

SumnerMcIntyre Key Messages from Monmouthshire Cultural Strategy Consultations with Creatives and Stakeholders

July-August 2025 and November 2025

SumerMcIntyre held 5 consultation events in July 2025 and two further events in November 2025. 6 events were in-person with invited individuals from the creative community in Monmouthshire, 1 event was held on-line with key stakeholders. The events were held in the Melville Centre, Abergavenny, The Shire Hall, Monmouth, Caldicot Castle and Chepstow Leisure Centre, two further events were held at Chepstow Tourist Information Centre and Tintern Village Hall in November as it was felt that we had not sufficiently captured the views of these areas in the first round of consultation meetings due to low numbers.

Participants included creatives – artists and makers, writers, group leaders, business owners, festival directors and creative industry workers. All participants were fully engaged and participated enthusiastically in the sessions. A number expressed interest in continuing to support the process by being actively involved and others were keen to be kept up to date of progress and to suggest other groups who should be consulted.

Attendance – Abergavenny 17, Monmouth 9, online 11, Caldicot 4, Chepstow 2, Tintern 11, Chepstow 14

The sessions were led to discuss 6 main questions:

Question 1 – What are the three most exciting things happening in your area/you are involved in that you regard as cultural at the moment? Tell us about culture in your area

Question 2 - What are our Cultural Strengths? What makes Monmouthshire Monmouthshire? Help us define what is special about Monmouthshire and how this impacts cultural activity, people and places

Question 3 – What could be better?

Question 4 - How does culture impact you?

Question 5 - What words or phrases would you like to see in the vision following our discussions?

Question 6 - How can we develop new ways of working collaboratively between the public, private, and voluntary sectors.

1. Cultural Activity – What’s Exciting Now?

- **Grassroots & community-led events** like Monmouth Lantern Parade, Monmouth Living Windows, Wassail Mari Lwyd tradition in Chepstow (Greenman Backpackers), Usk in Bloom, Electric Picture Hall, Tintern Fete, Queering the Wye and Pride events are thriving.
- **Festivals and live performances** like Abergavenny Food Festival, Devauden Festival, Wye Valley Festival, Art in Penallt, Medieval Festival, Writing Festival, Walking Festival, Bookish events, Tintern fete, Castell Roc, Bandstand, Folk on the lawn, Green Gathering, Cider & Perry Festival are central to cultural life.
- **Creative hubs** like Savoy theatre, Borough theatre, TogetherWorks, Melville Centre, Danceblast, Wye Valley Sculpture Garden, Chepstow Art Space.
- **Local venues** Pubs such as Kings Arms, Abergavenny The Boat and Robin Hood (with new stage) in Monmouth, The Queens Head and The Three Tons in Chepstow and Churches such as St Michael’s Church, Tintern and St Mary’s Chepstow as venues and particularly church halls such as that at Tintern - all support community participation
- **Local groups** – Artists Meet Abergavenny, Plough House Art Group, Grossmont Drink and Draw, Am-Dram Monmouthshire, writing groups, amateur dramatics, and book clubs, heritage talks, local history engagement
- **Outdoor and adventure culture** – viewpoints, mountain biking, Wye Valley walkers

2. Cultural Strengths – What Makes Monmouthshire Special?

- **Distinctive natural landscape** (Wye Valley, rivers including **River Tourism**, forests, undulating landscape, mountains) that is the inspiration for so much culture in the county. “I didn’t realise I was an artist until I came to Monmouthshire”. Contrasts – mountains, valleys, rivers and forests. Wye Valley landmarks such as Devil’s Pulpit, Eagle’s Nest, Kymin, film locations
- **Rich heritage assets:** density of castles, Tintern Abbey, Llantony Abbey, abundance of small churches and bridges.

- **Diverse market towns with individual identities** and a network of distinctive villages enrich the overall cultural fabric. The challenge and richness of multiple towns with distinct cultures.
- **Border identity** Unique border identity: Wales–England intersections, shared influences gateway to Wales, borders with Herefordshire, Forest of Dean, and cosmopolitan influence from cities such as Bristol
- **Independent cultural organisations** – Rockfield Studios for music/Wye Valley Sculpture Garden/Art Shop and Chapel, Plough Art Group
- **Stories and Traditions** – historical events such as Henry V, Chartist, number of *firsts* in Monmouthshire to celebrate, folklore and traditions, industrial heritage
- **Wellness landscape**: a lot of practitioners, retreats, outdoor yoga, walking, river activities

3. What Could Be Better?

- **Poor communication** – lack of central ‘what’s on’ listing platform, not knowing what’s on in next towns, social media not working, no collective voice, poor advertising infrastructure, Need modernised digital presence: “Headfirst Bristol” used as example.
- **Gaps in cultural infrastructure**: affordable venues, performance spaces, studio spaces, exhibition/art spaces, acoustics, accessibility, capacity issues, teaching spaces, only 2 cinemas across county, lack of community discounts for booking venues such as Chepstow Castle.
- **Poor public transport** limits access across towns, can’t get to cinema for example in different town, can get to Bristol or Gloucester but not across Monmouthshire.
- **Unequal access and funding** – youth and rural communities under-served, Welsh-language, lack of hands-on skills development, representation: PRIDE strong but needs rural support
- **Artists feel unseen and undervalued** – need more public visibility of local talent, wonder if valued up the ladder. Creatives need grant-writing support and structured space/time. Volunteers need structured support and cross-town collaboration
- **Fundraising and sponsorship** – patronage – set up a Monmouthshire Art Fund so businesses can donate and know how to support creativity and artists/creatives can apply for funds or introduction of cultural vouchers to spend in Monmouthshire.

4. How Does Culture Impact People?

- **Enhances mental health** and healing, combats loneliness.
- **Enriches people's lives and opportunities**
- Builds a sense of **belonging and identity**.
- Brings **joy and fun**.
- Provides **shared experiences**.
- **Fosters personal growth** and creative careers.
- Culture seen as an **economic contributor** and needs valuing and nurturing as a creative industry. Provides career pathways and talent.
- Culture as a form of **spiritual nourishment and nature connection**.

How do you capture the impact of culture?

- Sharing data across the county to support future grant applications and encourage investment/support.
- More creative methods of evaluation.
- Importance of shared data to demonstrate impact.

5. Vision Words and Phrases

- 216 words were noted during the sessions.
- Community, Local, Outdoor, Accessible, Inclusive, Joyful, Playful, Sustainable, Creative, Empowering, Valued, Landscape

'A joyful, thriving, accessible county to be creative and to play.'

'Where art is part of daily life, and everyone has a voice.'

'A county where creativity transforms lives and communities.'

'A cultural strategy rooted in landscape, belonging and shared heritage, supporting creative futures for all.'

'Inclusive. Inspirational. Vibrant.'"

'A county whose creativity is visible, valued and celebrated across all towns and generations.'

'A multicultural, open, generous and unifying creative community.'

'Monmouthshire celebrates the life, activities and values of the county, in its culture and events together'.

6. New Ways to Work Collaboratively

- Establish a Monmouthshire-wide cultural platform to showcase and connect.
- Support a community panel with real influence and accountability. Must be inclusive and accessible
- Continue and expand database and news emails about culture in the county, build partnerships across sectors.
- Identify culture and arts ambassadors for mentoring and profile-raising
- Look at innovative initiatives (such as the collectives and Monmouthshire Art Fund)
- Develop annual Cultural Celebration Day (different venues)
- Pay and value artists – move beyond volunteer reliance.
- Establish shared creative spaces and hubs across the county – both digital and physical
- Offer mentoring and development support. Provide a toolkit for event organisers.
- Use diverse engagement methods: visual, online, face-to-face, place-based.
- Each town known for something specific and special.

Strategic Summary

- Monmouthshire's culture is rooted in its landscape, history, border identity and strong community spirit.
- Access, visibility, and connections are the greatest barriers and biggest opportunities.
- Capture local individuality of towns and villages - people, activities and events to highlight grass roots cultural activity - (much is happening in local and rural locations yet to be captured).
- Culture must be visible, valued, and supported to become an economic driver
- Success relies on collaboration, infrastructure, communication, community-led creativity across towns and rural areas and ensuring the cultural strategy is distinct, achievable and creative-led. A strong appetite for collaboration supported by clear structures.