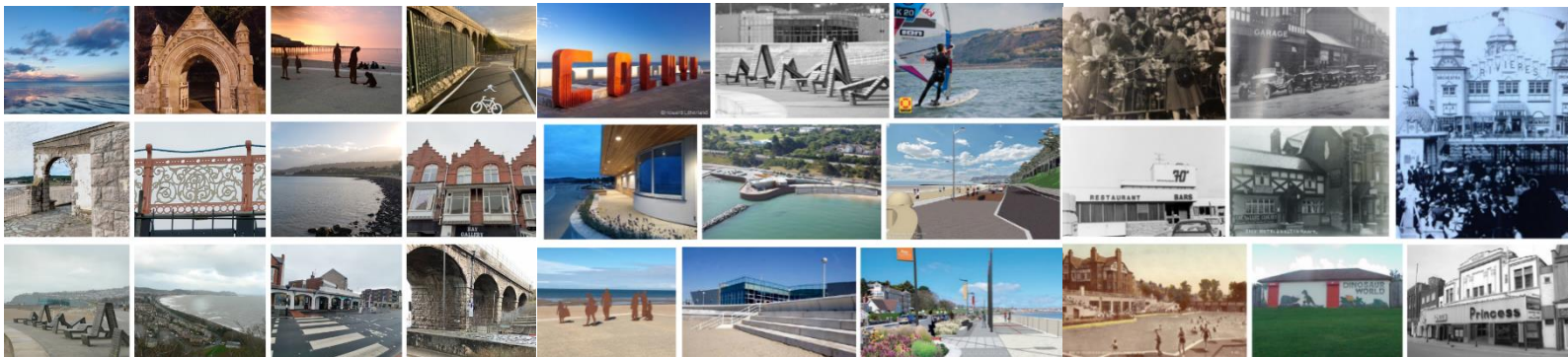


The National Lottery Heritage Fund – Great Place Scheme Nations

Programme Evaluation Case Study 1

Dychmygu Bae Colwyn / Imagine Colwyn Bay



Embedding the legacy – a sustainable infrastructure

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Context

- Lead partner: Conwy County Borough Council
- Grant expiry extended to: December 2021, extended from March 2021
- The Fund grant awarded £400,000.00
- Full project budget £451,000.00



Image of an example of the Colwyn Bay new brand

[Imagine Colwyn Bay](#) sought to harness interest in the town's unique past to inspire and connect people, groups and businesses through innovative cultural activities, exhibitions and events. Its objectives were:

- To map, record and celebrate existing cultural and heritage assets and resources.
- To develop and strengthen culture and heritage links with 3rd sector organisations.
- To inspire and connect people through a programme of engaging heritage and cultural activities and events.
- To support creative industries through Creative and Digital Colwyn training, upskilling, networks, peer support and delivery opportunities.
- To develop a Cultural Strategy embedded within local organisations, plans and wider strategies.

The Partnership

- The Bay of Colwyn Town Council
- Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC). The project is linked with the Council's Community Development Service, responsible for: Active & Creative Lifestyles, Business & Tourism, Conwy Youth Service, Culture & Information, Strategic Planning & Communities, Business, Policy & Performance.

N.B: Colwyn Business Improvement District was the third partner, however it ceased operating in March 2020.

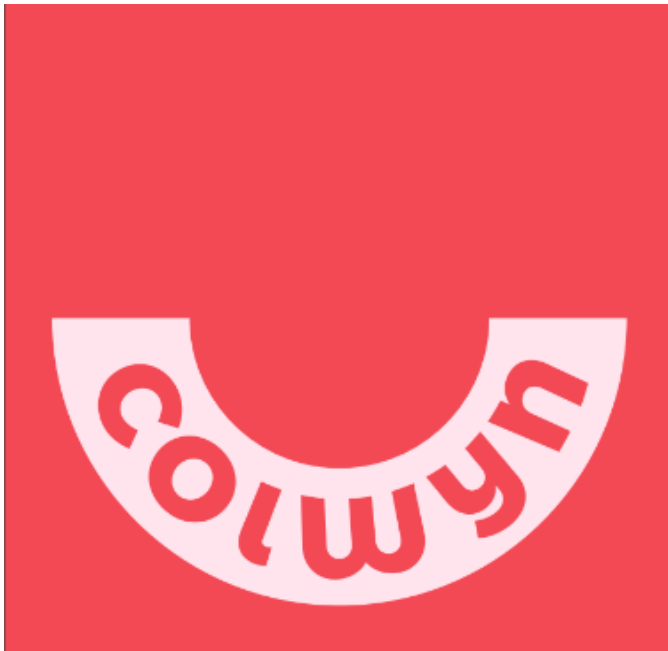


Image of an example of the Colwyn Bay new brand

The steering group included representatives from across sectors, including heritage group volunteers, with a chair from a voluntary group. The project was also supported by ‘advisors’ from across sectors, from expert to voluntary.

¹ <https://www.conwy.gov.uk/en/Business/Regeneration/Colwyn-Bay-Regeneration/Bay-Life-Regeneration-Programme/About-Baylife.aspx>

Strategically placed

Great Place Scheme Nations Imagine Colwyn Bay is an integral part of ongoing investment and development for Colwyn Bay and Conwy County. Led by Conwy County Borough Council, and delivered by Colwyn Bay Town Council, this project was strategically placed to deliver on the ambitions of the Bay Life Regeneration Programme¹ and the Colwyn Bay Master Plan².

‘The Bay Life Regeneration Programme has been established to bring about a programme of physical, social and economic regeneration within the Bay of Colwyn area.

This partnership includes key representatives of the private, public and community sectors representing key stakeholders in the town’s future.

Conwy has been successful in attracting funding under the Welsh Government’s Vibrant and Viable Places framework together with European, Lottery and other partners funding to fund a range of projects in excess of £100m to facilitate the regeneration of the Bay of Colwyn.’

Bay Life Regeneration Programme

² <https://www.conwy.gov.uk/en/Business/Regeneration/Colwyn-Bay-Regeneration/Bay-Life-Regeneration-Programme/Assets/Assets-Natasha/LDP10-Colwyn-Bay-Masterplan.pdf>

The Colwyn Bay Master Plan, 2011, is one of the Bay Life Projects and set out to re-invent Colwyn Bay, 'as a 21st century town with a renewed focus on its role as a seaside town and an attractive place to live, visit and invest'. The Master Plan provides a framework for the physical regeneration of the town focussing on four key areas of change to establish Colwyn Bay as a regional centre for business and leisure. It included the following requirements:

- Consider the need to propose iconic projects to strengthen the town identity.
- Consider public realm projects and further pedestrianisation.

Colwyn Bay has also benefited from 'Communities First' a community focussed programme that supported the Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty agenda from 2013-2015.

Previous projects had focused on the rich heritage of the area including The Colwyn Bay Townscape Heritage Initiative, 2012-2017, funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Welsh Government, Conwy County Borough Council, and Cadw. Also under Bay Life, this project was to conserve, enhance and regenerate conservation areas suffering from economic decline.

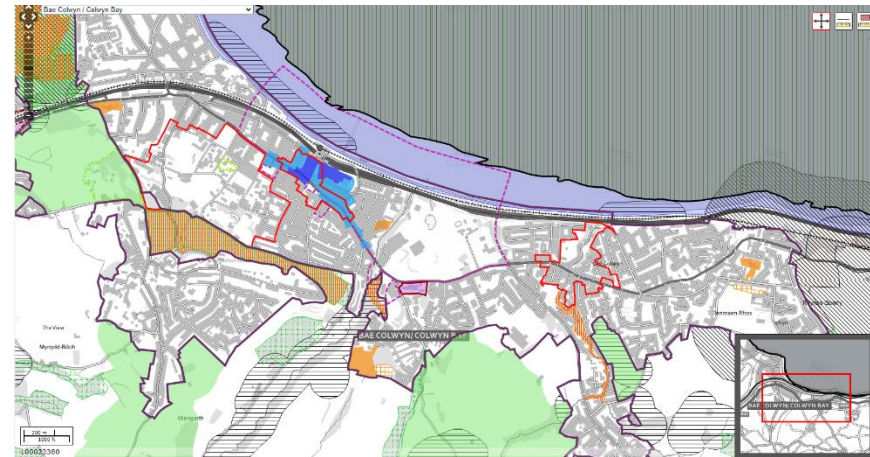


Image of the map of Colwyn Bay indicating aspects of its regeneration - purple dashed lines represent the Colwyn Bay Masterplan area and the red lines represent conservation areas.

Imagine Colwyn Bay differentiated itself from other initiatives, as the Heritage and Culture Manager, CBBC, said, with its focus on bringing the community together and identifying ways of supporting the creative industries - aiming to, '...increase recognition of the value of culture and heritage within the community and organisations. Creating and enhancing

opportunities for the community, local organisations, creative industries and visitors.’³

While the regeneration programme provided a strong strategic context, it did not include a cultural strategy. Developing a vision and the cross-sector partnerships was therefore a primary focus for the Great Place Scheme Nations project initially, to pave the way for a Cultural Strategy.

The opportunity to experiment

Great Place Scheme Nations offered a unique opportunity to explore and experiment with new ways of working. Different places were therefore able to find their own route. Although, the quantity of elements to deliver within the time-scale across the Great Place Scheme Nations projects was often daunting to project managers, and many said that they felt the process of change was only just beginning by the end of their programme delivery. This, however, demonstrates that strategic change is incremental where places are concerned and takes time and multiple interventions - as the context for Imagine Colwyn Bay outlined above shows. This is a recurring theme for Great Place

³ <https://imagine.colwynbayheritage.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Imagine-Colwyn-Bay.pdf>

Scheme Nations projects and is also recognised by regeneration projects, such as Birmingham’s Civic Square initiative.

‘We know that in a time of fundamental uncertainty about our urban futures, creating the capacity for experimentation is crucial in order to design for a multi-stage, multi-level, large scale transition of how we live together. Our experience shows us that the only way to go about this is by moving forward step-by-step, whilst engaging multiple levels of government, different sectors, communities and a range of partners’⁴

The Project Manager for Imagine Colwyn Bay corroborates this, in terms of the time required, *‘if this was going to be a truly co-produced project, we would probably have to have doubled at least the timescale.’* Nevertheless, Colwyn Bay has moved its narrative on through the Great Place Scheme Nations project - embedding the work within local strategy and policy, involving the creative sector and a range of representatives from the community. As the resulting strategy acknowledges, however, there is still more to do, but Great Place Scheme Nations has provided a blue-print for change of sorts.

⁴ Birmingham Civic Square <https://civicsquare.cc/2020/03/06/transition-co-operative/>

Sewing the seeds to support inclusive growth



The project addressed the economic impact challenge of Great Place Scheme Nations through its support of the cultural and creative sector. A broader approach was taken, which came into focus in light of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, which went beyond just providing jobs. This was manifest through direct commissioning of local cultural organisations and creatives, providing networking opportunities, mentoring and a longer-term vision for support.

"it's created opportunities for local organisations, local creatives, and freelancers and organisations to work together"

Project Manager

" it was surprising how many individuals were in the [Cultural] sector that have never accessed any support previously. And were working in silo. We'd like to think that all these people now that they have come together will make the area a lot stronger, create more opportunities, and create jobs, and also get a lot of the bigger contracts by working together."

Project Partner

"I think the thing that I was always spotting was how much mentoring is going on and how many emerging practitioners a project was connecting to and working with... when the Kickstart scheme happened, there was opportunity to employ someone on Kickstarter who could then get really involved with the project, and there are a number of graduate returners who had returned during the pandemic with no work, nothing going on very much. So looking at: okay, how can we support those emerging practitioners to connect? Provide some employment as well but actually it

wasn't just about providing employment, it was about the mentoring that goes on, and connecting people."

Project Partner

Legacy

Imagine Colwyn Bay set out to ensure that it was not perceived as an isolated short-term project which came and went, with no legacy. This was purposefully to counter the experiences of other projects, as Chair of Colwyn Bay Heritage Group, pointed out that previously, there had been a lack of ongoing investment in the outputs of projects.

" I think with really effective placemaking and co creation projects, they're kind of slow burners, but the embers burn a lot longer after the project. And so I think it's making sure that you capture both ends of the project cycle."

Heritage & Culture Manager, CCBC

A sustainable approach was embedded within Imagine Colwyn Bay, which has resulted in culture, heritage and the creative industries driving the development of the town's infrastructure, including developing or informing:

- Creative and Digital Colwyn - a network for the creative industries.

- Town team cross-sector group for Colwyn Bay
- Ongoing support for the Heritage Forum
- Conwy [brand](#) and toolkit
- Conwy County's [Cultural Strategy](#)
- [Conway Culture website](#)

Role of the local authority

The strength of the project came from its positioning within the ecology of regeneration in the area, and its delivery from within the local authority. This gave it strategic opportunity, however, it did also require the project to shift perceptions of the local authority from funder to facilitator, changing the culture of 'dependency', to one of opportunity. The project manager who had a community development background, was instrumental in changing the nature of the relationships between the local authority, communities and other stakeholders - putting people together and initiating projects that required cross-sector working.

A re-structure of the departments in the council and the new Culture Strategy, provide the best possible opportunity for a strategic legacy for this Great Place Scheme Nations project.

"during the lifetime of the Imagine project, we've restructured the council...and created 'economy and culture' [department]. We're working in a completely new way now, our brand and culture and in everything that we do, and I do think it's made a difference right up to the top. The Culture Strategy has become recognised now as a corporate priority and one of our flagship strategic projects for the next five years for the council."

Heritage & Culture Manager, CCBC

Community capacity building

The involvement of the community has come through the locally commissioned creatives who have developed the project's outputs with the communities of Colwyn Bay. The project also gave delivery partners opportunities to continue to work with marginalised groups. As the Project Manager put it, *'there's been an overlap between developing the community content and the creative facilitators who have taken part in that'*. In turn local creatives have worked together and supported each other through informal mentoring.

"Within the framework of the activity plan we have enabled as much community input and co-production as we could."

Tape Community Music and Film who were commissioned to develop the Imagine Trail App (the biggest community element of the project) have a well-developed approach to co-production so the areas of focus and creative content have been identified by the community. The concepts and ideas for the sculpture trail and Underpass artwork have been fully shaped and developed by young people and other community members... With the sculpture trail I really did not envisage that we would have an Octopus Ice Cream signposting the way to beach, that concept came completely from a Coleg Llandrillo Foundation art student."

Project Manager

A model for future working

The Great Place Scheme Nations funding has been matched from the Rural Development fund to create the county-wide Culture Strategy, so that the learnings from Imagine Colwyn Bay can be applied to the whole county.

"So the vision is that in the next three, four or five years, we're going to create what we're calling these town teams, these creative alliances across the whole county, not just in Colwyn Bay, so that they will act as anchor points where the

community and local business and local industry can work together to have control over what's happening in terms of local placemaking projects, and local town centre renewal. I'm going to be right in the middle of all of that, because they've asked me to drive it through."

Heritage & Culture Manager, CCBC

The Cultural Strategy for Conwy County Borough 2021-2026 - Creu Conwy - Creating the Spark⁵ sets out the positioning of culture for the area:

'Culture creates the spark for economic growth, wellbeing and connection. Culture can drive sustainable economic growth and help bring communities closer together. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are facing key challenges that culture can help to overcome.'

The strategy includes creation of a cluster of Cultural Launchpads located in towns across the County, to bring, people, ideas and creativity together to deliver distinctive local projects, which embeds the Imagine Colwyn Bay principles and approach strategically across the County.

⁵ https://conwyculture.com/content/files/Creu-Conwy-%E2%80%93-Cultural-Strategy-for-Conwy-County-Borough-2021-2026_2021-12-14-120251_fbys.pdf

'Creu Conwy will support projects that put culture at the heart of policy and decision making across a range of sectors. Creu Conwy will use the transformational power of culture to support strategic projects across tourism, education and young people, rural development, and health and wellbeing.'

The learnings from Imagine Colwyn Bay, on how culture led placemaking works, are therefore informing other local authority areas and infrastructure projects.

"it's [legacy is] going to come through, I think, long after the project finishes...So I think that partnership working has now been set in stone as part of this project, and we will see that continue definitely."

Town Clerk

And while it was not successful, Conwy's bid for the European Capital of Culture⁶, demonstrates the place's commitment to realising the ambition of the cultural strategy, catalysed by the work of Great Place Scheme Nations Imagine Colwyn Bay.

⁶ <https://conwy2025.co.uk/>

The Cultural Strategy is embedded across sectors, as the ‘What next’ section at the end of the strategy indicates:

A. Apply the Creu Conwy principles in decision-making processes across all sectors:

1. Adventurous: does this make an adventure of the everyday?
2. Playful: will this make people stop, smile and/or join in?
3. Connected: does this bring people and/or places together?

B. Establish action plans and the resources needed to deliver and fund them:

1. Organisational structures and staffing, including creating Town Teams
2. Asset management
3. Finance.

While additional investment is required, and governance structures need strengthening, the question asked by the Heritage & Culture Manager is, ‘*what will Colwyn Bay look like in five or ten years time?*’, what will have evolved and what changed, and how much may be attributable to the catalyst of Great Place Scheme Nations Imagine Colwyn Bay?



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