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AiR is everywhere.  
It moves through our schools  
and  
youth centres, theatres, village  
halls and residential homes;  
it transforms our streets,  
parks and open spaces.  
It brings to life our communities  
and gives a voice  
to those who thought they had  
nothing to say.





AiR gives us breathing space....  
time to think...to learn, to make new friends,  
to ask questions, and to feel free again.  
AiR is about breathing new life into Redditch,  
the vital element in our town's environment  
encouraging new ideas and inquisitive visitors.





But what does AiR stand for?

AiR stands for increasing the life expectancy  
of our creative communities,  
it stands for working together in  
partnership across Redditch and beyond,  
giving us pride in the place that we live.





But what does it mean?

Open up your doors and windows to let it in.  
AiR stands for Arts in Redditch.





AiR is .... Freedom or Life itself ?





## Strategic themes

**Life** in its entirety instead of **Diversity**  
**Transparency** instead of **Partnership**  
**Freedom** instead of **New Opportunities**





## **Breath of Fresh AiR**

New experience and art forms  
wind of change  
transformation, new commissions,  
breathing new life into Redditch,  
regeneration of dead and redundant space

## **Spoken Word**

Non visual performance,  
unlocking potential giving a voice (particularly to those who thought they had nothing to say  
testaments, text within mediums (theatre, song, comedy, Opera,  
Living Newspaper, open mic (Comedy, karaoke!, Rap battle) Text messaging

## **Freedom**

travel, escape, celebration,  
freedom of speech, creative voice, democratic process,  
political awareness, freedom of information  
Combating the withdrawal of freedom: escapology, petition, travel.....





## Life

*Fire:* light, warmth, family, basic needs,  
danger,  
excess, madness, ritual, burning effigies!!  
the flame, food, controlled explosions,  
fireworks, smoke in the air, rumour, gossip,  
record breaking, fire awareness (shared  
priorities ie Community safety)

*Earth:* tradition, creating new traditions,  
roots, identity, unity, origins,  
history, cross fertilization, community  
capacity building

*Water.....*

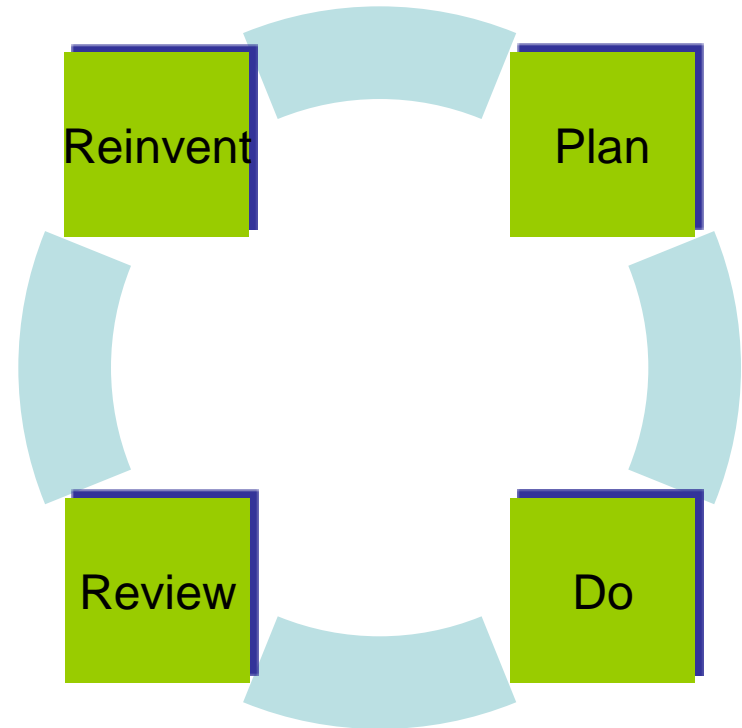


# How we work with the amateur arts sector in Redditch

- Redditch Arts Council : 1970s – 2001
- Consultancy recommendations/RBC Arts Strategy 2003
- AiR Partnership : management mechanism for strategy
- Redditch LSP : Cultural Theme Group 2006
- Worcestershire wide decision making

# The Life Cycle

- AiR Partnership annual work programme
  - Bi monthly meetings
  - Ongoing project work
    - Fluctuating and permanent membership
- Mutual consensus and focus
  - Capacity building
- Funding applications



# AiR Membership

- Redditch Arts Council
- Performing Arts Status College
- Other voluntary sector organisations
- Individual artists
- Statutory Organisations : PCT, County Council
- Redditch Borough Council

# What works and doesn't work for us

- Understanding how to work with volunteers in the first place.
- Redditch Arts Council grant scheme: Borough Council develops strategical alignment with other schemes (County Council, local business, local trusts) instead of delivering grant giving.
- Rural and small scale touring scheme model
- Mutual consensus through **formal** partnership process (AiR)
- Encouraging partnership projects between paid and non paid sector.
- Seed funding and supporting new initiatives : example “Bridging the Gap”

- ADO's acting as a buffer to major funding streams (eg G4A)
- Using terms “amateur” and “professional”. “Paid” and “unpaid” seems to sit more comfortably.
- Paid artists nervousness of comparing participation figures with unpaid artists.

- The local unpaid sector insist on practical involvement for the sake of sustained local participation in the arts because of inconsistent and patchy support from local authority according to the status quo of political will.

Parry this with:

- AiR Partnership process
- Delegated grant giving responsibility

Other examples of the amateur sector stepping up to the breach:

Ophelia Byrne in her book “The stage in Ulster from the eighteenth Century” (1997) talks about Northern Ireland during the 1970s depending upon the amateur sector to sustain theatrical activity where bloodshed forced closures of professional venues.

There must be many other examples of this.

- Assumptions about the interests of the amateur sector
- Voluntarily run theatre audience clubs help build audiences for high status theatre activity, as well as rural and small scale touring scheme promoters.
- Amateur theatre producing groups on the whole do not. In fact you can be in danger of offending them.

# The wider context : how policy impacts upon increasing participation in the arts.

- Experience on the coal face of advocating “quality”
- The “**excellence**” argument struggles to stand up to reason. In general colleagues and members of the public can in some cases be offended by the prioritisation of “quality” or “excellent” artists. We all know there are examples of excellent, ok and poor amateur and professional work. The Youth Ensemble of Bolivia (Simon Bolivar) is maybe a good example. This argument I think is close to being won. The wider issue is that it’s seen to be simply a **matter of taste** anyway.

“art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences.....Whereas the ideology of charisma regards taste in legitimate culture as a gift of nature, scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education.”

**Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste  
(1984) Pierre Bourdieu**

Quality in art is not “absolute” by its nature.

- Arts Council England/ Oxford University Sociology Dept joint publication “From indifference to enthusiasm: patterns of arts attendance in England” Tak Wing Chan and colleagues (2008)
- “Social stratification of cultural consumption across three domains: music, theatre, dance and cinema, and the visual arts” Tak Wing Chan and colleagues
- Arts Council sailing close to those who understand Bordieu’s work.
- The closest that MacMaster gets to relating to this at all in his recent report is when he talks at great length about “**relevance**” and the “**root of living**” in good art.

- “An excellent cultural experience goes to the root of living” Macmaster
- Amateur Theatre audiences not linked by family links with participants but simply attending because they “relate” to the work.
- A gut response to this being some people feel closer to the amateur actor. It is the “untrained” risk taker who presents human traits maybe more effectively. Ongoing debate in the theatre training sector. What can the two sectors therefore learn from each other.

- The destructive side to professionalisation.
- Pertinent post RFO review
- How many artists are truly able to earn a living anyway?
- Is the national strategy of paying a limited number of artists very well because of a lack of any choice in the matter.
- Been a paid artist in the past, sliding into non payment.
- Most paid activity bordering on volunteering at times.

- Who produces the best work anyway?
- Poorly paid art work often backfires and fails.
- Searching high and low for “motivated” art, often found in the hazy middle ground in between paid and unpaid work.
- Professionalisation often kills the love, or we pay so much that complacency sets in, particularly when performance management is so difficult to “put your finger on” within the arts sector.

- The problem with money and how it effects creativity.
- Developing work to attract funding
- Paid work producing interference : career ladders, overwork and fatigue, and most of all :
- **ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DECISIONS**

- Therefore lets re look at Macmaster's work again in this context.
- "Supporting excellence in the arts, from measurement to judgement" (Macmaster 2008)
- Its very exciting to talk of moving in this direction. The stomping ground of the volunteer who simply focuses on creating his dream with no fear of being held accountable for financial expenditure. That is as long as the "relevance" that will lead to this "excellence" **includes** "judges" from all walks of life and especially those who have absolutely nothing to do with the arts. Not anecdotal involvement but involved at every possible stage.
- The opportunity for the paid to learn as much from the unpaid is compelling, as well as between the public and all artists.

- Where are we in our debate, in the world between documents like Macmasters, LA strategies, the TBR research etc?
- “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others” Orwell
- We can't seem to agree if the artist is inside everyone or not.
- The growing participation agenda and the cultural offer for children and young people advocate the artist in everyone.
- Potential ten year funding agreements give the polar opposite impression.

# Conclusions

- There is a need to explore further the quandry local authority arts services face daily and for the key decision makers to adapt to produce more effective partnership working:
  1. Common language.
  2. Local government share good practice.
  3. Clear roles and responsibilities for local government, ACE, RFOs, the amateur sector, and indeed the public when exploring what Macmaster calls “relevance”.
  4. Further intellectual rigour of how best to present ourselves. Lets battle with these issues and find common ground.



Café

The image features a stylized logo for the word "Café". The letter "C" is orange, "a" is black, "fé" is black, and "é" is blue. A vertical pink bar runs through the center of the letters "a", "fé", and "é". The logo is set against a light blue background with several darker blue splatter-like shapes.