



CULTURE  
NORTHEAST

The Revised Regional  
**Cultural Strategy**  
For The North East  
of England





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## FOREWORD from Culture North East Chair

In reviewing the Regional Cultural Strategy for the North East of England we have been looking again at how culture and the cultural sector can make a real difference to the life of the region. In doing so we have identified key principles that we believe are critical to the future success and sustainable development of the North East. We are calling our commitment to seeking collective action on these principles, 'A Cultural Manifesto for the North East of England'.

# people

The first Regional Cultural Strategy (RCS) outlined an ambition for the North East as a region that is recognised for, and celebrates, its unique character and cultural assets. The overall vision of the RCS went even further, 'for the North East to be transformed into an innovative, invigorating and exciting region that is clearly recognised throughout Europe'.

Admittedly ambitious, this vision was an affirmation of the belief in the real potential that lies at the heart of our region. In seeking to provide a framework for these ambitions, encourage cohesion and provide strategic leadership, the belief was that the core values of the region would help drive us towards achieving our goal.

I am pleased to say that we have come far. More than ever before the North East is seen as region whose distinctive cultural offer can compete with others in the UK and beyond. Working in partnership, the cultural sector has succeeded in significantly raising both its own profile and the 'case for culture' at regional and national levels. There is still some way to go, but we have begun a process of change that is irreversible, invigorating and irrefutably positive.

# place

More importantly, the idea that perhaps our most valuable cultural asset is the people of the region coupled with their sense of place, has increasingly centralised the needs of the citizen in policy development work. The distinctive character of people and place, as championed in the RCS, is the principal defining factor of our region today. The raised profile, improved socio-economic conditions, and greater confidence evident in many parts of the North East have, in some part at least, stemmed from this particular advantage.

In reviewing the RCS, we took the view that the six strategic aims of the strategy remain important reference points for the sector. They were the result of an extensive consultation process and continue to

inform the work of our partners and other stakeholders. Culture is embedded in regional policy making like never before. Culture is embedded in regional consciousness like never before.

The RCS was never intended to act only as a practical working document. The opportunity of this review was to focus our collective efforts on better understanding and utilising the people, places and values that make the North East special. Our vision for the region remains as ambitious as ever, and we share this vision with our strategic partners. This revised RCS, together with a new cultural manifesto, will provide renewed focus and inspiration for the work of the cultural sector, and others, in the region.

It is our belief that our cultural identity, the core values at the heart of the North East, will enable the region to fulfil even more of its potential. CNE will continue to work to develop, sustain and celebrate the culture and values of the North East of England.

**Olivia Grant OBE DL**

**Chair**

**Culture North East**

## Culture North East and our work

Culture North East exists as one of eight regional cultural consortiums (RCCs) charged by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to provide a framework of coherence and leadership across the cultural sectors in the regions.

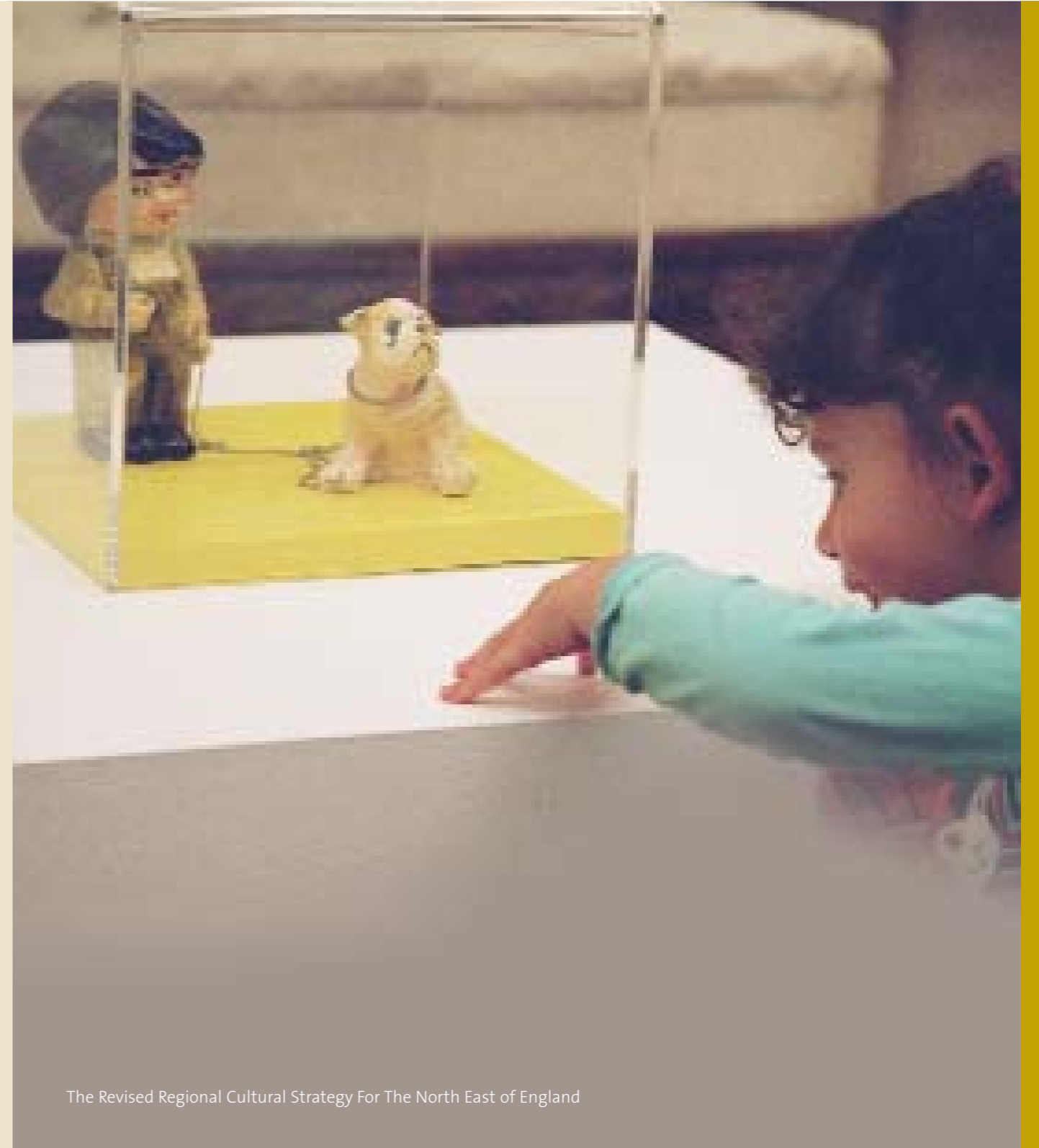
The basis of an agreement between DCMS and each of the RCCs rests in clearly defined responsibilities with an aim of ensuring that culture and creativity have a strong voice in the regions and that they play a full and coherent part in contributing to increasing prosperity and enjoyment of life. These responsibilities are:

- To maintain a primary focus on, and develop and strengthen the capacity for strategic regional cultural planning in the regions;
- To be the primary focus for developing regional cultural data and intelligence;
- To be the primary focus for the encouragement of a strategic approach to embedding culture in local authority planning;
- To be a leading advocate for the role of culture in regional economic and social regeneration, promoting the success and sustainability of initiatives to increase prosperity and quality of life;
- To promote regional distinctiveness – the image, identity and diversity of the regions and its role in broader regional development

It is our belief that only by working closely with a wide range of partners and stakeholders, within a framework of complementary strategies and policies, can we fulfill these responsibilities and achieve real improvements in the quality of life of the people of the North East

# distinctiveness

“You never know when your gonna need culture”  
Conrad Atkinson



## Cultural Aspirations and Achievements - the first Regional Cultural Strategy

The framework of strategic aims and proposals that accompanied the first Regional Cultural Strategy for the North East of England responded to the issues, challenges and aspirations of the time and has been adopted throughout the cultural sector.

These remain important and useful reference points for achieving the long-term vision for the North East. They will continue to inform the work of CNE and its partners, alongside the key principles of our cultural manifesto. These strategic aims, together with a broad commentary on progress in the region are as follows:

1. To sustain, develop and celebrate the cultural distinctiveness of the North East. The distinctive cultural character of the North East of England has long been recognised. However, it has not always been seen as something to be valued, harnessed and enhanced for the wider benefit of the region and its people.

In 2004 the cultural distinctiveness of our region is seen as being integral to regional policy development across a wide range of Government agendas. A wider definition of what makes us distinctive is beginning to be celebrated and promoted in its own right and as a tool for regeneration and social inclusion. Research into regional identity and the role of culture in contributing to a sense of place is well established within and outside of the region.

2. To prioritise investment in the protection, development and promotion of the region's natural and cultural assets.

As the potential and value of our cultural assets has increasingly been recognised and realised, so has the case for investment in culture. There remains however a need to continue to strongly advocate for the prioritisation of investment in culture at a whole range of levels.

CNE and the regional cultural agencies, together with key strategic partners continue to work to ensure that cultural assets are protected, developed and promoted, and that culture and creativity is recognised as a driver and catalyst for change across all policy areas throughout the region.

3. To fully realise the potential of cultural and creative activity in contributing to the raising of educational standards, and sustaining world class education facilities and developing a culture of life long learning.

Through a range of programmes at local, regional and national level this ambition has moved on. Increasingly DCMS and DfES are working together to put creativity, imagination and innovative thinking at the heart of a child's experience at school and to encourage and engage learners of all ages.

4. To improve opportunities for individuals and communities across the region to fully experience and participate in cultural activity.

The regional cultural agencies have been especially pro-active in developing work programmes that seek to engage all sections of society. Young people, people that live in economically disadvantaged communities, and black minority ethnic community groups have been amongst those for whom the sector has tailored initiatives to try and ensure all have equal access to participate in cultural activity.

5. To stimulate vigorous and sustainable economic growth of the region's tourism, cultural and creative industries.

The region's tourism, cultural and creative industries have rightly been identified by One NorthEast as key economic drivers for the region. Mapping and analysis in these areas has advanced thinking about their potential to contribute to economic development and business plan models have demonstrated the potential of focused support and investment.

Within a regional, national and international context, the case for investment in creative industries has been successfully made. Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship are

seen as driving modern economies. Culture, regional distinctiveness, image and identity are now, more than ever, seen as tools for attracting business firms, capital investors, residents, tourists and other consumers.

6. To develop effective qualitative and quantitative information on the cultural sector to facilitate planning, advocacy, leadership and evaluation.

The past few years have seen the emergence of a rich variety of cultural research, but of a range that lacks any concerted focus as part of a cross-sectoral agenda. Significant studies commissioned by the sector agencies, have heightened the advocacy and planning capacity of the sector and continue to provide useful impact data.

There remains a need however to develop a coherent, comprehensive and nationally significant cross-sectoral research agenda that is not bound by a reliance on quantitative impact and short-term results. Culture is multi-faceted and any proposals for establishing a grounded objective evidence base need to reflect this fact.

There remains a real need to continue to focus our collective efforts to ensure that we achieve against these aspirations. CNE intends to contribute by influencing and guiding the sector in the context of an enhanced understanding of the cultural values and identity of the region. This new approach is intended to have widespread influence on regional policy making and the delivery of culture.

## Culture, Identity and Distinctiveness - a new approach

The opportunity of the review process was to build on progress against the six strategic aims of the RCS to further examine and develop the relationships between the region, its people and its culture. The aim is to present a strategy that acts to bind the region through its collective cultural experience and identity. We will point to the importance of the essential character of the region, that which makes us distinctive and sets us apart in a world where all regions are striving for some unique competitive advantage.

# authenticity

We believe that the real distinction of our region, that which makes the North East truly exceptional, lies in a set of core values and a latent regional identity that joins the people to the land and provides an understated self-confidence that is often overlooked in a world of place-marketing and fighting brands. People have always been at the heart of the North East's story, its 'becoming' and its 'being'.

The history of the North East is well known. The story of our Roman heritage, our Christian Roots, our frontier role, our industrial power, our innovation, and our economic decline is often told. It forms the basis of a collective history, a regional story,

that feeds the modern tourism industry and attracts thousands to our region.

What is less often described are the fundamentally defining characteristics that enabled the people of the region to cope with successive periods of turbulence and change. That is, despite the ups and downs, the essential North East – same land, same people – goes on. Notions of resilience, community, togetherness, survival, coping, strength, solidarity, and hard work provided the basis for an identity forged out of unique, often perilous, circumstance. Whilst the lifestyle and industrial landscape have changed, the values of this period have not yet disappeared.





# community

These values, and the images they produce, are those that many people in the region see in themselves or possess. They indicate a depth and a richness of culture that, coupled with an innate adaptability, will serve the North East well. In representing what it really means to belong in the North East we might seek to re-affirm the connection between people and place.

This feeling of 'connection' is all-embracing. The North East of the 21st Century is more complex, more diverse than ever, and what is needed is a realistic narrative that mixes the old and the new.

Yet the region has a history of absorbing other cultures that is also often overlooked. Survival has by and large negated a rejection of difference and relied instead on generosity and acceptance. Indeed, perhaps our greatest cultural asset, the Lindisfarne Gospels, provides a model of tolerance, eclecticism, plurality and harmony that

It is our role to ensure that this approach is integral to the thinking of those working within both the cultural sector and the wider regional decision-making arena. We will do this by adopting a higher level strategic approach to inform, influence, lead and advocate on behalf of the culture of the North East. We will do this in partnership with others, clear in our duties to the region, its people, and our culture.

retains its relevance to this day. In aspiring to look outward, embrace change and accept others, including visitors to the region, we will be in a position to demonstrate our distinctiveness.

There is real opportunity in this approach. A renewed sense of place and 'regional values' will breed a confidence in, and an understanding of that which is distinctive about the North East, that will resonate within and far beyond the region. The durability of our core values and our acceptance of others, combined with our natural and cultural assets built up over centuries, will provide a hugely valuable and powerful resource.

This set of values, binding the region, is what should inform and provide a common reference point for those seeking to ground policy in the experience of the citizens and communities of the North East.

## Cultural Coherence and Co-operation - working in partnership

We need to continue to recognise that the RCS takes its place within a much wider policy framework of national, regional and sub-regional strategies, in the context of an ever changing socio-political and cultural climate. By adopting a high level strategic approach based on the values of our region we intend to provide a consistent and meaningful reference point for anyone working to improve the lives of the people of the North East.

There are many agencies and organisations that contribute immeasurably to the development, support and promotion of the culture and cultural assets that make the North East so special. These partners place the people of the region at the heart of what they do. There are also numerous partnerships and consortiums whose aim, through specialist intervention and guidance, is to preserve and promote the quality and distinctiveness of life for the people of the North East.

CNE has developed Memoranda of Understanding with our key strategic partners, One NorthEast, the North East Assembly and the Association of North East Councils. These establish clear working

relationships that commit our organisations to ensuring that the distinctive nature of our culture is recognised and promoted as both a catalyst for change and coherence across all policy areas throughout the region.

If the vision for the North East is to be realised, then the region will require strong integrated cultural, economic and social policy. By operating in a spirit of partnership and co-operation, within a framework of complementary strategies and policies, we will be in a better position to affect real improvements in the quality of life of the people of the North East.

It is our belief that an understanding of the values that lie at the heart of the region, that 'sense of place' that permeates the region and makes us distinct from other English regions, is a necessary part of regional policy development. We will adopt the principle that culture should be placed at the heart of all policy-making, because this entails an understanding of local cultural resources and of regions as cultural entities, as places where people meet, talk, share ideas and desires and where identities are formed.

# partnership

By adding value through a focused and inspirational strategic approach CNE and its partners will make a real difference.



## Culture and Quality of Life

# core values

The Integrated Regional Framework for the North East presents a vision for the region: The North East will be a region where present and future generations have a high quality of life. It will be a vibrant, self reliant, ambitious and outward looking region featuring a dynamic economy, and a distinctive culture. Everyone will have the opportunity to realise their full potential.

Our approach to achieving this vision is, as described above, to advocate for cultural values and cultural identity to be at the heart of regional policy development. It is also to instil a much clearer sense of the broad cultural changes that will enable us to fulfil our potential as a region. The North East described below presents the best opportunity for broader progress:

A region known for its unique character and sense of place.  
A region bound by a collective

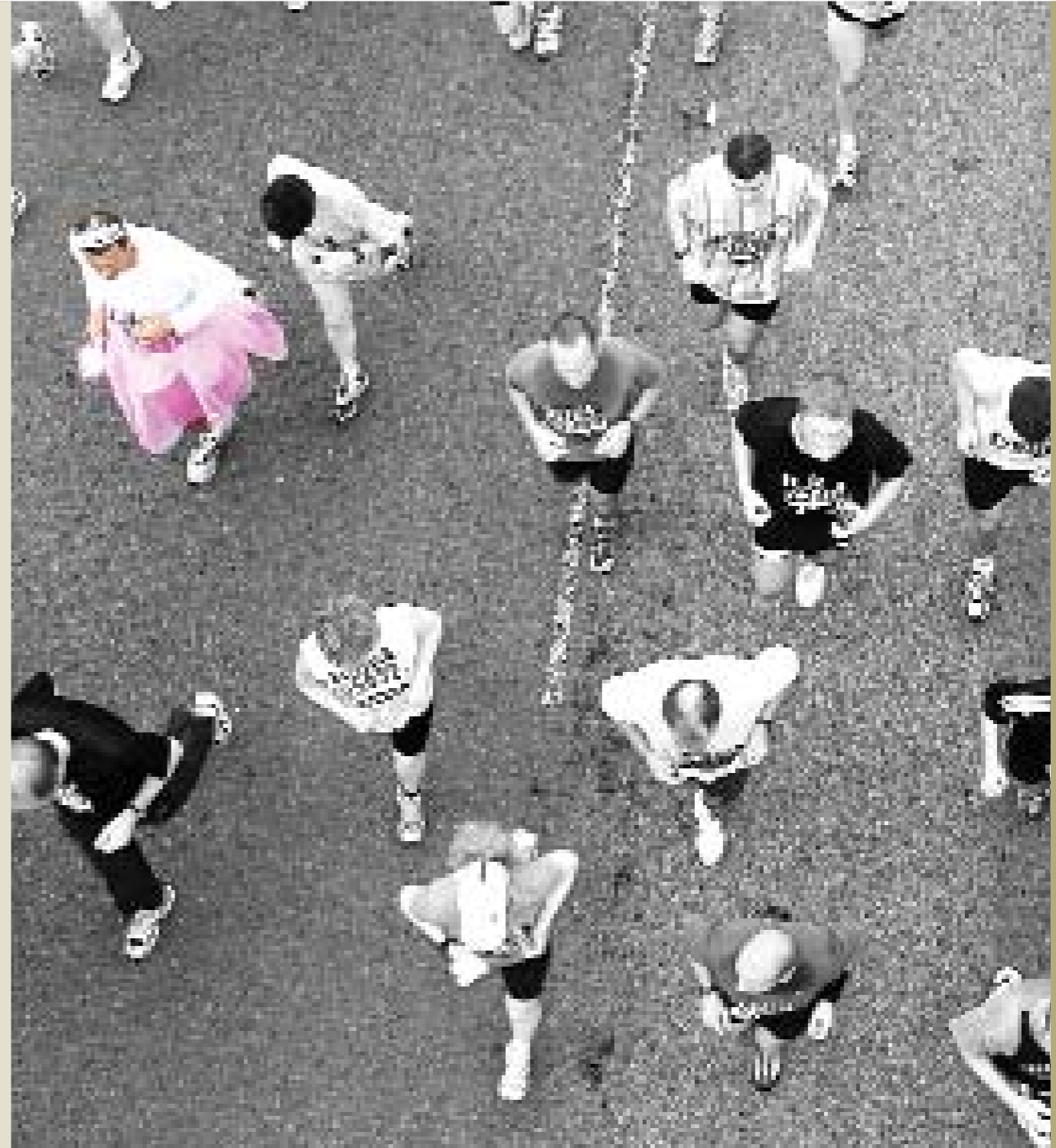
identity that encompasses the past and the present.  
A confident region that looks outward, embraces change and accepts others. A region that puts people first, understands their core values and the importance of community.  
A region of **people, places and values.**

In considering how best the cultural sector can work together to achieve this vision for the region, our partners and stakeholders have helped us identify areas where they feel cultural change is particularly appropriate to effecting wider change in the region. These simple, guiding, higher order principles make up a Cultural Manifesto for the North East of England

# transformation

“Authenticity becomes the critical concept at the heart of culture”

*Authenticity*, David Boyle, 2003



## A cultural manifesto for the North East of England

The people of the North East are proud of a distinctive culture. They have a right to, and expect, the highest standards of cultural provision. The cultural sector is dedicated to providing this, using culture to bring the best out of the region and bringing the best in the world to the North East.

This manifesto is presented by Culture North East, the organisation charged by government, 'to promote, encourage, coordinate and develop cultural and creative interests in the North East of England with a view to enhancing the prosperity and enjoyment of life in the region'. The manifesto complements the six strategic aims of the RCS and our intention is that it focuses and inspires the work of the cultural sector in order to produce a cultural transformation in the region.

The key principles of this Cultural Manifesto For The North East will unite and further mobilise the cultural sector and its partners in using the power of culture to create a sea-change in attitudes and perceptions and to support and stimulate real and long lasting change in the North East of England. The cultural sector will work together:

### distinctive

to explore and promote regional distinctiveness, helping us to know ourselves as a region, our diversity, our history and our strengths;

### open

to promote access and encourage openness to new ideas and experiences. To better understand, and improve opportunities for cultural participation

## outward looking

to encourage the region to be outward looking, and to strengthen its links with, and place in, the wider world;

## inspired

to have regional decision makers inspired by, and better understand the role of, culture. To develop the leadership capacity of the cultural sector and the region.

CNE will work to instil these key principles at the heart of its own agenda, that of the cultural sector, and the wider region. Our own actions, and those of our partners, will be informed by an understanding that in committing to these principles we will begin to address some of the fundamental challenges and opportunities facing the North East.

We recognise that policies and strategies alone will not produce the changes required, it is our belief that a critical mass of activity, together with changes in attitudes and

perceptions, focused and inspired by these complementary key principles, presents a powerful force for good in the region. CNE will begin by immediately looking to significantly raise the level of debate on each of these issues, to begin to arrive at actions that work in the best interests of the people of the North East.

If you would like to talk to us about any aspect of this revised Regional Cultural Strategy for the North East of England or how you or your organisation can play a part please do not hesitate to contact us.

Where we are who knows  
of kings who sup  
while day fails? Who,  
swinging his axe  
to fell kings, guesses  
where we go?

*Briggflatts*, Basil Bunting, 1965



**CULTURE  
NORTHEAST**

This document was published by  
Culture North East (CNE) in February 2005.

CNE is the regional cultural consortium for the North  
East of England.

CNE is supported and core funded by the Department  
for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS).

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