like to reflect on the wise words of Roy Adzak, the British photographer and sculptor. He said that 'good art is not what it looks like, but what it does to us.'

DESIRE LINE 4

ENSURE THAT EVERYONE HAS ACCESS TO WORLD CLASS ARTS AND CULTURAL PROVISION

There was a common consensus from the Desire Lines contributors that not all Edinburgh's residents and visitors are able to easily access the diverse cultural opportunities that the city offers. This included a strong feeling that everyone has a right to engage with Edinburgh's cultural life but that issues such as age, disability, wealth, and access to information often stand in the way. In particular, there was a perception that the Festivals are not accessible to a broad range of citizens and do not cater enough for local audiences.

We still need to develop an evidence base that gives us a coherent picture of who is engaging with arts and culture in the city and the nature of that engagement. Nevertheless, it has been noted that activity tends to be concentrated in the city centre, which may lead to transport barriers. We should work harder to spread cultural opportunities around the city, possibly utilising non-arts spaces, such as empty shops. Careful consideration also needs to be given to the type of opportunities available, including suitability for certain audiences and participants such as family friendly activities, and taking into account those travelling on public transport.

The Desire Lines process has identified four strategic objectives concerning access to culture, including the need to:

- use communication strategically to sign post offers and promote the visibility of culture in this cultural city;
- offer affordable attendance and participation activity to all;
- develop a joined up way of managing disabled access across the city; and
- work in educational settings to guarantee engagement with young people.

Working closely in partnership with artists, cultural venues, organisations and networks can make Edinburgh accessible to everyone.



NEIL COOPER, JOURNALIST & CRITIC -

Great things come out of Edinburgh, despite what seems like the best efforts to restrict, police or just prevent artistic activity beyond its great institutions. Art doesn't work from top-down thinking. It comes from the backrooms of pubs and creative spaces with cheap rents where artists can make a scene. We don't need to look to Austin, Manchester or Glasgow for advice; we have all the expertise we need in this city, right now. This isn't about money, it's about developing a will to do great things, enabling artists, and protecting cultural assets, so they can't be turned into one more branch of Sainsbury's Local. Artists do this stuff because they want to and they need to, and that's exactly how it should be. As the Clash's Joe Strummer said long after he played Edinburgh Playhouse, the future is unwritten. It's up to everyone to make sure that future's written the way we want it to be.

'The festivals bring Scottish work onto an international stage, allowing Edinburgh's year-round activities a world-class showcase.'

DESIRE LINE 5

INVEST IN ARTISTS' DEVELOPMENT, AND SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN THE LOCAL ARTISTIC COMMUNITY

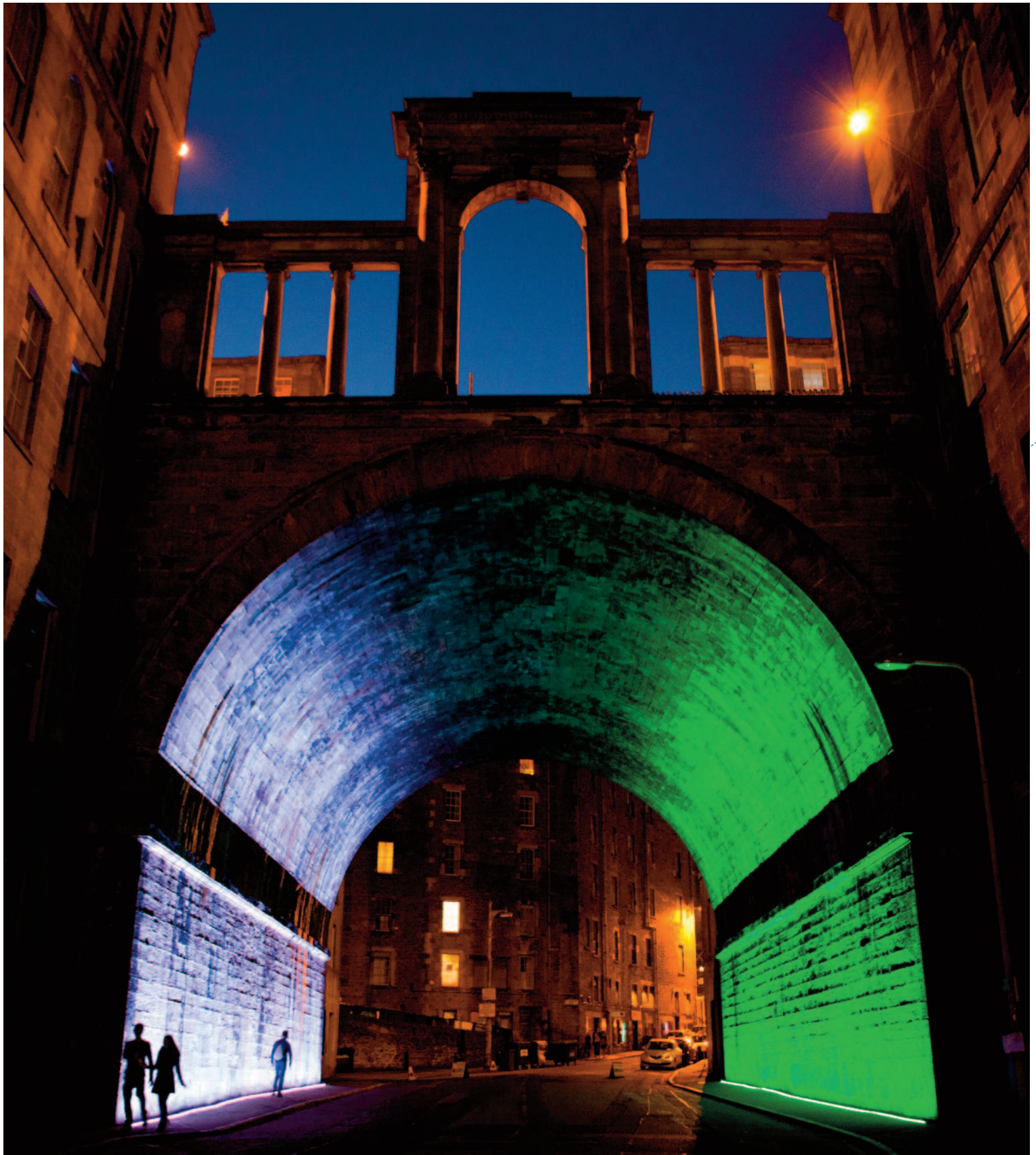
The Desire Lines process has allowed us to explore together the real and perceived challenges currently faced by the arts and culture sector, and to consider the necessary steps to protect and nourish Edinburgh's artistic community. There is undoubtedly an appetite from both grassroots and established professionals to work with the city to create a healthier creative ecosystem. However, there is also a strong sense that key frameworks need to be simplified or reimagined to empower artists to become more self-reliant and sustaining.

The development of a 'cultural quarter or zone' has been heavily criticized as artificial and destructive to organic clustering. On the other hand, the creation of a hub for intergenerational and cross-discipline mixing, enabling artists to meet, share and exchange ideas, is a popular suggestion. Many feel that the current support landscape for artists can be confusing, and do not understand the differences between organisations or where to go to find specific support.

Similarly, whilst there is an understanding from the artistic community that venues/spaces are under ever-increasing pressure to generate income, contributors feel that more could be done to facilitate affordable and accessible spaces for artists to use, including 'cheap and dirty' spaces for pop-ups, temporary activity, and events. Many expressed that approaching the council to use space in the past has been complex and that departments are not always as flexible as they could be.

As a result of the Desire Lines conversations we have identified three strategic objectives that would help to support an artistic community in Edinburgh that can truly flourish. We should:

- use shared resources and intelligence to enable the artistic community to advance at all stages of their careers;
- create more affordable studio and rehearsal space for artists to develop new work, experiment and collaborate; and
- provide artists and companies with more creation, performance and presentation opportunities, both at home and abroad.



IDEAS FOR ACTION

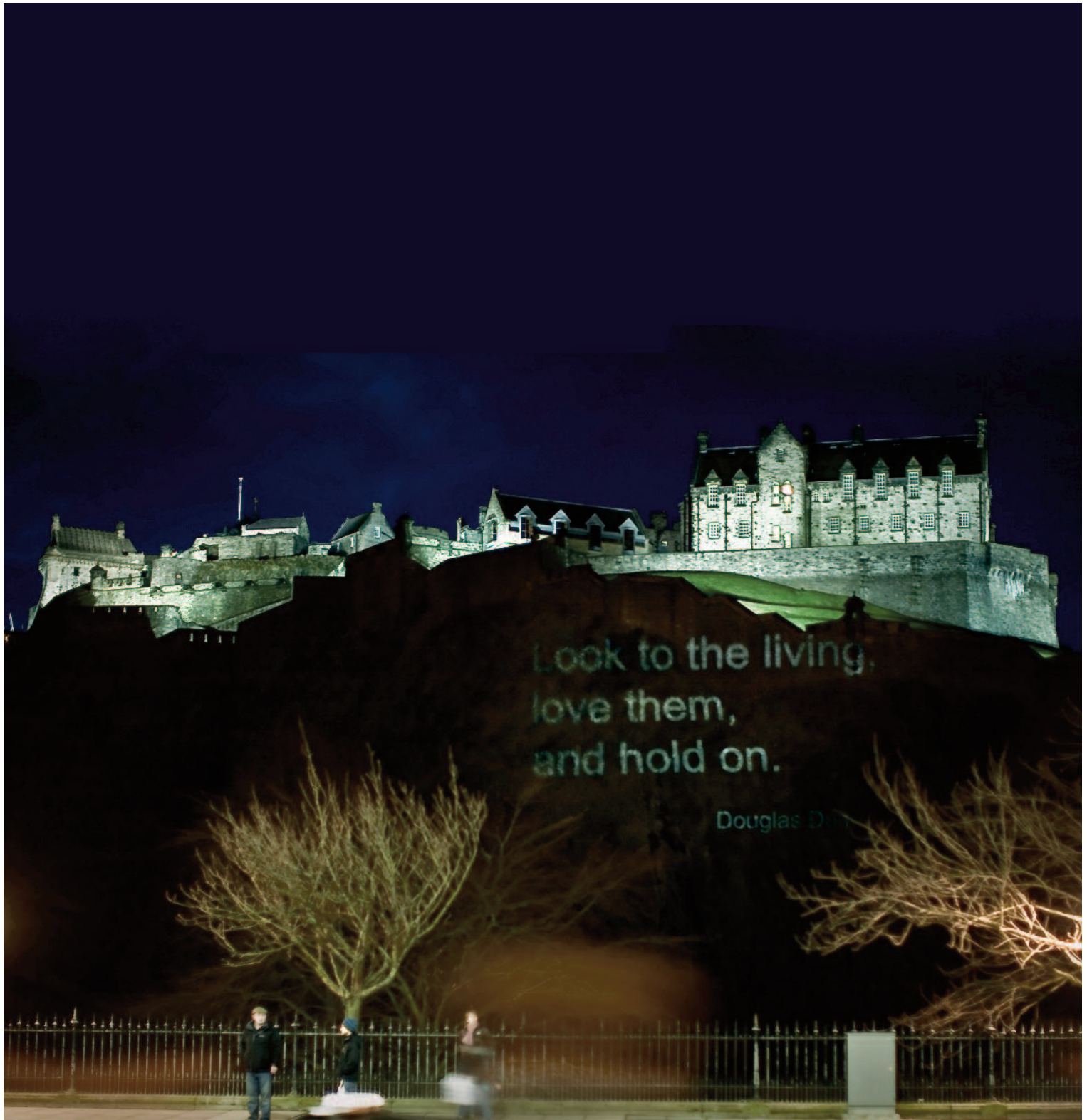
The following are some of the ideas for action which emerged during the Assembly Rooms discussions as specific things that could be done to achieve one or more of the strategic objectives outlined in the five Desire Lines above.

- Encourage the City of Edinburgh Council to demonstrate their commitment to culture within the city by appointing a Director of Culture who would be a member of their senior management team.
- Appoint a cultural champion to be a high profile advocate for culture within the City, to promote the benefits of the sector, and lead a task force comprising of top professionals from key sectors such as health, education, environment, business and technology.
- Create a directory of angel investors and facilitate an annual ‘Dragon’s Den’ style event for arts and cultural organisations to pitch for new investment.
- Reframe the cultural narrative and develop a set of key messages which articulate the true public value of arts and culture, and deliver these messages in a city-wide public campaign.
- Lobby for a ‘tourism dividend’ whereby a proportion of income generated is redistributed into arts and cultural organisations.
- Work in partnership with funding bodies such as the City of Edinburgh Council, Creative Scotland, and the National Lottery to streamline and simplify evaluation processes and create a single evaluation framework.
- Compile a register of current venues with capacities and facilities that can be made available to performers and promoters, and hold a creative open doors day for venues to highlight what’s available.
- Identify gaps in venue provision and decide how to fill those gaps by refurbishing existing venues or building new ones. Investigate empty Council buildings that might be put to community use.
- Reduce licensing costs by ensuring they are proportionate to the size of the venue.
- Incentivise the use of empty commercial spaces by reducing business rates for properties which are put to cultural use and insist that developers incorporate cultural facilities into their plans. Also explore the use of University estate departments and commercial properties.
- Ensure that culture has a voice within the Edinburgh Partnership.

- Introduce statutory safeguards for arts venues or a planning policy whereby processes are ‘put on pause’ to consider the implications of losing a cultural space.
- Establish a ‘one stop shop’ to assist promoters and practitioners, including an online site where venues can list empty rooms or workshop spaces, and a ‘pop-up’ toolkit about the logistics of setting up a pop-up space.
- Create a physical or online hub for artistic resources as well as spaces for creative people to come together and promote existing peer support events and networks.
- Compile a comprehensive support map which informs artists where to go for different types of professional support. Share this across City of Edinburgh Council and arts organisation websites.
- Twin well-funded arts organisations with smaller, less well-funded organisations for a year-long partnership, sharing programming expertise, marketing platforms, communications channels, and audience.
- Create discounted access for year-round and local cultural producers to festival platforms, such as taking part in the Fringe, the Art Festival, or having a stall at makers markets etc.
- Extend the ‘Made in Scotland’ programme to include a ‘Made in Edinburgh’ focus, with a flexible timescale to enable participation from as many art forms as possible.
- Put on year-round ‘culture nights’ once a month, where cross art-form partnerships could be used to encourage communication and ticket sales across genres.
- Create a community of interest across the city to promote disability access to cultural venues/activity and develop existing resources and expertise in this area.
- Engage every primary-aged child each year with a professional artist, company or creative individual.
- Develop a pool of Cultural Coordinators to help embed cultural activities into community planning, linking into newly developed neighbourhood structures.
- Identify new ways of distributing cultural information locally, create cultural city maps, and make arts activity visible through better signage.
- Negotiate with Transport Edinburgh to deliver a number of benefits such as training their personnel as cultural ambassadors, offering special deals for schools and local communities, and promoting the city’s cultural offer across the transport network.
- Instigate an audience development strategy which includes a much broader range of ticketing initiatives for hard to reach audiences, and targets specific groups such as teachers to increase attendance from children and young people.



Red Baraat, Edinburgh Mela 2012.
Photo: Neil Thomas, courtesy of Edinburgh Mela.



*A surety that if it's worth experiencing
then it will come to Edinburgh.'*

MAKING IT HAPPEN

There is a will to realise the ambitions set out in this document, but what is the way? Delivering success requires champions in every area of city life. Conversation and collaboration across conventional boundaries are essential, for whole city ambition requires whole city participation. The networks must be networked, and connected with communities and individuals who can make things happen. At the same time the process needs the commitment and participation of our City Council, national government and its agencies, the business community, education, health, cultural organisations and the voluntary sector.

The members of Edinburgh's cultural community who have facilitated the process that has resulted in this document are committed to the Edinburgh Cultural Promise and the call for collective action that it embodies.

JAMES ANDERSON, JOINT MANAGER, BAILLIE GIFFORD -

From a narrow business viewpoint it is the culture of the city that gives my work at Baillie Gifford a serious chance of lasting success. In order to generate special results and returns for our clients it is essential that we think differently from others. It is the ideas – radical perspectives and visions emerging from the culture of the place we work and live in – that give us our best chance to compete with the best in the world.

We need the help of brilliant people. We need visions of the world beyond our own. The amazing intellectual and imaginative history of Edinburgh provides the model. But the artists, actors, musicians, photographers, and writers who populate Edinburgh, and the many more who join us in August, are the inspiration. Building great businesses and a great civic culture ought to be mutually supportive. Certainly Edinburgh offers the opportunities for both to flourish in a way that is all too rare in Britain. Culture – very broadly defined – is central to a city's worth. It makes a vital contribution to full lives and happiness. It's the point of generating wealth in the first place. We forget this too often and at our peril.

We ought to be braver. We ought to be more international in our mentality. And there needs to be an end to the contrast between one supercharged month and eleven months when culture faces a comparative struggle to be taken seriously.

*In truth, Edinburgh is already a great city.
It could become an extraordinary one.*



THANKS

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'Edinburgh is one of the great cities of the world with a physical beauty and shape that lends itself to artistic self belief.'



A CREATIVE CITY IS
A SUCCESSFUL CITY