

CULTURAL ACTION ZONE



Southside
DISTRICT



WE ARE THE CULTURAL HEART OF BIRMINGHAM

Cultural Action Zone

At Southside BID, we have been busy re-imagining the district as a key Cultural Action Zone. We are re-thinking what a transport plan looks like*, collaborating with air quality researchers, residents and businesses to create a bold new vision that prioritises the needs of disabled people and improves the environment for better health and wellbeing of all who live, work and visit Southside.

We are also setting out an ambitious plan for digital commissions, festivals and events* that will bring to life Southside's diverse and vibrant cultural scene post-Covid.

Becoming a Cultural Action Zone will help to sharpen our focus and ignite our determination to exploit the massive opportunities presented by the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and our new, public performance square. These plans will situate Southside as a leader and destination of world-class cultural events and visitor experiences, with inclusion and engagement at our heart.

*This is part of an overall strategy to benefit the local area, its businesses, residents & visitors so supporting Access and Festival plans are also available on our website. www.southsidedistrict.co.uk

The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) are looking to use culture as a driver to invigorate the economic recovery of cities, towns and local centres. Cultural Action Zones are aimed at creating thriving and dynamic places for people to live, work and visit. As the independent cultural heart of the city, Southside is well placed to deliver a dynamic plan over the next 5 years that will help reimagine the area's offer.



CULTURAL ACTION FRAMEWORK

To align between cultural development and economic development we are using the four characteristics of the 'Cultural Action Framework':

- **Building on regional distinctiveness**
- **Extending or creating new 'class-leading' assets**
- **Taking an innovative approach to cultural investment**
- **Contributing to a cluster/ ecosystem-based model**

Over the following pages we are using these characteristics to share our objectives of the Cultural Action Zone and our approach to each.

The term 'cultural action zone' describes a concerted, multi-agency, multi-action approach to cultural development. For Southside this approach will include; ideas for further investment in cultural assets; new ideas on how to attract creative businesses and enterprises; looking at the changing face and skyline of the area and what this means; areas that require improvement such as wayfinding and branding; support for existing creative enterprises.

The cultural sector in Southside District plays a major role in attracting visitors to the area and helps to boost the hospitality economy.

There is already an increasing desire of citizens to live and work in the area (a high % from the Far East) therefore our cultural action zone needs to exist so that it can involve projects of all sizes, from major redevelopments like the Smithfield Development to smaller initiatives that speak to and represent the local people and residents that make up the diverse community.

To make this into a system change proposition, Southside can offer many component actions, interesting projects, with multiple outcomes. We are keen and support the local culture eco-system once a city-wide strategy has been developed. We believe that once this strategy is in place connectivity will be better placed.

Our focus will be to continue to offer something complementary to the current venues across the city; something alternative to the statutory funded and established bigger institutions. A place where new talent can continue to thrive within a distinctive local culture.

How do we sustain the momentum of building a vibrant cultural scene in Southside against the tide of rapid residential development, and a shift in cultural funding?

**Multi-agency,
multi-activity
model of cultural
development to
proliferate and
thrive**

Regular meetings with creative organisations and stakeholders will give us a closer ear to the issues, needs, wants and desires of the cultural sector in Southside as well as helping us to connect up, share and deliver an enhanced festival plan. We will bring people together to help advocate for more creativity across the district with joined-up thinking going forward.

WHY: We feel it is important that voices are heard and shared so that a breadth of ideas, plans and imagining can take place across the BID.

HOW: We will invite the key cultural venues / businesses / organisations based in the area to regular (4-6 weekly) meet-ups that will begin to shape ideas. We will connect in with non-creative businesses who might benefit from cultural events, such as hospitality (restaurants, bars and hotels who would benefit financially from additional visitors). Cross-sector sharing will hopefully impact the area and businesses positively in a more joined-up approach.

WHEN: Starting Autumn 2023 onwards

FACILITATED BY: Southside Culture and Festival Coordinator

COST: £5,000 p.a.

OUTCOME: Contributes to a cluster/ecosystem-based model / Builds on regional distinctiveness



Building cultural development capacity through a sector-led, collaborative approach



Birmingham Open Media is one of Southside's cultural and creative assets that is under threat of having to move out of the district due to landlord uncertainty and development.



While the new Smithfield Development plans offer only a small space to host cultural events for less than 5000 visitors, not fit for Birmingham Pride.



As well as the flats, this scheme includes a new office base for Birmingham LGBT – the city's charity advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities.

WHY: We need to encourage delivery at both project and place-making levels through a range of leadership and administration functions. Southside has become an increasingly popular urban living destination and as a result we are seeing a number of new high-rise buildings and developments taking shape. Some of our outdoor spaces, that have been frequently used for popular festivals including Pride, are now being sold for development. As a result we are losing space to buildings. While developments are welcome and needed it is having an adverse effect on our outdoor festivals and events.

HOW: We will research other cities that have managed to preserve their cultural assets alongside development. We want to work in partnership with planners and developers so that cultural assets are consolidated as important elements of the area, rather than seen as additional but unimportant components. This might require legal advice and representation to help develop further planning consent in the area. Our key aim would be that new developments must hold physical floor space for cultural venues (i.e. subsidised units available for creative businesses only and sufficient noise cancelling measures built into new developments).

WHEN: Starting Autumn 2023

FACILITATED BY: Southside BID Manager and Southside Culture and Festival Coordinator + Legal representation

COST: £25,000 R+D

OUTCOME: Takes an innovative approach to cultural investment / Builds regional distinctiveness

Mapping and benchmarking Southside's creative businesses and venues



WHY: Southside's creative offer is mainly independent and reliant on a mix of public money (usually via Arts Council England (ACE) funding) and entry or ticket sales. With less footfall, cost of living rise, landlord/property owner uncertainty and limited ACE grants/budgets we are in danger of seeing a reduction in our cultural offer. It is important that we are able to continually map so that we can benchmark: the financial contribution to the area via inward and outward investment / hospitality benefits and uplifts when creative and cultural events take place / visitor numbers and responses / etc.

HOW: We will start with overall mapping and begin to work with venues to help us understand what is important to capture. This will form part of the regular quarterly meet-ups. We will then be able to effectively monitor patterns that will help guide and inform strategy moving forwards.

WHEN: Starting Autumn 2023 onwards

FACILITATED BY: Southside Culture and Festival Coordinator

COST: £6000 p.a.

ACTION: Contributes to a cluster/ ecosystem-based model / Extending or creating new 'class-leading' assets

Many of Birmingham's local culture organisations do not currently have the mechanism to record visitor feedback or economic benefits.

While anecdotally we know that there is a marked uptake in visitor numbers, hotel stays and hospitality revenue we have not been able to officially record statistics or gather data.

Wayfinding and branding Southside as the independent cultural heart of Birmingham



Branding the SOUTHSIDE HEART around the area's key entry points and venues as a recognisable symbol of love and tolerance could be one of the ways to start a new campaign for the area.

WHY: While being part of the larger culture ecosystem of the city, as a BID, we have a duty to promote and enhance the area for our levy payers. Attracting more people to Southside via a campaign that tells the story of the area will help us to be distinctive and we wish to develop a campaign that will share this with a wider audience.

HOW: Working with a branding and PR consultant we will deliver a strategy that includes creative wayfinding around the BID area and entry points. This will be used to both enhance the local area and communicate with brand assets and marketing. We will encourage creative partners, cultural venues and festivals to use this branding when hosting events so that cross-shared collateral (i.e. a printed publication) can be produced.

WHEN: Starting Autumn 2023

FACILITATED BY: Southside BID Manager / Southside Culture and Festival Coordinator / Branding + PR Consultant

COST: £12,000 p.a.

ACTION: Builds on regional distinctiveness

**Attracting
innovation and
tech while
celebrating
heritage**



WHY: Historically significant Southside BID has many stories to share. From the Chinese community who chose the area to settle, the LGBTQ+ community who call Southside home to the original Back to Back buildings and important 70's-90's fashion and music scenes - there are many stories to tell.

HOW: To enhance the distinctiveness of the area we wish to begin to develop an app. While locally some stories are well known and documented others have been left to fade. Working on a cross heritage / tech project we will share these stories to offer as a tourist / visitor tool.

WHEN: Research starting Summer 2023 with BCU research department / development reliant on funding (possibly via Heritage Lottery) application to be written Autumn/Winter 2023 / delivery from Spring 2024

FACILITATED BY: Southside Culture and Festival Coordinator / App development team

COST: £80,000

ACTION: Takes an innovative approach to cultural investment / Builds on regional distinctiveness / creating new 'class-leading' assets

Unearthing and developing stories of Southside and sharing histories and landmarks from the community will help us capture some of the creative and independent essence of the area which can be used to develop an APP that can be part of a wider visitor campaign.

BUDGET NOTES

Southside Cultural Action Zone and Festival Strategy				
Draft Budget				
Project Line	Cost	Details	Budget pays for;	Timing
Multi Agency, multi activity model of cultural development to proliferate and thrive	£5,000	Meetings every 6 weeks facilitated by the coordinator to bring cultural organisations, community organisations and cultural practitioners together with hospitality businesses and other sectors.	Meeting space, refreshments, facilitation. Coordinator hours	Per annum
Mapping and benchmarking of Southside's creative businesses and venues	£6,000	For the coordinator to develop and implement ongoing monitoring and evaluation of impact of cultural events	Coordinator hours, evaluation costs	Per annum
Wayfinding and branding Southside's as the independent cultural heart of Birmingham	£12,000	For campaign to highlight and position the district as the independent heart of culture in Birmingham	PR collateral, print, branding and signage	Per annum
Coordinator fee	£27,500	For the coordinator position to oversee Festival Strategy, CAZ Strategy and	100 days @ £275 per day	Per annum
Annual Budget	£50,500			
Building cultural development capacity through a sector led collaborative approach	£25,000	To implement a plan with legal advice which will help link developers with planning teams and local communities to build in plans for cultural and community spaces	R&D, legal representation, meeting spaces, travel and a written strategy	One off cost
Attracting innovation and tech whilst celebrating heritage	£70,000	Research and develop content for an app that can be built into visitor engagement.	Producing content, developing technology, video and sound recording, footage and licensing.	One off cost
			Total One off Costs	£95,000
			Total Budget for 2 years	£196,000
			Total Budget per year for 2 years	£98,000

SWOT – SOUTHSIDE AS A CAZ

STRENGTHS

Very high (70) cultural engagement score

Highest density of cultural venues in the city

A large pedestrianised space

Diverse cultural population

Easy to walk to from multiple parts of the city centre

A well known destination already

A strong brand identity

Popular well-liked destination

WEAKNESSES

Smallest BID of Bham (least levy to spend)

Communities who can be more at risk of crime

Capacity within the BID to plan and coordinate festivals

Lack of commercial property available to rent for creative / culture orgs due to increasing residential redevelopments of commercial spaces

Not enough support for BID or festival orgs to help with funding apps / strategy / joined up thinking

OPPORTUNITIES

Developing a large open space

Southside BID Festival Subcommittee

P/T festivals coordinator

Commonwealth Games has created a thirst and new audience base for major cultural public events in the City beyond the Games

Evaluation & Data

Recognising Southside BID as a CAZ

Smithfield site development

THREATS

Reduced funding / Sponsorship

Residential communities

Lack of capacity for project delivery within the BID team to carry out actions from funding agreement

Lack of public use space for events

The existing BID team is overstretched - project roles need to be built into future funding applications

Confidence of people returning to events post-Covid

Noise complaints

Crime & its impact on vulnerable communities

Cost of Living Crisis

Gentrification

FURTHER NOTES

When looking to re-engage visitors we are considering how:

We can use the big strategic opportunities that Southside can benefit from.

How we might use the 2022 Commonwealth Games as a case study on how Southside's cultural and hospitality offering can attract people to the District after sports events and position Southside as the social / cultural destination to head to at the end of the day.

How might we monitor visitors / audience average spend?

Before COVID lockdowns there were 12 annual festivals that called Southside home with a combined visitor count of over 250,000.

Post Covid and in the grip of deep economic recession and rise in cost of living, we are looking at a significant (possibly 80%) drop in the festivals that are taking place.

While Southside has a very engaged cultural visitor* (40% above Birmingham's average) the offer has been diminished due to a number of external factors. We are now looking at how to re-engage visitors and how to align future plans with the BID's pledges.

A conservative estimate based on a person's spend means that Southside businesses could potentially lose in the region of £11m of income from loss of festival revenue.

"As a result of not being able to secure a permanent home in Southside, and due to a 50% drop in visitors, we (BOM) have closed our gallery and cafe from August 2022. The challenge is how can visual arts venues sustain themselves in Southside, not only with the huge drop in audiences, but also against the tide of rapid residential development which prevents any opportunities for long-term leases and ownership. Festivals and events seems the way forward for the District." Karen Newman, Founder and Director BOM.

Key Issues identified across the festival organisers

- Gentrification
The building of new residential apartments and squeezing out of commercial businesses and in return increased cost of space. This has been an issue for many of the cultural venues and festival organisers - especially Birmingham Open Media (BOM) who are unable to secure a longer term lease of space in the area.

- Crime
Hate crime and anti-social behaviour have increased throughout the city and Southside is also suffering from some of these issues. The East Asian and LGBTQQIA communities in Southside have been targeted.

- Festival monitoring
It is difficult for festivals to monitor visitor numbers, gain feedback and understand the impact it is having without independent evaluation methods in place



*WM Place Profiler Dashboard

The West Midlands Place Profiler Dashboard brings together audience, demographic and social data from across the West Midlands to help you better understand the people and places.

The data from the Southside area (Birmingham I35) shows that:

27 venues in Southside have live music is the dominant venue and artform.

According to the Place Profiler Dashboard: Birmingham's overall Cultural Engagement score is on average **42**. The score for Southside is **70** showing on average a more engaged visitor to the area.

<https://www.culturecentral.co.uk/wm-place-profiler/>

