



# Art, Culture and Heritage: contribution to wellness

2018



## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the respondents who participated in our questionnaire survey and to all the agencies and organisations that assisted the interviews. These include: volunteers at the GrowAllot gardens in Whitley, Southcote and Katesgrove; Southcote Sure Start – parents and staff; Southcote Library – staff and library users; Southcote Community Centre staff and volunteers; residents and volunteers in the Southcote Christian Action Shop; Whitley Community Development Association; and residents in Whitley and Southcote who responded to door knocking research.

This report is based on a survey run in conjunction with, and partly funded by, Food4Families. Some of this report contains overlapping material. For this we thank Sharon Fitton, the Project Co-ordinator of Food4Families who agreed to this collaboration.

The report is a Whitley Researchers and University of Reading production. Whitley Researchers include Liz Ashcroft, Aneta Banas, Sandra Clare, Naomi Lee, Natalie Merritt, Sonia Duval and John Ord. Sally Lloyd-Evans and Lorna Zischka of the University of Reading contributed to the data analysis and report writing.

The research was commissioned by Lara Stavrinou, Cultural Development Officer at Reading Borough Council. It informs Reading's Great Places Scheme, which is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England.

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## Executive Summary

Findings based on interviews with 50 people from Whitley, Southcote and Katesgrove.

### **1. The meaning of ‘art’, ‘culture’ and ‘heritage’:**

- ‘Art’ was seen as the outworking of creativity. Twice as many people spoke of their own creativity as opposed to observing someone else’s; ‘doing’ rather than ‘spectating’. Opportunities for creative expression were mentioned in unlikely places (e.g. helping with homework, DIY).
- Interviewees said that ‘culture’ has to do with the way people relate to one another and conduct themselves in life. The kind of cultural events mentioned included taking part in local fairs or Fun Days. Few (if any) of those we interviewed had accessed (expensive) professional performances.
- ‘Heritage’ got people thinking about the past and where we come from.

### **2. How participation in art, culture and heritage contributes to wellness:**

‘Wellness’ was strongly correlated to people doing what matters to them. It was not one or another activity in itself that made the difference, so much as the feeling that ‘I can do what is important to me.’

Around 95% of interviewees agreed that (1) coming together with other people and (2) gaining access to beautiful spaces (especially green spaces) was important. These were amongst the top activities seen to contribute to wellness.

Creative activity and cultural or heritage events were seen to be important by around 70% of persons. The minority who did not express any interest are less likely to benefit from participation.

Men, women and people of all age groups were equally likely to attach importance to creative activities, cultural/heritage events and access to green spaces. Women were most likely to champion the importance of collective activity.

### **3. Barriers to participation in activities that contribute to wellness:**

Time, cost, immobility (related both to lack of car access and to poor health) and lack of information are barriers to participation, although people tend to find a way to do the things that are really important to them.

Accessing beautiful/green spaces and accessing certain cultural events (the expensive ones and/or events outside of town) posed much more of a barrier than getting involved in art at home or with art and culture in local groups.

There is advantage in connecting art, cultural and heritage activities to existing community groups. Not only because of because community groups play an important role in bringing people together, but also in order for people to ‘own’ the cultural activities. Not knowing what

is going on or not feeling that an event is intended for me are important reasons why people miss out on cultural experiences. Since community groups were found to be relatively accessible to all parties (even those who suffer from poor mental health), these offer people a 'way in' and make it significantly more likely that individuals will engage with new activities.

#### **4. How people rated their neighbourhood and what they want more of:**

The average rating people gave their neighbourhood was 5.7 out of 10; neither advantaged nor disadvantaged in terms of the arts, culture and heritage. Ratings were higher amongst people accessing green spaces and people who had been involved with culture and heritage related events. The latter finding applied even to people who did not express much interest in such events. This suggests that events or actions with wide reach can make a significant difference to the attitudes that locals have towards their neighbourhood. However, as with 'wellness,' neighbourhood ratings were the lowest amongst people who felt something was important to them and yet did not have the opportunity to do it. Meeting the interests of these people makes the biggest difference.

Strong interest was expressed in:

- Activities that include different age groups and/or that provide for children.
- Activities that bring people together as a community and which build positive neighbourly relations.
- 'Hands-on' activities or trips, especially where disseminated through local groups (which makes them accessible);
- Our heritage of green spaces. These also need cultivating for the next generation.

## 1. Introduction

In this survey residents in Whitley, Southcote and (to a lesser extent) Katesgrove were asked what they do to keep well or get well. The research set the context by which to evaluate the particular impact that Art, Culture and Heritage had on wellness. It also considers the barriers people face to wellness, and the ratings people give to their locality in terms of Art, Culture and Heritage.

The questionnaires collected some basic information on age, gender, location, ethnicity, self-reported 'wellness' and access to a car. It then listed a range of activities that were seen to promote wellness. These activities were partly drawn from focus group feedback (what local people do to feel good). The activities also reflect findings in the academic literature regarding what factors contribute to quality of life.<sup>1</sup>

Having compiled a list of activities relevant to people in Reading, including activities related to the arts, culture and heritage, respondents were asked whether or not they did these things, how important they rated each activity for their wellness, and detail about the things that helped or prevented them from getting involved. Respondents were also asked to rate how advantaged or disadvantaged their locality was in term of art, culture and heritage, pointing out what they like and what could be better.

The survey enabled us to answer the following questions: (1) What 'art' 'culture' and 'heritage' mean to local people; (2) How participation in art, culture and heritage contributes to wellness; (3) Barriers to participation in activities that contribute to wellness; and (4) How people rated their neighbourhood and what they want more of.

### 1.1 Description of participants interviewed

50 structured interviews based on a questionnaire format (see Appendix) were conducted by the community researchers. Just over half of these were carried out in Whitley, and the other (just under) half in Southcote and Katesgrove. These districts were very similar in terms of the self-reported 'wellness' of those interviewed – there was not statistically significant difference between the two.

Many of the interviews were carried out in community groups, which biases the sample towards group attenders. The study is also biased towards women – two thirds of interviews were carried out with women.

A couple of people under 20 were interviewed, and every decade above that was fairly represented up to and including the final age category which was 'over 60.' People in their thirties were particularly well represented.

People were asked to describe their ethnicity in their own words. In total, 83% of respondents self-identified themselves as 'white', a category that also included some reference to being

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<sup>1</sup> For example:

Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level: why more equal societies almost always do better*. London ; New York: Allen Lane.

Layard, R. (2005). *Happiness: lessons from a new science*. London: Allen Lane.

Ryff, C. (1989). Happiness Is Everything, or Is It - Explorations on the Meaning of Psychological Well-Being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069-1081.

Aked, J., Marks, N., Cordon, C., & Thompson, S. (2008). *Five ways to wellbeing*. Retrieved February 2015, from [http://b.3cdn.net/nefoundation/8984c5089d5c2285ee\\_t4m6bhqq5.pdf](http://b.3cdn.net/nefoundation/8984c5089d5c2285ee_t4m6bhqq5.pdf)

‘white British’ or ‘white other’. The remaining participants defining their ethnicity as Bengali, Black Caribbean, Indian, Somalian, South Sudan, Black and Malaysian and there was a higher representation of Black and Ethnic Minority (BAME) participants outside of Whitley. Although the demographic profile of residents from different ethnic backgrounds was similar in this study, we noted that participants from BAME communities in Reading were marginally more likely to cite time and money as barriers to engagement in cultural activities and were less likely to be in paid work or volunteer<sup>2</sup> or take medicine. We discuss this in further detail on page 9.

## 2. The findings

### 2.1 Factors contributing to wellness

Participants were asked whether or not they took part in various activities that promote wellness, and also to give their own rating about how important this activity is to their wellness. How important an activity is to wellness was rated on a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important) implying that people rating an activity as 4 and 5 found it to be important, and any average rating over 3 suggests a majority agreement that the activity is important. The summary statistics are shown in the table below, listed in order of importance to wellness.

Activity	Mean average rating of how much this activity contributes to wellness (1-5)	% of persons interviewed who take part in this activity	How persons who take part in the activity say it contributes to wellness	How persons not taking part in the activity say it contributes to wellness
Get involved in a community group/club/support group/religious group	4.40	88%	4.61	3.00
Eat healthy	4.34	86%	4.37	4.17
Give to/ do things for other people (and receive back)	4.32	86%	4.64	1.60
Work in paid job/volunteer	4.27	86%	4.57	2.43
Get out in nature in other ways	4.08	72%	4.47	3.14
Exercise	4.01	64%	4.45	3.15
Learn new things	4.00	84%	4.23	2.71
Share food or drink with family/friends	3.96	86%	4.29	2.00
Pray/meditate/think positive	3.92	75%	4.61	1.92
Time out alone/ rest	3.81	80%	4.08	2.56
Do gardening	3.73	57%	4.74	2.42
Do something creative	3.61	73%	4.26	1.67
Take part in cultural/heritage events or visit cultural/heritage sites	3.32	51%	4.38	2.28

<sup>2</sup> Definitions of what constitutes formal and informal ‘volunteering’ and care work differs between communities so this may not be significant. Our study did not explore this in depth.

Take medication	3.25	41%	4.60	2.13
Party/go for a night out	2.73	35%	3.85	2.07
'Shopping therapy' (buy stuff!)	2.58	36%	3.74	1.97
In addition to these activities, one person mentioned the importance of time to read or watch serials/films. They also considered this to be important to their wellbeing.				

The data provides us with insights into what sort of activities mean most to most people and which ones face high barriers to entry. It can be seen that nearly every activity listed is, on average, generally agreed to be important to wellbeing with the exception of 'shopping therapy' and partying/going for a night out (although even for these activities, a small majority of the people who did them found them to be important).

The higher rated activities also tended to be done by a higher percentage of the population interviewed (people do what they find to be important), with a few notable exceptions. For example, getting out in nature or getting exercise are both very highly rated as contributing to wellness, and yet are less widely practiced than many other activities. On the other hand, rest time alone has lower ratings in terms of contribution to wellness and yet most people do it (with the exception of some mothers in particular). The higher ratings with lower participation suggest that significant barriers to entry exist, whilst lower ratings with high participation suggests much lower barriers to entry. Indeed, when it came to 'alone time,' there were even a few remarks about having too much of it!

Overall, people tend to rate the activities which they actually do as more important to their wellness than the activities they do not do. In other words, the average ratings given to an activity in terms of its impact on wellness are higher amongst people who do the activity and lower amongst the people who do not. It could be understood from this that participants tend to do what helps them, and that one main reason for people not taking part in a particular activity is that they do not want to. It is not always because they cannot. This is the most likely interpretation, although it is also possible that people who do not take part in an activity do not fully understand the value of that activity to their wellness, or else they seek to justify their own behaviour/decisions after the event by rating activities they have not done as poor contributors to their wellness.

There were just four activities which were rated 3 and over by those who do not take part in them. The high ratings even among non-participants suggests that these are activities that are almost universally perceived to be good, but there must be significant barriers to entry because although most people rate them as important, not everyone does them. These four activities are, in order of importance to non-participants, **healthy eating, exercise, getting out in nature and being part of a group**. As was already mentioned, getting into nature and exercise may involve particularly high barriers, since there were also fewer persons participating in these activities.

The sort of barriers directly mentioned by persons who would *like* to participate in these four activities even though they are not currently involved include **time** constraints (to healthy eating, exercise and attending groups); **health and mobility** constraints (particularly related to exercise and getting out into nature); and **cost** (as a barrier to healthy eating and getting out into nature). Motivating oneself to make the effort required was also mentioned as an issue when it came to healthy eating and exercise.

Special mention may also be made of activities which are *rated highly (4 or over on average) by people who do them*, and *negatively (2 or under on average) by people who do not*. Whilst these activities are clearly important to those who do them, the negative ratings by people who do not imply that people are not doing them because they do not want to rather than because of high barriers to entry. There are again **four activities** that fall into this category:

- giving to others
- sharing food or drink with others
- thinking positively and/or prayer
- doing something creative

86% of those interviewed said they gave/did things for other people, 75% said they tried to think positive or else (to a lesser extent) prayed, 86% shared food or drink with others (especially with family), and 73% said they did something creative. Barriers to these activities are low in that no one gave any reason why they cannot think positively or pray (except not being very good at it) and no one had a reason why they cannot give. Few reasons were given why eating with other people might be hard either, except that one person said they were new to the area, and it was clear that without family eating with others may be a rather less frequent thing than for those with family (someone whose family member had died said that they no longer eat with someone, for example). Although three persons mentioned time barriers to doing something creative, lack of inclination was rather the factor of importance determining lack of engagement in each of these activities.

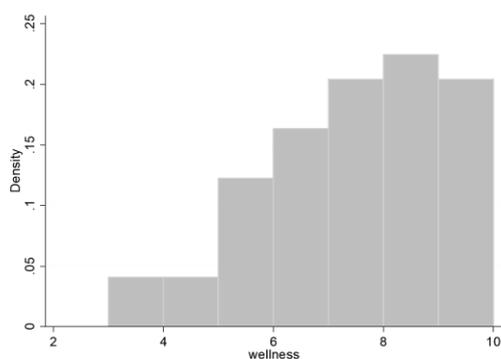
Several other activities were also seen by most as important to wellness, and particularly by those who did them. These included paid work or volunteering, learning new things, and taking part in cultural/heritage events. Those who did not do them were not, on average, negative about these activities, and yet did not indulge themselves partly because of barriers to entry, and partly because these things were not seen as a personal priority.

Taking medication was extremely important to the wellness of those who depended on it, although some expressed a strong aversion to having to take medicine at all, despite its importance. Having to take medicine is rather associated with unwellness than with wellness overall.

Partying/taking a night out or shopping therapy/buying stuff were the two activities least likely to be rated as important to wellness, and also the activities least likely to be indulged in. Taking a night out was presented by some people as an important break (also from the kids) which contrasts to an activity like 'getting out in nature' that was appreciated because it includes the children. Shopping therapy was praised by one person because it 'helps you forget'. This contrasts to activities like taking exercise, giving or healthy eating, where people mentioned a 'feel good' factor that is often associated with 'doing the right thing.'

## 2.2 Overall wellness

How those interviewed rated their own wellness on a scale of 1-10 is shown in the following figure.



It was found that very few out of the activities mentioned in the previous section were significantly correlated to the overall wellness of a person. Healthy eating was associated with higher levels of wellness; eating with other people (indicative of supportive relationships) was also weakly correlated to wellness, and taking medication was associated with lower levels of wellness, but whether or not people did the other things had no statistically significant association with self-reported wellness.

More to the point with the other activities was whether or not people were getting to do the things that they *personally felt to be important to them*. People who felt a particular activity was important to their wellness and yet for some reason did not actually do that activity tended to express significantly lower levels of wellness than everyone else.

For example, average wellness for all persons interviewed was almost seven out of ten, and for those who did the big four activities (healthy eating, exercise, getting out in nature and taking part in groups) average wellness was 7.3. Persons who voluntarily expressed some sort of guilt or dissatisfaction with their own involvement in these four (for example, *“I exercise but I should do more”* *“I try to eat healthy but I don’t always manage”*) tended to report significantly lower levels of “wellness” compared to this average (their mean wellness was 6.0). Likewise, persons who think that the big four activities are important to wellness but do not or cannot do one of them at all also report themselves as significantly less well than all other persons (mean wellness 5.9). On the other hand, persons who neither take part in one or another of the big four nor feel that the activity matters to their wellness report themselves at least as ‘well’ as everyone else.

This shows that the main contribution to wellness comes about from helping people to do the things that they feel are important to them. Attending cultural activities or heritage sites for example, creative activities or getting out into nature are not for everyone, and where people have no interest, they are less likely to benefit from the activity. The wellbeing of those who neither take part in these activities nor want to is just as high as the wellbeing of those who take part in the activities and want to. It is only those who do not take part in the activity but want to whose wellbeing suffers.

When it came to cultural activities, creative activities and getting out into nature, the *mean welfare of persons who thought that these three activities were important but did not do them was 5.71 whilst the mean welfare of everyone else was 7.17 – a statistically significant difference*. In other words, not being able to engage in activities that matter to an individual can have a negative impact and supporting them to get involved may significantly their wellness.

Wellbeing was very closely associated with how an interviewee rated his or her locality in the context of art, culture and heritage. Either people were happier when they felt they were in a good locality or else, just as likely, happy people felt more positive about their locality. ‘Place’ is considered in more detail in the next section.

### 2.3 Art, culture, heritage and ‘place’

Participants were also asked whether their locality or neighbourhood is advantaged or disadvantaged in terms of the arts, culture and heritage. Their responses are recorded in the following table:

	% participants giving this rating
1= very poor	4.26
2	4.26
3	14.89
4	10.64
5	4.26
6	14.89
7	25.53
8	12.77
9	6.38
10= excellent	2.13

The average rating given overall was 5.70 out of 10 (1 being very poor, and 10 being excellent). ‘White’ participants tended to rate their neighbourhood more negatively than BAME respondents (over a point lower on average). Taking ethnicity into account (more BAME respondents were interviewed outside of Whitley), Whitley was rated marginally better than Southcote and Katesgrove (around a point higher, which does not quite scrape statistical significance).

Men rated ‘place’ significantly more positively than women (mean response 6.5 rather than 5.29 – just over a notch higher). This rating had nothing to do with participation in art, culture or heritage related events – men and women were equally likely to get out into nature, do something creative or attend a cultural/heritage event/site, and they were equally likely to rate these things as important to wellbeing. It had nothing to do with general wellness either – there was no significant difference between the self-rated wellness of men and women. Men and women both mentioned a wish for more child-related arts related activities, but mention of this was also not related to a lower rating of place. The only explanation that could be relevant is that women might be more relationship sensitive (they are more likely to rate community groups and eating together as important for example) and they may therefore be more sensitive to and concerned about strained relationships in the community. This is one possible interpretation, not an affirmation. The only point that is confirmed is that women rate their location more poorly than men. Age has no clear impact on rating.

People who took part in cultural events, who got out into nature and who ate with others (had positive reciprocal relationships) all reported more positively on their locality. These things clearly go with feeling better about a location in terms of its arts, culture and heritage attributes.

Participants who had learnt new things, however, tended to report less favourably on their locality. Perhaps they were made more aware of the many other things they might be missing!

Both wellness and ratings of the place were lowest of all amongst those who felt that a certain activity was important to wellbeing but could not do it. The previous section described how wellness was impacted by not being able to get out in nature, do something creative or take part in a cultural/heritage related activity when one felt these things were important. If we apply the same formula to place ratings, we find that place is rated on average at 2.33 out of 10 by those finding these activities important but not being able to do them, and is rated as 6.20 by everyone else – an important and a significant difference. This emphasises the point that providing for people with interest in the subject is going to make the biggest difference to one's feelings about their place.

### 2.3.1 Nature

It is clear from the correlation between getting out into nature and the rating of one's locality that access to a natural environment is an important part of 'place'. Moreover, access to the natural environment is seen as important to wellbeing by the majority of people, even those who do not have access to it, which is a feature that underlines its importance.

72% of those interviewed got out into nature, which is significantly lower than participation in a few other activities which were rated less important to wellbeing, suggesting that there are barriers to participation. Transport is the most frequently mentioned barrier to getting into nature, Part of the problem was disability, and part was having no car access. Time/looking after children was also a factor, as was cost.

Some mentioned getting out to National Trust sites and also other nature reserves such as Dinton Pastures, Lookout (Bracknell forest) or Wellington Park. There were also several mentions of getting out into the local countryside, canals and riverside. However, this kind of access was not within reach of all. Two of those responding "yes" referred only to major excursions such as 'going to the seaside with a group outing'. These were people without a car. Another carless person said that she could only get into nature via the garden. Another referred to a trip into nature as a walk along their road. Walking in the park was mentioned by a few persons. One even mentioned getting out into nature via bus journeys. The importance people put on nature for their wellbeing, and the fact that people referred here to any type of natural environment and not just countryside access, suggests that providing local green spaces is an important part of improving one's living space. There was no difference between men, women and different age groups in terms of the perceived importance of the natural environment.

### 2.3.2 Cultural events and heritage sites

51% of participants mentioned taking part in cultural events or visiting heritage sites. This is rather on the low side compared to other activities that are important to wellbeing.

Examples given included taking part in a May Fair, in local carnivals or in Fun Days. Celebrating St. Patricks Day along with taking part in the Sikh festival or other cultural celebrations was mentioned. Visiting stately homes and gardens was also raised, along with visiting cathedrals or other heritage sites and historic buildings. One respondent said they 'watched stuff on TV about these things' since there was not much going on locally. 'Following politics' also got a mention as well as being part of 'Friends of Reading Abbey,' and having attended the reopening of the ruins. This variety of activities provides some insight into what people see as culture and heritage. Overall, the National Trust got a mention by four out of

forty persons responding to this question. Live music events were mentioned but had not been categorised as ‘culture’. Instead, they had been placed under ‘a night out’.

There was only just a majority of people who felt such things were important to wellness. Almost half were not so sure – some were negative but around 28% were neither hot nor cold. Age and gender made no difference. It was interesting to find that, amongst persons who attended cultural activities (or visited heritage sites) those who felt strongly about the importance of these activities to their wellbeing tended to report less favourably on their location in terms of arts, culture and heritage than those who did not feel strongly about it (they did not rate their overall wellness differently, just their locality). This suggests that the neighbourhoods under review are not perceived as especially culturally and heritage rich. People who are well into the subject are aware of what they are missing. It also suggests that people may become more positive about their location when they get some bonus activities, even if they are not especially into the subject of culture and heritage. Indeed, correlations suggest that this is the case: people who were unconvinced about the importance of cultural activities still rated their location more positively if they had taken part in an event. This is important, as it implies that the opportunity for cultural input can make a *real difference to general feelings about the place a person lives in, whether or not they are into culture*. The same cannot be said of creative activities – involving a person who is not interested in creative activities in a creative endeavour does not make them rate their locality more highly.

### 2.3.3 Creativity

Doing something creative has to do with the arts, and it is therefore interesting to note the variety of activities that are mentioned as falling into this category. Creative activities mentioned included cooking, needlework, gardening, DIY, painting, drawing and colouring, card-making, helping children with creative homework and other crafts or tasks involving assembling things with children, photography, bee keeping, making decorative items for the house or to wear (including making jewellery), writing poetry or stories, organising a women’s group, singing, filmmaking, and conservation work.

Creative activities which included this variety were mentioned by 73% of those interviewed, and were highly appreciated by these as being important to wellness. However, the 27% of persons who did not mention taking part in these things rather rated creative activities as unimportant to their wellness. Although some people mentioned time as a barrier, it could be observed that most people tended to find time for what they believed was important, and so the reason people did not take part in creative activities is rather because, for a minority of persons, such activities were not seen to be important. Men, women and people of every age group were equally likely to be involved in creative activity.

### 2.3.4 Community groups and relative importance of arts/culture/heritage related activities to wellbeing

Of the three sets of activities above, getting into nature was seen to be the most important. 67% of persons said it was important or very important (rating 4 and 5) and only 6% of persons rated it unimportant (rating 1 and 2). Doing something creative was the next most important although 29% did not find it important). Cultural/heritage related activities were third (the same proportion of persons rated it as unimportant as was the case with creative activities, but less people found it to be very important (42% rated it important or very important as opposed to 57% rating creative activities as important or very important).

Having said that, getting involved with other people as a community was seen to be more important than all of these. Only 4% found it unimportant, and 85% found it to be important or very important. Likewise, when people were asked what could be better in terms of the arts, culture and heritage attributes of their location, the overwhelming response was for more activities which people can get involved with together, as a community and even across different age ranges. This suggests that creative and cultural activities that bring people together in such a way that people get to know one another (for example, working on a project together) have more importance to wellbeing than “led from the front” type events in which one is only involved as a spectator. The former builds relationships, which is key to wellbeing. All ages reported group involvement as important, and women were particularly sensitive to these relational issues.

#### 2.4 Barriers to wellness

It has been noted that the ratings of one’s locality is closely related to wellness. It is of interest then to look closer into the barriers to wellness.

Apart from the barriers to participation in specific activities, people were also asked an open question on what else stops them from getting involved in activities that contribute to wellness.

- Anxiety, depression and lack of confidence came out as the foremost reason why people hold back;
- Family care demands came second;
- Money constraints were third;
- Physical disability was a factor;
- Time constraints unrelated to family care were mentioned;
- Lack of motivation to get on and do more was also mentioned, along with along with reduced energy levels mentioned by just a couple of persons in the context of ageing.

It was interesting to note that people who mentioned barriers in terms of time and family care reported in significantly higher on the wellness scale. Keeping busy in productive activity (which includes childcare) is not barrier to wellness! Mentions of ill-health as a barrier were, as may be expected, correlated to lower levels of overall wellness. Money worries also had a weak correlation with a lower sense of wellness.

Barriers to transport were not mentioned when people were asked about barriers to wellness in general, and yet the problem often came up when it came to taking part in one or another specific activity that contributes to wellness. 26% of persons mentioned transport or mobility matters altogether. People were much more likely to mention barriers to transport when they did not have a car. People able to access cars reported in significantly higher on the wellness scale (probably because of its association with other things to do with being well also, such as having positive reciprocal relationships (eating with others)).

Although each of these barriers may affect wellness, and wellness is linked to one’s feelings about one’s locality, none of these barriers directly affected the way the individual reported on the strengths and weaknesses of their locality. It would seem that the perceived quality of a place is not directly affected by health, time pressures, money constraints or transport and mobility issues. Nor is it affected by being able (or not able) to access help (a point discussed later).

#### 2.4.1 How barriers affect involvement in activities that contribute to wellness

The mention of transport and mobility barriers (whether a person had access to a car or not) were weakly correlated to being less involved in group activities, being less likely to get out into nature, being less likely to get to cultural events or heritage sites, and being less likely to go for a night out. People who worked/volunteered were more likely to mention transport problems than those who did not, perhaps because of the absolute necessity of getting around. It would seem that getting out and about is clearly a constraint for people in Reading's less well-off suburbs. Getting to work might be made to happen despite the transport difficulties, but some other activities of importance to wellness are allowed to slide because of mobility barriers.

Mentions of lack of money is weakly associated with eating less healthily, being less likely to take part in group activities or to go for a night out, and being less likely to give to others.

Mentions of ill-health go with unhealthy eating and with taking medicine. Other than that, people with ill-health seem just as likely to take part in activities contributing to wellbeing as anyone else.

Time or family constraints were weakly associated with less partying, less gardening, less creative activity, less taking part in groups, more giving, more eating together with others, healthier eating and less requirement for medicine.

These points indicate that for arts/cultural/heritage events to benefit a community, they need to be local. Cost will also be a factor, since even engagement in the two highest rated of all activities are influenced by cost. Moreover, the vast majority of the cultural/creative activities that people mentioned having been involved with in these localities were very low-cost options.

#### 2.4.2 Getting help in overcoming barriers

People were asked if they could get any help in overcoming the barriers they faced. 60% of persons said yes, and the rest were unsure or said no. No suggestions were made by those who felt they had no one to turn to as to what should be put in place. This suggests that people are not necessarily aware of what they want or what would help. More important is the personal touch - feeling wanted and invited can open up something new that was not necessarily looked for. This is why word of mouth / personal invitation is the main reason why people end up joining a new group.

However, of those accessing help, mention was again made of the importance of meeting people and taking part in joint activities, especially if children could be included in these activities. Added to this is the value of talking therapy/support groups which again involve just being with other people. These were seen to be 'confidence building'. Mentions of this 'being with people' far exceeded mentions of help from specific advice centres, though these were important to some. This relates to the point made earlier about cultural activities that bring people together on a project being of particular value to wellness.

Another important source of help mentioned was medical help. Also being provided with access to amenities that help wellbeing. Online support networks and information got a couple of mentions too.

Persons who were able to mention a source of help tended to be people who were part of a group (either a workplace group or a community group, both of which make you better networked). They were also more likely to take part in culture or heritage activities and they

were weakly associated with being more likely to get out in nature. Connections clearly matter, perhaps in order to know what is going on and to access an activity together with others. Indeed, people who were part of organisations were more likely to attend cultural events. Creative activities however are not necessarily linked to these connections with other people. People can get involved with creative activities with or without others.

## 2.5 What does Art, Culture or Heritage mean to you?

Art was seen as the outworking of creativity. This can involve one's own creativity, or looking at the product of someone else's creativity. Below is a box showing all the different ways that people responded to the question, what does 'art' mean to you. Almost twice as many people spoke of their own creativity as opposed to observing someone else's – 'doing' rather than spectating.

### ART

- how you are creative/see things
- pictures/paintings
- museums, gallery
- pictures on a wall
- going to museums/galleries
- is hugely important to my therapy
- paintings/drawings
- means being creative
- means meeting and talking to other people
- being creative
- creativity and using the mind, listening to your inner self
- way of expressing a culture
- having access to galleries, museums, protecting old buildings
- fine art and artists
- creating "making something beautiful"
- pictures in a gallery (hospital art)
- expressive, helps create an atmosphere
- art is relaxing

When talking about culture, interviewees were likely to talk about the way that people relate to one another and conduct themselves in life. The more creative and artistic side of 'culture' came out more when people were asked if about the cultural events they had been involved with. The box below shows all the different ways that people responded to the question of what 'culture' means to them.

### CULTURE

- getting involved with people
- part of being Scottish
- sense of belonging: how my mum brought me up: something passed by generations
- different backgrounds/diverse people
- Caribbean carnival

- learning about other faiths & traditions
- the way of life and the environment
- being more aware of things that enrich life
- how people live
- people's habits and priorities
- background/where you come from
- different ways of life
- connection with other people e.g. family
- our humanity
- music and plays
- like history how we lived
- how people live and interact

The word 'heritage' was much more likely to get people thinking about the past. Just a few persons expressed how these things lead into what we have and are today. The box below lists all the ways that people responded to the question, what does 'heritage' mean to you.

#### HERITAGE

- the past
- buildings. Our legacy - past history
- our history. How people lived
- past history. "proud of our history" but labour v conservative
- older buildings/monarchy/the past
- family background where you came from
- background
- preserving the past, celebrating past achievements
- where you are from and history people past
- means background - historical places, castles - love to visit one day
- Scottish dancing, music
- knowledge passed from generation to generation
- value all people's background/origins
- legacy/history
- family heirlooms e.g. ring
- my background, ancestry, my blood
- history, roots old culture
- stimulating ways of History
- something from the past
- history
- the past and keeping the cultural
- where we come from
- history and past - how people enjoyed life e.g. folk dancing
- history of country
- our past - where we live
- our history.
- history. Past building

One person summarised all three: “Art, culture and heritage are all important for a well - rounded community.” One person could not bear to answer such big questions in such a small space.

It is worth referring again to the different activities people mentioned to when they were asked about the creative and cultural activities they were involved with. This gives further insight into what people think of as art, and to what people think of when asking about cultural or heritage related activities. It also reveals the sort of activities that are presently accessible to people in Reading’s suburbs. A summary of the range of responses are duplicated in the boxes below.

<p>Creative activities carried out by respondents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cooking</li> <li>• needlework</li> <li>• gardening</li> <li>• DIY</li> <li>• painting, drawing and colouring</li> <li>• card-making</li> <li>• helping children with creative homework and other crafts or tasks involving assembling things with children</li> <li>• photography</li> <li>• bee keeping</li> <li>• making decorative items for the house or to wear (including making jewellery)</li> <li>• writing poetry or stories</li> <li>• organising a women’s group</li> <li>• singing</li> <li>• filmmaking</li> <li>• conservation work.</li> </ul>	<p>Cultural or heritage related activities carried out by respondents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• taking part in a May Fair</li> <li>• local carnivals or Fun Days</li> <li>• celebrating St. Patricks Day</li> <li>• taking part in the Sikh festival and other cultures</li> <li>• visiting stately homes and gardens</li> <li>• visiting cathedrals or other heritage sites and historic buildings.</li> <li>• watching stuff on TV about these things</li> <li>• following politics</li> <li>• being part of ‘Friends of Reading Abbey,’ and attending the reopening of the ruins</li> <li>• live music event (which was mentioned under ‘night out’ rather than ‘culture’)</li> </ul>
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It can be seen that creativity was expressed in a wide range of domains, few of which involved high cost. It is also interesting to observe the recognition given to creative expression even in domains that others persons might regard as a chore (such as helping with homework, DIY or gardening). It gives a wide and positive perspective on one’s scope for creativity.

Under cultural events, very little mention at all was made of attending professional cultural performances such as the theatre. Cost and mobility are one known reason for this. Such events are also clearly not a ‘norm’ for most of those interviewed. Most of the culture related events mentioned were local and community run. Some mention was made however of visiting buildings and places of historic/cultural and artistic interest.

Finally, people were asked, in relation to their local area, what goes well and what could be better. The exact responses people gave to this question are duplicated below.

What goes well	What could be better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good community</li> <li>• When community comes together, neighbours are friends</li> <li>• Church festivals</li> <li>• Community activities</li> <li>• Good transport connections to London and other cities</li> <li>• A local place - Abbey Rooms (old building)</li> <li>• Quiet and peaceful. Friendly</li> <li>• Close-knit community, friendliness, support</li> <li>• Children's school is great!</li> <li>• Reading has some great history and some good museums and cultural centres. Rising Sun Institute, Global café etc. Open air cinema (although too expensive!)</li> <li>• Excellent library DVD's computer use, very active groups, toy library</li> <li>• Happy with it as it is, keep it as it is. Keep it as a community</li> <li>• It's a diverse area - good as it is</li> <li>• There is a network of strong support and help in my community but it is not "art", "Culture" or "heritage". It's invisible and not recognised - this is our inheritance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving more for the kids to do</li> <li>• I don't want to be choosy but maybe in future I would like a garden of my own</li> <li>• Crime- anti social behaviour, drugs, scooters, our secondary schools.</li> <li>• Kids pressurised to pass tests "joy of learning knocked out of them" e.g. kids learn grammar but not creative writing!</li> <li>• Children misbehaving</li> <li>• There are a lot of things going on in Reading. Not enough classical concerts.</li> <li>• Support, friendlier</li> <li>• Make sure people know more about local history</li> <li>• More for older people</li> <li>• I'm moving to another area. Nothing going on locally.</li> <li>• Use community centre for art displays and a heritage centre</li> <li>• Being more open to everyone - all backgrounds</li> <li>• More community activities that don't cost too much. Upkeep of play areas for kids</li> <li>• See more ethnic backgrounds</li> <li>• Family activities x 2</li> <li>• No events or art people just leaflets</li> <li>• Nothing available - family, in London have tons of things going on. Lack cookery (parents &amp; kids)</li> <li>• People should be more motivated to do things together "people are more insular these days"</li> <li>• Help with English</li> <li>• Too much rubbish - too many police interventions needed</li> <li>• Too much police</li> <li>• Community drama/theatre groups - more of please. Better use of community facilities for range of activities</li> <li>• Recognise all diverse groups/some left</li> <li>• More advertising of things available at schools and nurseries</li> <li>• No idea! Courses or event advertised at Playbarn</li> <li>• Not enough money available</li> <li>• More sports available especially for younger age groups.</li> <li>• Things should be more collective - across ages for instance e.g. drama and dance. People need more groups to combat isolation</li> <li>• Children's centres and clinics could be more clean and updated</li> <li>• Additional funding and support from local council</li> <li>• More services</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More stuff for kids to do</li> <li>• Communicating what's being done to restore and protect Reading heritage (Abbey Ruins, Forbury Gardens etc) and what Reading people can visit to find out more about our history. Too many pubs/clubs in one area in town. Not enough for younger people/middle aged etc (e.g. bowling alley)</li> <li>• Lots going on but summer only really</li> <li>• Massive room for improvement in Reading - need for more community coming together. More support from council please. Mostly "underground" not supported by council</li> <li>• More like community centre museum.</li> <li>• Could advertise better</li> <li>• More activities. Especially gardens from past history.</li> <li>• More people should be involved. Get out of their own groups</li> </ul>
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A strong appreciation of/desire for activities came through that bring people together as a community. Activities that include different age groups or provide for children got many mentions. Perhaps this was seen also as a counterforce to the anti-social behaviour and social divides that were mentioned by some as being a problem.

Some of the problem is people just not knowing what is out there - getting the information to people is important. Some people said that having the council back/endorse community run activities would help. Knowing stuff is out there is one thing, but knowing it is really for YOU and that it is a recommended activity is another.

### 3. Conclusion

This study looks at how people in Whitley and other Reading suburbs engage with Arts, Culture and Heritage. It looks at how this engagement is associated with wellness, comparing to other activities and their association with wellness. It also considers the barriers faced to engagement in these various activities.

Four of the activities contributing to wellness were directly related to the arts, culture and heritage. Listed in order of their contribution to wellbeing (as rated by the interviewees) these are:

1. getting involved with community activities;
2. getting out in nature;
3. doing something creative; and
4. taking part in cultural/heritage events or visiting cultural/heritage sites

The importance of collective activity and 'doing' is striking. Arts related events that bring the community together and foster meaningful interaction between its members are seen to have a greater impact on wellbeing than attendance at one-off events. Women were particularly sensitive to these relational dynamics. Overall, being part of a community group was seen as one of the greatest contributors to welfare, comparable to healthy eating, having work and being part of giving, reciprocal relationships. Even amongst those who did not attend a group

themselves (time, cost and mobility were barriers), very few people thought that belonging to a community group was unimportant.

The vast majority of persons felt that getting out into nature was important too, whether they had access to the natural environment themselves or not. People gave examples ranging from being in the garden to walking in the park to joining a coach trip to the seaside. Men, women and people of all ages were equally likely to rate this as important to wellbeing. Higher barriers to access, particularly mobility barriers related to transport and to ill health and also time and cost factors, meant that less people were able to take part in this activity than the numbers attending community groups, even when they felt that getting into nature was important to their wellbeing.

There were few barriers to doing something creative, and over 70% of persons interviewed said they took part in creative activities themselves. These persons also rated creative activity as being important to their wellbeing. The variety of creative activity mentioned was huge: 'art' is a broad concept. The persons who did not report doing anything creative had no sense that creative activity added to their welfare however. This, together with the lack of barriers to creative activity suggests that where people do not do art, they do not do it because they do not want to, not because they cannot.

Taking part in cultural activities (local fairs and festivals were particularly mentioned) or visiting heritage sites were only mentioned by half of those interviewed, and there was a wide range of opinion as to whether or not such activities actually contribute much to wellbeing. This difference of opinion was not related to gender or to age. Although those who felt cultural activities were important to wellbeing were more likely to do them, some people who were quite ambivalent still took part in cultural activities (and felt their locality to be more advantaged in consequence), whilst a few who found them important did not.

Those who wanted to take part in cultural activities but did not have the opportunity tended to be very frustrated. Indeed, with all of the above activities, taking part or not taking part had no direct correlation to wellbeing, but feeling that an activity is important to wellbeing and not being able to take part was correlated to significantly lower levels of wellbeing. Wellbeing is most enhanced then by helping people to do what is important to them.

Cost, mobility and getting to hear about activities and to feel they are personally relevant are significant barriers to participation in cultural events. Cultural activities intended to benefit people in Reading's less well-off suburbs therefore need to be local, low cost and 'owned' by local networks who will take on the personal advertising. Although health (especially mental health) is a barrier to wellbeing, there was no evidence to suggest that people suffering in this way are excluded from cultural and creative activities, except in the sense that if their social connections were poor, they are less likely to hear about activities. Time is also a limiting factor, especially for those with childcare duties, but it was found that people tended to find time for the things that are really important to them. Creative, hands-on activities and community cultural gatherings rarely have to exclude children.

People are more familiar with events in which they are actively involved rather than events which they might attend as a spectator, and they benefit most from events which involve regular group connections.

Wellbeing was closely associated with the way people felt about the place they live in. Specifically, interviewees were asked to rate how advantaged or disadvantaged their locality was on a scale of 1-10 in terms of the arts, culture and heritage. The average rating given to the communities interviewed was 5.7 out of 10; neither advantaged nor disadvantaged. People rated their local place more positively when they had access to nature, and when they had taken part in cultural activities (even if they did not feel these to be important to wellness) and when they had positive reciprocal relations with others. Men were more positive about their locality than women, possibly because women are particularly sensitive to some relational tensions that were mentioned.

Providing local green spaces, providing local cultural events, providing creative groups for people to interact in over time and providing access (low-cost organised transport in particular) to the natural environment and to heritage sites further away all appear to have a significant impact on the way people rate their locality. Where these opportunities are disseminated through existing social networks they are more likely to be heard about and engaged with by potential beneficiaries.

## Appendix: Questionnaire

Interview by.....Date.....Form No.....Location.....

**Age range:** 11 – 20, 21 – 30, 31 – 40, 41 – 50, 51 - 60, 61 +

**Gender:** Male Female Other..... **Do you have frequent access to a car?** Yes No

**Residence** (start of post code only) ..... **Ethnicity** (self-described) .....

**1. Do you do any of the following, and how important do you think each activity is for your wellness? (on a scale of 1-5 with 1=not at all important and 5=very important)**

	Yes	No/ rarely	Would like to but can't (please explain why not)	Importance to your wellness (scale of 1-5)
Eat healthy				
Exercise				
Take medication				
Share food or drink with family/friends				
Learn new things Examples?				
Work in paid job/volunteer				
Pray/meditate/think positive				
'Shopping therapy' (buy stuff!)				
Get involved in a community group/club/ support group/ religious group Which?				
Give to/ do things for other people (and receive back)				
Do something creative What?...				
Do gardening				
Get out in nature in other ways Where?				
Take part cultural/heritage events or visit cultural/heritage sites Which?...				
Party/go for a night out				
Time out alone/ rest				
Other (what?)...				

