

**Culture and Leisure Review Committee  
Policy Review 2008 – 2009**

**A Place to Play – A Review of Music Venues in Sunderland  
Draft Final Report**

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# 1 Foreword from the Chairman of the Committee

On behalf of the Culture and Leisure Review Committee I am delighted to publish this report. I would like to thank all those who participated in the process, particularly those who came to present evidence at the committee, focus groups or who met on our visits to venues across Sunderland and the region.

Everybody can enjoy music be it listening to a favourite group, attending a concert or playing an instrument and performing with a group. Music in most cases makes people feel good and calm and it is this emotional hook that draws most people to experience music.

Sunderland is developing into a hotbed for new and emerging talent and bands like the Futureheads and The week That Was are gaining national and international reputations. In 2009 Sunderland will also play host to high profile events featuring Take That and Oasis at the Stadium of Light which will see thousands of people travelling to the city for these gigs.

Sunderland City Council has also recently launched its first music strategy with an aim of working towards recognition for Sunderland as a Music City.



*Jim Scott*

Councillor James Scott, Chair of the Culture and Leisure Review Committee

## **2 Executive Summary**

- 2.1 At the start of the 2008/09 municipal year Members of the Culture and Leisure Review Committee agreed to review music venues as part of the new music strategy.
- 2.2 The title of the review was agreed as 'A Place to Play – A Review of Music Venues in Sunderland' and its objectives were agreed as:
- 2.2.1 To build a picture of current performance venues in Sunderland for all types of music rehearsal and performance and add to the Council's evidence base in this area.
- 2.2.2 To determine the audience potential for additional performance spaces including specialist music venues in and around the city.
- 2.2.3 To identify the major barriers to music performance and rehearsal.
- 2.2.4 To add evidence and research to the Sunderland Music Strategy and help Sunderland work towards recognition as a Music City.
- 2.3 The approach to this work included a range of research methods namely:
- Desktop research
  - Use of secondary research e.g. surveys
  - Evidence presented by key stakeholders
  - Evidence from members of the public at meetings or focus groups
  - Interviews
  - Site visits
- 2.4 The review made the following overall conclusions:
- 2.4.1 The Culture and Leisure Review Committee have seen and experienced, throughout this policy review the passion, dedication and hard work of performers, promoters, venue owners and music lovers in Sunderland and around the region. Throughout the review it has been seen that it is important to develop a vibrant and lively music scene to nurture new and rising talent and allow musicians their first experiences of playing live. The committee has seen excellent examples across the region and in Sunderland of dedicated people running live venues and providing music events for the public. The new music strategy builds on this and provides a framework from which the city can work towards its recognition as a Music City.
- 2.4.2 The issue of a new music venue for Sunderland has been discussed several times during the review investigations and it seems that it is perhaps not that Sunderland needs a bright shiny new building but a recognised and identifiable music venue. Throughout the review process certain venues cropped up again and again as places that were good music venues and it is this recognition that needs to be developed and nurtured for a venue in Sunderland. Success also lies in the development of other associated services for a venue's sustainability including making it a place to frequent at lunchtimes and on evenings even when no event is planned.

- 2.4.3 Other successful venues have developed an holistic approach incorporating rehearsal spaces, recording facilities and providing musicians with services for their journey through the formative stages of practice and rehearsal to live performance and finally to recording their own material. This can provide young musicians with the training, resources and guidance required to progress and develop their talent. The review also found that rehearsal spaces were in high demand and venues across the region offering such facilities had seen them well used by musicians of all ages and styles. So a venue for music performance can be about so much more and providing other services can help to ensure the sustainability of a venue and help towards its recognition as a place to play.
- 2.4.4 Potential audiences need to know what is going on in the city. It is important that knowledge of events reach as wide a market as possible and this could mean exploring a variety of media to ensure the best fit for Sunderland. Looking at websites, directories of services, poster boards and event magazines are some of the possible ways mentioned during the review by witnesses. Advertising and awareness raising is crucial for audience development within the city and also in creating recognition for venues as positive places to play. Good feedback from musicians can soon spread via internet blogs and music dedicated websites and create a knock-on effect. Also if there was a centralised ticketing area within the city this could help to stimulate and increase the size of audiences going to gigs. It is important to make events easy and accessible for anyone to attend.
- 2.4.5 Work is already underway to enhance the cultural and visitor attractiveness of Sunderland city centre through investment in the City Library and related facilities. Proposals to invest in these facilities, in order to enhance the city centre's cultural and visitor attractiveness can only help in developing a distinct identity and reputation for the city. It will also help to change the way people view and use the city centre and create an environment that is conducive to creative industries and be a place where people want to spend their time and money. The ambitious project will see Sunderland work with partners to ensure a joined up approach which aligns itself with current planning policy, strategies and also maximises the opportunities and resources available.
- 2.4.6 It was also evident from the investigations carried out that any initiatives in music development need to have a collective and coordinated approach across the city. It is important that everyone works together for the collective purpose of improving access to gigs and music performance in Sunderland. Is it the sole responsibility of the local authority to develop and create performance spaces? While no one can argue that the local authority has a lead role to play in helping to develop and realise the potential of the city in relation to music there are other principal stakeholders who can also play their part. The Sunderland Music Forum, Sunnyside Partnership, Sunderland University and the Sunderland Heritage Forum to name but a few all have a part to play along with local projects, bands and the music going people of the city. It is important that all the initiatives and drives to improve access to music in Sunderland compliment each other and provide a complete experience from gig listing through live performance to going home.
- 2.5 The following recommendations are made as a result:

**Recommendation 1:** To identify potential sites for poster points in and around the city and also to identify the resources to purchase poster point.

- Recommendation 2:** To undertake research into best practice with regard to the management and maintenance of poster sites.
- Recommendation 3:** To explore the development of a promoter's network for Sunderland including other forms of entertainment like dance and theatre.
- Recommendation 4:** To identify existing and emerging promoters and look to develop support mechanisms within the city for promoters.
- Recommendation 5:** To continue to ensure that music plays a prominent part in festivals and flagship events and that relationships with the local music scene are further enhanced.
- Recommendation 6:** To support the development of music with both young people, adults and professionals through the development of Arts Centre Washington as a music venue.
- Recommendation 7:** To hold discussions with youth development groups to consider the issues around transport for young people to access music events within the city centre.
- Recommendation 8:** To identify and develop a Sunderland directory of rehearsal and performance spaces for performers, promoters and audiences.
- Recommendation 9:** To explore the notion of a centralised ticket sale facility for the city.
- Recommendation 10:** To raise awareness of the current marketing avenues available to promote music events and to explore a variety of different methods including the use of new technology.
- Recommendation 11:** To raise awareness of existing venues through the development, production and distribution of a Sunderland Music Directory.
- Recommendation 12:** To continue to explore opportunities for a small to medium sized venue within the current regeneration of the city centre.
- Recommendation 13:** To raise the profile of the diverse range of music venues currently available in and around Sunderland that already cater for a variety of music genres.
- Recommendation 14:** To develop a venue network for the city that provides support and assists venues in supporting themselves.
- Recommendation 15:** To highlight and signpost Springwell Village Hall as a model of good practice as a local community venue.
- Recommendation 16:** To support the refurbishment of Holy Trinity by the Churches Conservation Trust through partnership working that realises the potential of the venue as a hub of creative activity.
- Recommendation 17:** To continue to offer advice, support and information to the University Big Band.

**Recommendation 18:** To identify resources within the City Council to address issues identified throughout the review report that will develop the infrastructure required for music to grow and develop in Sunderland in line with the overarching music strategy for Sunderland.

**Recommendation 19:** To look at the creation of a music development group, that includes the key music stakeholders within the city, to ensure a coordinated and joined up approach to the development and implementation of the recommendations of this review and the wider music strategy delivery plan.

**Recommendation 20:** To devise a delivery plan including key actions, milestones and costings to monitor progress on the review report and its recommendations, that will sit within the wider delivery plan for music development in Sunderland.

### 3 The Review Process and Scope

3.1 In undertaking a scrutiny review a number of stages are involved in the process and these stages are broadly defined as follows:

<b>Stage 1 Scope</b>	The initial stage of the review identifies the background, issues, potential outcomes and timetable for the review.
<b>Stage 2 Investigate</b>	The Committee gathers evidence using a variety of tools and techniques and arranges visits where appropriate.
<b>Stage 3 Analyse</b>	The key trends and issues are highlighted from the evidence gathered by the Committee.
<b>Stage 4 Clarify</b>	The Committee discusses and identifies the principal messages of the review from the work undertaken.
<b>Stage 5 Recommend</b>	The Committee formulates and agrees realistic recommendations.
<b>Stage 6 Report</b>	Draft and final reports are prepared based on the evidence, findings and recommendations.
<b>Stage 7 Monitor</b>	The Committee monitors recommendations on a regularly agreed basis.

3.2 Members agreed that the review would consider the following issues related to music and venue provision:

- What are the current provisions in relation to venues and rehearsal rooms?
- Who are the providers?
- Are all venues used to their full potential?
- Is there a potential for new venues and performing spaces?
- Are all music genres catered for?
- What is a specialist music venue?
- Is there audience potential for specialist music venues?
- What part can or do local communities, businesses and infrastructures play?
- Are venues, rooms and events adequately advertised and do they reach the intended market?
- What are the experiences of audiences, performers and promoters of current Sunderland venues?
- What barriers exist to music performance and practice in Sunderland?
- What is happening elsewhere and what is working?

3.3 The title of the review was agreed as 'A Place to Play – A Review of Music Venues in Sunderland' and its objectives were agreed as:

3.3.1 To build a picture of current performance venues in Sunderland for all types of music rehearsal and performance and add to the Council's evidence base in this area.

- 3.3.2 To determine the audience potential for additional performance spaces including specialist music venues in and around the city.
- 3.3.3 To identify the major barriers to music performance and rehearsal.
- 3.3.4 To add evidence and research to the Sunderland Music Strategy and help Sunderland work towards recognition as a Music City.
- 3.4 A number of speakers were invited to give evidence to the Committee, two visits were arranged for Members to see venues both around Sunderland and also neighbouring localities, a number of focus groups were held and a number of individual interviews were conducted by the Review Co-ordinator.

## 4 Approach

- 4.1 The approach to this work included a range of research methods namely:
- Desktop research – review of relevant documentation including Sunderland City Council’s 5 year Music Strategy.
  - Interviews – with key individuals both internally and externally
  - Focus groups – with key individuals both internally and externally
  - Presentations at committee
  - Site visits
- 4.2 All participants were assured that their individual comments would not be identified in the final report, ensuring that the fullest possible answers were given.
- 4.3 Time restrictions did not allow large scale surveys to be carried out for this research, therefore it should be noted that many of the statements made are based on qualitative research i.e. interviews and focus groups. As many people as possible were interviewed in an attempt to gain a cross section of views, however it is inevitable from this type of research that some of the statements made may not be representative of everyone’s views. All statements in this report are made based on information received from more than one source, unless it is clarified in the text that it is an individual view. Opinions held by a small number of people may or may not be representative of others’ views but are worthy of consideration nevertheless.

## 5 Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 Music plays an important part in many people's lives and can often transcend the barriers of age, race, sex or class. From heavy metal to jazz and hip hop to classical, music caters for all tastes and personalities. The mp3 player has changed the landscape of how we listen to music. The first truly commercial recordings of music were on easily breakable 78 rpm shellac discs, with one track per side. These were replaced by more flexible vinyl, which offered the 45 rpm single – again one track per side – the EP or extended play which had two tracks per side, and the long player or LP, which ran at 33 rpm and offered several tracks on each side. From this we moved to the cassette tape, which gave entire albums and then the compact disc. The beauty of the CD was that it could contain even more music, not just an album, but at times two albums on a single disc. More, after all, was better – people bought them like crazy and the music business flourished.
- 5.1.2 MP3 music players are the next stage that allowed people to take music on the go with them. Of course, those devices and now personal digital music players have the effect of isolating people from the rest of the world behind ear buds. Music downloads are now part of the landscape some are legal, many were not, and the music business complained that pirating music was killing the business (just as they claimed home taping was once killing music), because CDs were no longer selling in the quantities they once did. Music downloads have taken the process of buying music full circle, even going past the point where it began with buying a shellac disc containing two tracks to simply downloading a track at a time. To download music has made the concept of “album filler” a thing of the past.
- 5.1.3 With the rise in music downloads it is little wonder that live performances are becoming the major source of revenue for performers once the preserve of the album or CD. In fact the UK live music scene is the fastest growing part of the music industry and recent statistics published by Creative & Cultural Skills show that of the 95,000 people working in the music industry the largest sector is in live performance, which accounts for 42,480 (or 45%) of the workforce. Add to this that royalties collected from public performances on behalf of composers, songwriters and performers rose from £6.4 million in 1999 to £14.7 million in 2005 according to the Performing Rights Society (PRS) and it is clear to see that there is a growing live scene in the UK.
- 5.1.4 The large scale music festival in the UK is also increasing and making a contribution not only to the live music scene but also the nation's economy. The Glastonbury Festival has grown to over 30 times its original size and Reading, Leeds and T in the Park continue to boom alongside newer events. Mendip District Council estimated that the Glastonbury Festival impacts on the world economy to the tune of £73 million. A study in 2006, by Perth and Kinross Council, also revealed that the overall value of Scotland's biggest music Festival, T in the Park, had increased to £18 million.
- 5.1.5 Sunderland City Council has developed its first 5-year music strategy which looks at Sunderland as a whole and how it can work and develop towards the title of a music city. Music Cities in the UK include London, Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Cardiff, Newcastle/Gateshead and Leeds. Music City

lists tend to be dominated by cities from the UK and the USA and there appears to be no formal awarding body for the title of 'Music City'. It boils down to the view of promotional or tourist agencies and how they present information, perceptions in the music media and the nightlife and ambience that a city exudes. Although most cities that are recognised or labelled as being a music city do have some common themes:

- A range of dedicated venues for all types of music performance
- A music industry supply chain
- Strong musical education at all levels
- Music development and networking strategies
- A range and diversity of music
- Opportunities for music in the community.

5.1.6 The underground music scene in Sunderland is recognised as a hotbed for new and emerging talent and has seen such bands as The Futureheads, The Week That Was and The Golden Virgins gain national recognition. Sunderland also plays host to the Sunderland Big Band competition which attracts participants from the North-West, Yorkshire and the North-East. 'The City Sings' is a choral development programme which holds an annual schools choral competition in the Empire Theatre and Sunderland Symphony Orchestra gave its first performance in February 2000 and now regularly plays at Holy Trinity in the East End and Sunderland Minster. The Davy Lamp Folk Club in Washington has a national profile and won the BBC Radio 2 Folk Club of the Year Award in 2001.

5.1.7 One of the key points of the Sunderland 5-year music strategy was to look at music venues across the city and provide an analysis of music venues and audience potential. This review allowed Members to look at music venues in Sunderland and across the region from a number of different viewpoints. Members took part in visits, held focus groups and invited speakers to perform and address the Committee.

## **5.2 Focus Group – The Promoters**

5.2.1 The first of a number of focus groups was arranged for 30<sup>th</sup> October 2008 with venue promoters and owners. A number of promoters and owners were invited to attend the focus group and discuss with members of the review committee their own experiences of music performance and venues in Sunderland.

5.2.2 Members were informed that all music venues were run in a very similar way and that venues needed a good location, decent facilities, recognition and good transport links to ensure that people would go and in Sunderland a good venue would be ideally located in the city centre. One off events like the Radio 1 event will always attract huge crowds due to the calibre of performer. People will travel for this type of event, but on a regular week in week out basis the city centre would be the ideal. The promoters also reported that it was easier to promote well known bands as they sell themselves and it was the less well known bands that required more promoting and venues like Independent and The Campus were good venues for live music.

5.2.3 During the focus group session promoters recognised that in any city there was a need for a range of venues in varying sizes to cater for all types of band and music performance and that good venues in Sunderland already included The Empire, Independent and The Campus. The Stadium of Light was noted as a

fantastic venue but only for the really big bands, however it does help put Sunderland on the music tour map with other groups and promoters. Many venues in Sunderland are pubs and these are commercial concerns and only interested in profits ultimately through bar takings. The focus group reported that the City needed something different and that a lot of bands in Sunderland wanted to play venues of a certain calibre.

- 5.2.4 In discussing the possibilities of a new venue for the city it was noted that there would be a need to look at how long it would take to have something in the city, and the need to take a long term view over the next 20 years. It was also seen as important to have satellite venues to any main venue and good established transport links. Any new venue needed to be multi-purpose and able to cater for pop/rock, choral, acoustic and various other music performance styles as well as being accessible and affordable to all potential audiences within the city to ensure a sustained usage.
- 5.2.5 Sunderland audiences already travel to Newcastle to see bands play and the focus group identified that Sunderland had a potentially larger catchment area. The Stadium of Light gigs featuring Oasis and Take That would also ensure good publicity for the city. Promoters all agreed that Sunderland needed to build a reputation as a place to play and any new venue could not open and immediately be a success it would take time to build a reputation as a venue and develop contacts before gaining recognition and success. The Cluny in Newcastle is a good example and this has taken 15 years to develop recognition but is now reaping the rewards.
- 5.2.6 The ease of a band or performer getting a gig in Sunderland all depends on the type/size of venue required. It is very easy to play a small venue as there are a number of such venues, such as pubs and bars, so much so that performers can pick and choose where they play; ultimately it is the quality that suffers. There is not a network of support for promoters. It can be difficult to promote certain genres. The White Room promoted jazz performers for a number of years and these events were totally reliant on the city's overseas students to keep it going. For certain types of music full venues can not be guaranteed.
- 5.2.7 One of the major barriers for music promoters is getting information about gigs out to potential audiences and the costs associated with any promotion is a major factor. The difficulty for younger groups pre-18 to performing and watching live is that so much of this happens in bars, clubs and pubs which limits the choice for younger people. Schools can offer the opportunity for young people to practice and perform music. School halls are purpose built to play music however no 'cred' or kudos for playing in their own school and really the desire is to play somewhere different and trendier. The only dedicated city centre practice space is The Bunker and the effects of the credit crunch and facilities in schools are having an adverse reaction. Particularly with young bands cost and access to rehearsal facilities is important and will simply move these bands out of the city as more and more schools open to the community.

#### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

- 5.2.8 Question: Is there a healthy audience in Sunderland for music?  
Answer: There is a demand for music and gigs, but again this needs to be accessible with good transport links. Also the city can be perceived as a no-go

area for older people on an evening. Need to develop a wider audience base that provides choices for the older and younger music goer alike.

5.2.9 Question: How easy is it to advertise music gigs in Sunderland?

Answer: The Sunderland Echo does not do enough to promote gigs and music events in Sunderland. It is very difficult to get listing in the Sunderland Echo or Magazines. Also could have a poster-point in city centre to promote live music and gigs to allow bands to post adverts about future gigs in the city. These have been successfully used in Liverpool, Leeds and London (see Appendix to this report). This could be administered by the Sunderland Music Forum to ensure that it is not misused but would provide a focal point for music gigs in the city. The Potential to advertise gigs in local libraries, tourist information centres and Sunderland Museums is something that could be explored by the review committee along with other mediums including council publications and website.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** To identify potential sites for poster points in and around the city and also to identify the resources to purchase poster point.

**Recommendation 2:** To undertake research into best practice with regard to the management and maintenance of poster sites.

**Recommendation 3:** To explore the development of a promoter's network for Sunderland including other forms of entertainment like dance and theatre.

## 5.3 The Cornshed Sisters

5.3.1 As part of the review process and to assist in the evidence gathering process a number of music performers were invited to the committee to provide a cross section of music styles from bands playing in and around Sunderland. These groups also shared their experiences of performing in Sunderland and other parts of the region with the committee and assisted the review to gain an understanding of the differing barriers that can be presented by the nature of different musical performing styles.

5.3.2 The Cornshed Sisters are an unsigned folk group who perform a combination of traditional songs and contemporary arrangements. They perform regularly in small venues across the North East and also at outdoor festivals. The Cornshed Sisters appeared at Cliffe Park this summer as part of the Sunderland Live programme. The Cornshed Sisters comprise Jennie Redmond (vocals, guitar and ukulele), Cath Stephens (vocal and guitar), Liz Corney (Vocals and piano) and Marie Nixon (Vocals and guitar). The group have a keen interest in the development of music in Sunderland. The Cornshed Sisters attended the Culture and Leisure Review Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2008 where they performed three songs followed by discussions with the members.

5.3.3 The group explained that they had played a lot of venues in Newcastle like The Head of Steam, Cumberland Arms and The Cluny but had also played the Davy Lamb Folk Club, White Room and Independent in Sunderland so had a fair knowledge of playing gigs in the region. The Cornshed Sisters stated that The Cluny in Newcastle was their idea of a good venue as it was not just a live music venue but had other facilities. It was a place to go and listen to a live band but

also had other areas of the venue where audiences could go to escape the music. It was not a nightclub but a venue that is used all the time it serves food and hot drinks and also is a place that older people frequent too. Members were informed that the audience and music scene had been developed at The Cluny and it was successful because it had a strong programme of events, a 'badge of trust' and a good relationship with performers. It was also willing to take some risks, was reasonably priced and makes people feel like it is a special night out.

5.3.4 Sunderland as a place to play has some way to go according to the group, there appears to be a lack of audience in Sunderland which may be down to habitat or space to play. Audiences are also unreliable which makes it difficult for venues as they need to be assured that they can make money, and this is perhaps a regional issue as Newcastle ticket sales are often the poorest for national tours of groups/bands. The Ouseburn Valley area of Newcastle is a particularly strong area for playing as the venues seem to know how to promote gigs and get good audiences. These tend to be smaller venues that attract around 100/200 people and generally these are the types of venue that the Cornshed Sisters would play. It is often difficult to get people to go to Sunderland. It is fair to say that people will travel to Newcastle to attend music gigs but it seems more difficult to get people to travel to Sunderland.

5.3.5 The Cornshed Sisters also noted that there was scope for a new venue but need to look at creating the demand for such a place. The last thing Sunderland needed was an academy or Sage. Any new venue needs to meet the wants of Sunderland audiences and needs to look at a modular concept that can accommodate music, theatre, dance and other genres. In looking at creating demand important that daytime usage of facility is not overlooked. If people go there during the day to eat, socialise get a cup of coffee then more likely to go there at night too. Also can help self publicity as more potential audiences will see what events are coming soon or taking place.

5.3.6 Having played 4 or 5 gigs in Sunderland the group still only know of one promoter, but there must be others. There is an issue about developing promoters and the promotion of live gigs in Sunderland. There seems to be no collective approach to putting live music on in the city. Bigger local bands can play both Sunderland and Newcastle and twice as many will attend the Newcastle gig and the reason is it is not as well promoted. Busker Nights put on by local pubs/venues are good but bands don't get paid and once you have done this – what next? There is nothing else supporting this. Audiences are often unengaged with the music scene and Sunderland needs to look at audience development this needs to be strengthened and coordinated rather than being so random. Festivals and 'flagship' events are good but can be detached from the local music scene and it is important that a thriving scene is developed.

### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

5.3.7 Question: Is there a demand for folk music or other music genres in the city?  
Answer: Folk is very much a niche area of music and the venues we play are not predominantly known for folk music. We also tend to play with groups/bands from other genres. The Cumberland Arms has a strong folk scene but this would not be useful to Sunderland as the market is too much of a niche. In looking at a new venue need to look at The Cluny model and the skills and expertise they have. Any successful venue needs to be modular in order to be able to change to accommodate and adapt different genres and styles of music performance.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 4:** To identify existing and emerging promoters and look to develop support mechanisms within the city for promoters.

**Recommendation 5:** To continue to ensure that music plays a prominent part in festivals and flagship events and that relationships with the local music scene are further enhanced.

### 5.4 Focus Group – Young People & The Oxclose Music Project

5.4.1 The latest of these focus groups was arranged for 17<sup>th</sup> November 2008 with young people from the Oxclose Music Project in Washington. The committee were invited to Oxclose Community School to see the project and discuss with young people their experiences of Sunderland venues, music performance and attendance.

5.4.2 The project began in early 1990 when Sean Taylor went back to his old school (Oxclose Community School) on a work placement and discovered that there were a lot of young people wanting to participate in music but had nowhere to practice. The project runs Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings from 18:30 to 21:30 working with young people from Washington aged 13 to 19 enabling them to fulfil their musical aspirations. The project provides support, equipment and practicing facilities that allow young people to form their own bands, record their own music and perform “live” to their peers and others. The project has now been up and running for 18 years with their last performance at Springwell Village Hall drawing nearly 200 people.

5.4.3 The focus group discussed where bands had played in Sunderland and mostly it had been in bars and pubs that cater for live music rather than being venues that were specifically for music. The group stated that there are no real venues in the city to play.

5.4.4 Young people from the Oxclose Music Project highlighted that living in Washington means they more closely identify with Newcastle and Gateshead rather than Sunderland. The focus group’s perception was that there were better transport links to Newcastle than to Sunderland. There are more young people living in Washington than any other part of Sunderland yet have poor access to the city centre. The group also stated that the Arts Centre in Washington was a great facility that needs to be developed further. The music project was also starting to use Springwell Village Hall which had good transport links and was a good building for music. The White Room in Sunderland was reported by the group as the only ‘real’ music venue in Sunderland with others just being pubs, clubs and bars.

5.4.5 It was suggested that Sunderland did not really need a purpose built new venue but needed to look at what currently exists and what can be developed. The group felt there was a requirement to look to improve on what there was rather than build a new venue. The White Room and Independent were recognised as having the potential with the right development and support rather than spending money on a new venue that may or may not work. It was important that whatever is undertaken it has the right atmosphere for live music. Also there are a lot of technicalities associated with any venue in that many promoters will ensure that

bands do not or cannot play within a certain radius of another venue. The O<sub>2</sub> Academy is very successful because it has taken over the mantle of the Mayfair and has real kudos with the music going public. Important aspects to success of any venue were seen by the group as good transport links, reputation, housing developments are nearby which can create a regular audience for a venue.

5.4.6 The group informed members that it was pretty easy to get gigs in Sunderland but again these were just in pubs rather than proper music venues. Many don't have stages or performance areas and you ended up playing on the floor. The music project was acknowledged as a very positive scheme as young people could use professional equipment such as drums, guitars and pa's and all for fifty pence a night. Could not get this anywhere else, places like The Bunker are too expensive.

5.4.7 The group also stated that poor transport to the city was a major barrier to even going there on a night and also a number of young people expressed the view that they did not feel safe in the city at night. The group also felt gigs were poorly advertised in Sunderland and this often resulted in a lack of awareness to what was going on in and around the city.

### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

5.4.8 Question: Is there a healthy audience in Sunderland for music?  
Answer: There is a massive demand for music but most bands tend to play Newcastle rather than Sunderland and if bands played locally rather than in Newcastle would go to see them, but this doesn't happen.

5.4.9 Question: Have you been to see any bands play in Sunderland?  
Answer: No. Normally go to Newcastle to see bands play but would go to Sunderland if bands played there.

5.4.10 Question: How do you think Sunderland compares with other parts of the region as a place to play or see bands?  
Answer: No venue to compare with the O<sub>2</sub> Academy in Newcastle as a place to see live music. Sunderland low down compared to this.

5.4.11 Question: How could Sunderland improve in relation to Music Venues?  
Answer: Rehearsal space is poor and limited nowhere to go and practice. Need to look to develop what Sunderland has and build on from this.

### **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 6:** To support the development of music with both young people, adults and professionals through the development of Arts Centre Washington as a music venue.

**Recommendation 7:** To hold discussions with youth development groups to consider the issues around transport for young people to access music events within the city centre.

**Recommendation 8:** To identify and develop a Sunderland directory of rehearsal and performance spaces for performers, promoters and audiences.

## **5.5 Bishopwearmouth Choral Society**

- 5.5.1 The choir was formed on the 18th November 1948 through an informal meeting held to discuss the formation of a choral society to present major choral works in Sunderland by the Rector of Bishopwearmouth Church, Rev.J.F.Richardson, and Clifford Hartley, the choirmaster and organist of the church. The first concert took place on March 1949 with a performance of 'The Creation' by Haydn, the choir numbered over 80 singers. The Society began slowly and after five years had become established. By 1956 it was performing two concerts per year and using regular orchestral accompaniment. By 1960 with a membership of over 80 the Society was performing in the Empire Theatre, Sunderland, as well as in Bishopwearmouth Church. It has since its inception performed almost 120 concerts, in addition to some for charitable purposes, and has since 1993 sung under the baton of Mr. David Murray, a highly experienced and professional musician. The Society rehearses weekly on Wednesday evenings, in The Minster Church Sunderland during the months of September to June and performs three concerts per year, all of which are held in Sunderland Minster. The current chair of the society, Christine Alder, attended the Culture and Leisure Review Committee meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2008.
- 5.5.2 The society has around 90 members and is conducted professionally by David Murray. The society requires a budget of approximately £24,000 to operate, develop and stage its concerts. The choir receives no financial assistance and is completely self funding through membership fees (£50 per year), ticket sales (£8-£10 per concert) and fund raising events.
- 5.5.3 The Choir tends to play Sunderland Minster, however it was noted that the choir had played Durham Cathedral and been involved in charity and special events at venues including Newcastle City Hall. The Chair of the choir explained that performing outside of Sunderland brought its own difficulties. The choir has a loyal following in Sunderland and this is not always guaranteed outside of the Sunderland area. The genre of music played does not appeal/attract everyone.
- 5.5.4 In considering possible venues for the choir around Sunderland members were informed that the Trinity Church only seats 220 people and was not big enough for the choir's requirements as well as having poor heating, lighting and only 1 toilet. The choir has looked at this venue but it is not of the same standard as the Minster. Also have to consider that there is a charge of £10 per ticket to attend and would people pay that for this venue. The Park Lane Church does not have the capacity to hold all the singers, musicians and staging. The Empire Theatre is a wonderful venue but holds around 2,000 people and the choir only attracts around 400/500 people so would look empty. Also acoustics of building not beneficial to the style of music performed.
- 5.5.5 Ideally a venue should have capacity for approximately 500 people with good sightlines and be able to stage a full production with an 80 piece orchestra and choir of 100-200 people. Important that any new venue or purpose built venue is situated centrally in the city and can cater and does host all varieties of music performance. Important that the venue is used all the time and people get into the habit of going to and using the venue, therefore audience and patronage can be developed.

- 5.5.6 It was also highlighted that the choir have a young singer's choir which helps to attract future singers for the main choir and encourages younger people to join. The junior choir is also included in at least one of the society's concerts to allow young people to gain experiences of singing and performing live.
- 5.5.7 To improve and develop the music scene in Sunderland a centralised ticket sale facility for all music gigs taking place in and around the city could be developed as well as a coordinated approach to publicity in both promotion and distribution would see long term benefits to the city in relation to audience size and attendance at events.

### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

- 5.5.8 Question: How do you advertise the choir's performances?  
Answer: We do not advertise through the Sunderland Echo as we have in the past and it has not increased ticket revenue. We tend to use the society's own website where tickets can be purchased and also a means of recruiting new members. We also put posters in churches, libraries and supermarkets. We do tend to lose money on the concerts we stage. They are very expensive productions to stage. Each concert has a 12 week lead-in time and the costs include rehearsal charges and musicians fees.

### **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 9:** To explore the notion of a centralised ticket sale facility for the city.

**Recommendation 10:** To raise awareness of the current marketing avenues available to promote music events and to explore a variety of different methods including the use of new technology.

### **5.6 Focus Group – Sunderland City Council**

- 5.6.1 A focus group was arranged with council officers from Sunderland City Council on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2009 to discuss issues surrounding the policy review. A number of officers were in attendance covering a range of services related to or involved with music venues and performance in the city.
- 5.6.2 The group felt that with such a healthy student population in Sunderland there was a demand for places for these people to go. This was seen as very much being a market that remained largely untapped. It was recognised that there were limited opportunities for young people in the city to see and perform live music. The student/young people market was also acknowledged as the age-group that wants to go out the most. Older people will go out but this will not be with the frequency of the younger market.
- 5.6.3 The officers attending the focus group agreed that there was not a suitable mid-size venue within the city that is attractive enough to encourage people to go out and see live music. This would ideally be a 400-500 capacity venue. The Cluny in Newcastle would be a good example of this type of venue that covers all music spectrums and has built up a strong reputation. The style of a music venue was also regarded as important as differing music genres and audiences create or need differing styles of venue. The Sunderland Choral Society are a good example of this as they can only play in one venue, due to the music style and

production, which is the Minster. Officers noted that the Stadium of Light had recently entered the music market and intended to stage a number of high profile events during the closed seasons e.g. Take That and Oasis. However, it was noted that this is a highly competitive market.

- 5.6.4 It was reasoned within the discussions that everyone will have their own view on the type of music venue needed for Sunderland but Sunderland already has a number of venues that could be utilised with further development including:

Rainton Meadows Arena Caters for small concerts and functions. It is placed a little way out of the city but has potential.

Crowtree Leisure Centre Part of the centre that is not currently being used could be developed and has a good central location although longer term developments of the site need to be taken into consideration.

ThePlace Sunnyside This could be developed and has the potential to be a small, intimate music venue although a number of factors would require consideration.

Seaburn Centre Again could be used for music performance also has gym upstairs. The seafront regeneration initiative could also have an impact.

The Campus Potential mid-size venue and buses run from centre to campus.

- 5.6.5 Barriers were identified as the lack of rehearsal facilities in and around the city to the development of band moving from rehearsing to performing. It was noted that The Arts Centre Washington had good rehearsal facilities and was currently bidding for funding to upgrade the centre. The group noted that there were a number of venues across the city and perhaps what was lacking was a co-ordinated approach. How many people know what is going on in the city or where rehearsal spaces are? Is there a comprehensive list of venues, rehearsal spaces including sizes, technical specifications, access arrangements and costs?

- 5.6.6 Lots of people in Sunderland do not know what is going on in and around the city and perhaps there is a need to look at increasing awareness of events. Look at the potential for poster points, events boards at key points in the city where footfall is high to draw attention to what is going on.

- 5.6.7 Officers in the focus group also discussed the potential for a purpose built venue and argued that there were 2 potential options in that a purpose built venue is looked at or a small existing venue is looked at and developed. The importance of any new build would be to ensure that it will be used on a regular basis. Stadium Village phase 2 could be a potential site for such a development. Any venue considered for development needs to be flexible to cater for performance, practice and not solely a music venue. It needs to be able to hit lots of markets from young people right through to older people. Line dancing and other forms of dance are very popular in the city and this could also feature to ensure any purpose built venue is used to its full potential. Any venue also has to have access to good parking facilities and/or transport links.

- 5.6.8 It is was also identified as being important to strike a balance and look at the role of the City Council in this as well as other stakeholders including promoters, commercial businesses and performers. Discussions took place around if it was Sunderland City Council's responsibility to build a new music venue or more of an assist and development role to help build up a venue to be recognised as such across the city? Consideration should be given to conducting an audit across the city which looks at the demand for music and music venues within the city involving a wide range of stakeholders.

### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

- 5.6.9 Question: How easy is it for a venue to get a music licence to put on live music?  
Answer: It is fairly easy to get a licence for live music within the city and the vast majority are granted. There is a fee to pay for the licence and free advice is provided on issues of safety and noise pollution as well as from the police. Venues may also apply for a temporary event notice for £23 which is a quick and easy way to provide one-off events in venues.

### **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 11:** To raise awareness of existing venues through the development, production and distribution of a Sunderland Music Directory.

**Recommendation 12:** To continue to explore opportunities for a small to medium sized venue within the current regeneration of the city centre.

### **5.7 Site Visit – Venues outside Sunderland**

- 5.7.1 Members of the Culture and Leisure Review Committee, as part of the review process visited a number of venues outside Sunderland to gain evidence of a variety of venues which are working well and had been mentioned during previous evidence gathering sessions. These visits took place on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

#### **THE SAGE - GATESHEAD**

- 5.7.2 The Sage Gateshead includes two auditoria with outstanding acoustics, a rehearsal space and a 25-room Music Education Centre - each conceived as a separate enclosure. The windswept nature of the site led Fosters to create a welcoming covered concourse along the waterfront to link the various spaces. As a result the entire complex is sheltered beneath a broad, enveloping stainless steel roof that is 'shrink-wrapped' around the buildings beneath. This extends over the Concourse, which acts as a foyer for the auditoria and hospitality areas for performers, audiences and students. The Sage also stages free concerts to promote the venue and attract people to the venue and possibly lead to people buying tickets for other events.
- 5.7.3 Hall One has a seated capacity of up to 1,700 seats and - from late 2008 - there will also be the option to create a standing/dance space at the front for around 200 people. The hall has a floating ceiling which can change the sound and acoustics of the hall. The seats are designed to absorb the same amount of sound whether empty or occupied. Hall Two is a very vivid, flexible space with the technical infrastructure to deal with a number of standard and in-the-round configurations. Hall Two is a 10-sided room which can change its layout and stage position to suit the performance. It also stages weddings, conferences etc which help to fund some of the music projects. The conference side of the business is

important to assist in funding. The Seating in Hall Two is dependent on layout but seated is 380 people and standing 400 people. The hall has disabled access and no internal pillars to obscure views and has a full compliment of technical staff. The Sage also has a multi-purpose conference room again this room is well used for conferences and weddings and is one of the top 5 unusual venues for a wedding as listed in The Guardian newspaper. The Foundation Hall is a rehearsal space which mirrors the acoustics of Hall One. The Concourse has a glazed frontage and stunning river views. It has huge potential with its large volume and will be used for occasional live events and festivals.

#### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

- 5.7.4 Question: What audiences is The Sage getting?  
Answer: The ethos of The Sage is to cater for all varieties of music. A lot of research has been done into audiences visiting The Sage. In 2002 a customer relation system was added which provides detailed information on how events are selling and also provides a complete picture of customer. This allows The Sage to segment marketing and target groups. In 2004 the system held 20,000 addresses now holds 120,000, the database is growing by 1,200 to 1,500 addresses a month.
- 5.7.5 Question: How is the programme of event developed?  
Answer: The classical programme is usually prepared 2/3 years in advance and everything else is planned around this. Generally look to have a balance in the programme and each individual show is developed to ensure deal is right for all parties.
- 5.7.6 Question: Are there any effects yet of the credit crunch?  
Answer: No obvious trends currently but this may take over a year to come through and be identified.

#### **CITY HALL – NEWCASTLE**

- 5.7.7 The City Hall was opened in 1927 as part of the redevelopment which also included the City Pool. The Harrison and Harrison Organ was added in 1928 to give Newcastle its first dedicated concert venue. The City Hall has continued to host almost every rock and pop "great" since the 60's as well as seeing the first tours of future legends. Throughout the 70's, 80's and 90's the City Hall has maintained its position as one of the best and most used 2000 seated venues in the country, and one of many artists favourite gigs. The City Hall hosts around 120-140 events per year and is managed by Newcastle City Council. There are 4 full time members of staff and the programme includes anything that will make money. Currently comedy is the big attraction and does very well. Staff will actively go out and seek acts to play at the venue – very proactive. The City Hall has no conference facilities.

#### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

- 5.7.8 Question: What is the City Hall audience?  
Answer: The City Hall has a loyal audience and as the City Hall is a recognised and established venue is well attended. There is no audience database and the computer system is 20 years old. The City Hall is not eligible for any funding and operates on £100k per year from Newcastle City Council. There is no additional funding for marketing or maintenance costs. The box office was originally situated

at the front of The City Hall and a bar was opened in 1974. The City Hall introduced a no-smoking policy around 10 years ago. The unique thing about Newcastle is the range of venues available which compares very favourably with much bigger cities like Manchester and Birmingham.

### **THE CLUNY - NEWCASTLE**

5.7.9 The Cluny is now officially called The Head of Steam however everyone still calls it the Cluny. The venue is located 1 mile outside of Newcastle city centre. The venue is part of an old whisky bottling plant. The Cluny has a large main L-shaped bar there is also a 300 capacity function room with bar on 2-levels with a stage. There is also another separate room called 'The Cluny Gallery' which is an established part of the Newcastle arts scene. The Cluny first opened in 1999 with The Head of Steam Ltd taking over in November 2002.

5.7.10 The Cluny is a great venue to foster young and emerging new talent. Ticket prices for the venue range from £4-£12. Transport links and access are not ideal but nevertheless the venue is acknowledged as a good place to play and has developed a strong reputation for music performance. The Cluny is also open during the day and serves food and drink and on the visit it was very busy.

### **THE STUDIO – HARTLEPOOL**

5.7.11 Durham Street Studio (the original name) was set up in 1981. It became very popular and the project grew to have a 16 track studio, 8 track studio and rehearsal room and was run by four employees and a number of volunteers. In 1996 Durham Street Studio gained charitable status and became an accredited training centre with NCFE (National Council for Further Education) as the Awarding Body. Over the following two years, alongside keeping Durham Street Studio open, a million pounds was raised to purchase and refurbish a derelict 100 year old former Baptist church building which opened on 1st May 1998 adopting the new title of The Studio.

5.7.12 The venue hosts a wide range of gigs from indie, rock, blues, jazz, punk, metal, folk etc with a special emphasis given to local performers as well as offering a well equipped space for touring national or international bands. Entrance to gigs is kept deliberately cheap to encourage people to support live music, with further concessions for unwaged people. The building has been designed to offer maximum access including a backstage platform lift to the stage area for disabled performers.

5.7.13 There are 2 recording studios which are fully equipped and anyone can use. Rates are very competitive and range from £16 per hour (Unemployed), £20 per hour (school) and £25 per hour (professional). The project is self owned and is funded through lottery grant money. The rehearsal rooms are bringing in more revenue than the recording studios side of the project. The rooms cost £15 for 3 hours time and includes the use of a pa system, drum kit and microphones. There is a big demand for rehearsal space. The project also provides sound engineering training at Btec level 1, 2 & 3 and this is a large part of the studios work. All teaching staff are CRB checked and also work with NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and young people from local projects.

5.7.14 The Studio is also a respected jazz venue and has a capacity of 180 and is open 4 nights a week. The Studio has a promotions person who arranges and books the bands that play. The Studio has no one set style but has developed a good

reputation amongst audiences and musicians. Bands play and feel comfortable at the venue.

#### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

5.7.15 Question: What are the ticket prices?

Answer: These depend on the event and artist playing but range between £3 - £18.

#### **THE GEORGIAN THEATRE – STOCKTON**

5.7.16 The Georgian Theatre, built in 1766, began life as one of several 'touring' houses on a northern circuit - built and maintained by 'actor / managers'. It has been called variously The Oxford Road Playhouse and Theatre Royal. The theatre fell into disuse and disrepair some time during the 19th century and 'enjoyed' life as a sweet factory until the late 1950's. More disuse and disrepair resulted in the property being acquired by the local council in the 1960's before a refurbishment saw it re-opened as a community building in 1980. The theatre struggled to find its way due to its relatively small capacity and operating more as an historic building than a working venue. In 1993 the fledgling music & arts collective approached the local council looking for a home.

5.7.17 In 2006, Stockton Music & Arts Collective (SMAC) became part of Tees Music Alliance after merging with its 'sister' - Middlesbrough Music Collective. A programme of capital works saw the theatre receive a much needed and long overdue makeover in 2007 - crumbling internal walls were given a new, clean finish; new toilets and dressing rooms constructed; efficient heating installed and a bright new bar area created. 2008 will see the exterior of the venue, along with its neighbour the Green Dragon Studios, undergo improvements to lighting and signage; the wider Green Dragon Yard and Theatre Yard areas will undergo environmental improvements - leading to greater leisure use of the area - now defined as Stockton Cultural Quarter. The venue capacity is 200 standing, 70 cabaret style and 80 theatre style.

#### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

5.7.18 Question: What are ticket prices?

Answer: Ticket prices range from £3 - £17 depending on the artist or event.

5.7.19 Question: How is the programme of events developed?

Answer: This is done through an in-house team and the programme is firmly rooted in community music. The in-house team is approx. 12-15 people. We also are involved in the development of a large-scale festival in the summer. This is a big project. The festival showcases performers that play the Georgian Theatre and is a 3-day event.

5.7.20 Question: What is the Georgian Theatres audience?

Answer: The audiences we are getting are changing but generally there are a core 70/80 people. We also encourage local artists to encourage and bring an audience. Experimental events are given 3/4 runs and after that if it is not working will never work and is dropped. Audiences are very savvy today and expect bands/acts/artists to be very good. The theatre is not really for cover bands but a number of high profile acts have played here in the past including the Arctic Monkeys and James Blunt. The theatre is looking to develop private hire for

conferences and parties. The bar is the main source of income and the outside is also fully licensed for alcohol and music. The Theatre also works with the Regional Jazz Agency and also a variety of promoters. It is in the best interests of everyone to work together. The Georgian Theatre is also developing ways to keep in touch with its audience through website development and also the possibility of a loyalty scheme.

## **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 13:** To raise the profile of the diverse range of music venues currently available in and around Sunderland that already cater for a variety of music genres.

**Recommendation 14:** To develop a venue network for the city that provides support and assists venues in supporting themselves.

## **5.8 Site Visit – Venues in Sunderland**

5.8.1 In following up the visit to venues outside Sunderland Members of the review committee visited a number of venues within Sunderland to compare and contrast the variety of venues available. These visits took place on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2009.

### **RAINTON MEADOWS ARENA – HOUGHTON-le-SPRING**

5.8.2 The venue has a capacity of 2000 and is divided into two floors. The 'Willow Suite' which is situated on the ground floor is capable of conferencing or wining and dining a-la-carte with three licensed bars. The 'Roseberry Suite' with it's balcony, overlooks the 'Willow Suite' and it's own private drinks facility it is ideal for small seminar (capacity of 350). V.I.P.gatherings - wedding receptions or Private Dinners etc. A connecting viewing balcony compliments this suite. The venue is equipped with, Wi-Fi –Video Conferencing – Large Screen Productions – A West End Stage together with a technical lighting facility. The in-house sound is coupled with lighting to a major rig situated over a large dance floor. Car parking is good with over 700 available bays and a further 750 in an overspill car park. The Arena has planning permission for an 82-bedroom hotel on the site.

## **Questions and Comments from Members:**

5.8.3 Question: How is the programme of events developed?  
Answer: We receive enquiries on a daily basis from sports promoters for events like wrestling and boxing. Music promoters are not as interested the 2000 capacity is not big enough for many bands that are looking for a 10,000 capacity venue. Although we often have band showcase events which are very popular and feature around 10 bands on one event.

5.8.4 Question: How do you publicise events?  
Answer: Mostly this is done through the internet at present. The only venue in the area that is larger than Rainton Meadows Arena is the arena in Newcastle.

### **SPRINGWELL VILLAGE HALL – SPRINGWELL**

5.8.5 Springwell Village Hall plays host to a number of musical performance throughout the year and is progressing into a good venue for young bands to develop their live performances. The hall has a small room usable for music practice and can be sealed off from the remainder of the building meaning that rehearsals do not really affect anyone else using the hall. The hall has a regular jazz night on a

Monday and have occasional 'open mic' nights which allow young people to come along and play on spec.

- 5.8.6 The main hall has a full compliment of light and sound equipment and is capable of recording a live performance. The capacity of the main hall is 220 people. The hall is financed by fund raising and always looking at ways to raise funds and as a result the hall can be hired out for shows and gigs as well as weddings which are very popular too. The cost of hiring is currently £100 for the whole day.
- 5.8.7 There is a full programme of events throughout the year and when members visited, the hall was preparing for its pantomime 'Goldilocks and the 3 Bears'. Everyone at the hall is a volunteer and to be a member costs £5 per year.

#### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

- 5.8.8 Question: How do you advertise your programme of events?  
Answer: Generally advertise in the village and members tell friends. We have a good network of communication. Although we have to admit that advertising is a weak spot. We have a notice board but do not currently use this to its full potential.

#### **ARTS CENTRE WASHINGTON**

- 5.8.9 The Arts Centre is situated in the centre of Washington with good transport links and free parking facilities and hosts a range of events. The Granary Suite is situated on the first floor and is suitable for both conference and theatre style meetings. Maximum capacity is for up to 50 people. The theatre situated on the ground floor, is a room suitable for theatre style, cabaret style and conference style events with a maximum capacity of 110. The theatre can also be used for a number of different live events and performances. Also on the ground floor is the Low Barn suitable for larger conferences and parties, with a maximum capacity of 120.
- 5.8.10 The Arts Centre is developing a music programme and had recently hosted under-18 rock nights and busker nights. The centre is also home to the award winning Davy Lamp Folk Club which sees capacity crowds at the centre and this is a great model of working that could be reproduced. The Creative Director of the Arts Centre informed members that the centre hoped to create a developmental journey for young musicians from rehearsal through live performance to recording their own songs.
- 5.8.11 The rehearsal rooms have some musical equipment in them but many of the groups using the rooms tend to bring their own instruments and sound equipment. The main issue with rehearsal rooms is one around sound proofing which is an expensive outlay. The recording studios at the centre are used but not as well as they could be but usage is starting to gather some momentum and recording engineers are employed on a casual basis. A number of young people use the studios as they are relatively inexpensive at the discounted rate of £12 per hour (normally £14 per hour). The Oxclose Project use the arts centre resources and facilities on a Sunday.

#### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

- 5.8.12 Question: How often is the venue used?

Answer: Not often enough is the simple answer. The centre has attracted a lot of creative people but we need to spread the word on the venue through musicians, blogs and word of mouth, this is important to the development of the centre. We are already looking at mailing lists, leaflets and improving marketing tools to improve the venue. After each event held at the centre a questionnaire is handed out to patrons to allow us to build a picture of the audience and help assist in the development of the future programming of events. The venue needs marketing on a regional level in the same way that the Customs House in South Shields has been.

### **THE SEABURN CENTRE – SUNDERLAND**

- 5.8.13 The Seaburn Centre has a seafront location and has hosted a wide range of events from the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and Opera productions to the North East Sports Awards. The spacious sports hall can be adapted for a variety of functions including conferences and exhibitions. The audience capacity of the Café is 300 and the Hall 1500.
- 5.8.14 The centre has hosted Sunderland No1 which was an X-Factor style event organised by Leisure Services and involved The Bunker who provided stage, sound and lights for the event. This event had been previously well attended with approximately 400 people at the event. Tickets were sold in advance (£5) but a number of people also turned up on the night and paid at the door. The centre has a small stage and PA system but event organisers tend to bring their own equipment.

### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

- 5.8.15 Question: How flexible is the centre for event bookings?  
Answer: Each event is looked at on an individual basis. Important that the event is right for the business and the city we have turned events down in the past if not suitable. We also need to give our regular customers who hire the sports spaces at least 2 weeks notice. For each event a price for the hall is negotiated and the majority of people bring their own equipment which is brought in from the back of the centre which is very easily accessible. We can also bring in catering and bar facilities if these are required for specific events.

### **THE CAMPUS - SUNDERLAND**

- 5.8.16 The Campus, Formerly known as Manor Quay, is located on Charles Street and is a 1300 capacity venue. The Campus serves food all day and currently offers a variety of entertainment including Construction and Builders party nights, Baywatch party nights and special guest nights which have included recently Coolio from Celebrity Big Brother, Radio 1's Zane Lowe and JLS from the X-Factor. The Campus is also hosting The Great North Big Band Jazz Festival featuring the BBC Big Band. The Campus has two-levels and a stage which is ideal for bands and has hosted a couple of gigs from local bands.
- 5.8.17 The Campus is looking to develop a range of ideas to raise the profile and promote the venue as a music place including live music nights featuring 3 bands made up of two local acts and a more established national act as well as themed music nights e.g. Rave, Hip-Hop or Heavy Metal nights. The Campus is also looking to widen its appeal and move away from the student's only image, even though affiliated with the Student Union, and promote the venue to a wider audience within Sunderland.

## Questions and Comments from Members:

5.8.18 Question: How do you advertise events?

Answer: We have publicised our events in the Sunderland Echo using full page adverts and have also used the Sunderland Music Forum. Poster boards are priceless in advertising gigs and would be a real boost for the venue.

5.8.19 Question: What do you see as the main barriers for the venue?

Answer: Need to move away from the student only image and develop a wider audience base for events. The venue has great potential and we need to get people familiar with coming here and having a good time. If people equate a good time with visiting the Campus then more likely to make frequent visits.

### **HOLY TRINITY CHURCH – SUNDERLAND**

5.8.20 Holy Trinity Church was consecrated on the 5th September 1719. It was built using small dark hand made bricks which made it look gloomy from the outside but the inside was very light and spacious with seven pairs of very large windows. Tall slender Corinthian columns supported the gallery and the roof. By 1988 the structure of Holy Trinity was in urgent need of repairs and on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1988 final services were held and within a few days the church was handed over to the Redundant Churches Fund. This was to make sure that Holy Trinity would survive and the property would be maintained. Holy Trinity is now a listed building. The deserted building now stands in isolation as a memory to some of Sunderland's wonderful historic past and it is still accessible to visitors.

5.8.21 The Holy Trinity is still used by the local community today and a lot of musical events can still see attendances of 300 people in the building. The acoustics of the building are exceptional for choral, folk and orchestral music in particular. However, to bring the building up to standard a number of major works would be required including a heating system, new toilets, drainage and lighting which would cost an estimated £1 million. Members were informed that funding streams can achieve these works but the Holy Trinity needs a client who can fill the venue with activities and utilise the building to its full potential.

## Questions and Comments from Members:

5.8.22 Members commented that folk or classical music would be really interesting performed at the Holy Trinity and that the whole space was something that could be explored.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 15:** To highlight and signpost Springwell Village Hall as a model of good practice as a local community venue.

**Recommendation 16:** To support the refurbishment of Holy Trinity by the Churches Conservation Trust through partnership working that realises the potential of the venue as a hub of creative activity.

## 5.9 Sunderland University Jazz Ensemble

5.9.1 The University Big Band was formed with assistance from funds obtained by the University Development Team. Not only is the Band one of a growing number of non-academic opportunities for Students at the University, but it has catalysed the University of Sunderland Big Band Jazz Competition. The funding for this event

was sought by the Trust from a number of sources including the Arts Council, the City of Sunderland and Boddingtons, and we are very grateful for their support. The band currently meets for rehearsals every Tuesday evening in the Priestman Building of the university at 6.15pm. All levels of musicians are welcome and the band leader is Bill Watson. A Jazz Ensemble attended the Culture and Leisure Review Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2009 and performed a couple of jazz songs and discussed their experiences with the committee.

### **Questions and Comments from Members:**

- 5.9.2 Question: Is there a jazz scene in Sunderland?  
Answer: The university bars, Bonded Warehouse and the Campus cater for jazz, but as far as Sunderland city centre, the only venue that put on jazz bands would be the White Room. Newcastle has more of a jazz scene, with the jazz café for example, however, the Stadium of Light has hosted a Big Band Festival.
- 5.9.3 Councillor Gibson reported that the Davy Lamp Folk Club could be a potential venue following recent visits.
- 5.9.4 Question: What type of audience does the Big Band attract?  
Answer: Generally these are quite low and are around 50-60 people.
- 5.9.5 Question: How do you advertise band events?  
Answer: Concerts are advertised through the University, but we might attract bigger audiences with better advertising. The Band also suggested that if the City of Sunderland had its own central website advertising jazz and other music genres, it would give people more choice as there are the venues in Sunderland, just not the advertising of them.
- 5.9.6 Councillor Wake noted that in the past there had been underground newspapers informing of concerts and events. There were websites that can help to promote gigs and advertise amongst the music community.
- 5.9.7 Councillor G. Hall commented that the Glass Centre had run Tapas and jazz nights in the past and that the casino in Sunderland sometimes had a jazz trio perform. Councillor Hall also expressed his surprise that the Sunderland Echo does not advertise what is on.
- 5.9.10 Councillor T. Martin reported that there are there ways of putting listings into the Sunderland Echo. Councillor Martin also suggested a system within the council's website where the public could search for concert listings in categories.
- 5.9.11 Question: What are the student participation figures for the Band?  
Answer: Student participation is quite low, but that is due to internal university advertising. Not many students know about the Band.

### **Recommendations:**

**Recommendation 17:** To continue to offer advice, support and information to the University Big Band.

### **5.11 Interview with Peter Brewis**

- 5.11.1 As a final part of the research an interview was conducted with Peter Brewis who is a member of the Sunderland Music Forum and has been involved in a number of bands mentioned during the review process. The interview was conducted on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2009.
- 5.11.2 Question: Can you tell us a little about the group and where you have played in Sunderland?  
 Answer: My name is Peter Brewis and I have played with the bands Field Music, The Week That Was and School of Language over the UK, Europe and The USA. In Sunderland we have played at the following The White Room, Independent and The Royalty.
- 5.11.3 Question: Where else have you performed in the region good or bad?  
 Answer: The Cluny - 300 capacity. Good PA system, good food and good beer. Small backstage facilities but they are more than adequate for touring bands. A bar room away from the venue room and other good live music venues locally. Star and Shadow - 200 cap. Voluntary run multi purpose venue and cinema. Poor PA system. Great community atmosphere  
 The Sage Hall 2 - 350 cap. Good stage, PA and dressing room. Very expensive to put a show on due to high costs of venue.  
 O<sub>2</sub> Academy main room - 1500 cap? Great stage and PA. Dressing rooms. Poor atmosphere, poor staff moral, lack of community spirit. Expensive poor drinks.  
 The Head of Steam - 200 cap. Good atmosphere. Hired in PA. Good drinks and a 2nd room to escape to.
- 5.11.4 Question: How does Sunderland compare with other parts of the region as a place to play?  
 Answer: Very Poorly. Although I am from Sunderland we prefer to play in Newcastle.
- 5.11.5 Question: From your own experiences is there a healthy audience in Sunderland for music?  
 Answer: No. We can generally get up to 600 people to see Field Music play in Newcastle. In Sunderland we struggle to get 100.
- 5.11.6 Question: Do you think Sunderland has the right mix/types of venues to cater for the city in relation to music styles, audiences and locations?  
 Answer: No. The venues in Sunderland are generally of poor quality.
- 5.11.7 Question: Do you think any existing venues could be developed to meet the requirements of Sunderland?  
 Answer: No. But any new venue would need some kind of audience development program as well as careful programming.
- 5.11.8 Question: Could Sunderland benefit from a new venue in the city, is there that demand?  
 Answer: At present there is little demand for a venue.
- 5.11.9 Question: What barriers, as performers, have you experienced either playing in Sunderland or elsewhere?  
 Answer: Poor promotion, poorly trained staff, poorly equipped venues. Difficult to get gigs due to the lack of promoters.

5.11.10 Question: How could Sunderland improve in music venues from a performer's point of view?

Answer: A higher quality small venue where the music community of Sunderland be trained to deliver quality programmes.

## 6 Conclusions

- 6.1 The Culture and Leisure Review Committee have seen and experienced, throughout this policy review the passion, dedication and hard work of performers, promoters, venue owners and music lovers in Sunderland and around the region. Throughout the review it has been seen that it is important to develop a vibrant and lively music scene to nurture new and rising talent and allow musicians their first experiences of playing live. The committee has seen excellent examples across the region and in Sunderland of dedicated people running live venues and providing music events for the public. The new music strategy builds on this and provides a framework from which the city can work towards its recognition as a Music City.
- 6.2 The issue of a new music venue for Sunderland has been discussed several times during the review investigations and it seems that it is perhaps not that Sunderland needs a bright shiny new building but a recognised and identifiable music venue. Throughout the review process certain venues cropped up again and again as places that were good music venues and it is this recognition that needs to be developed and nurtured for a venue in Sunderland. Success also lies in the development of other associated services for a venue's sustainability including making it a place to frequent at lunchtimes and on evenings even when no event is planned.
- 6.3 Other successful venues have developed an holistic approach incorporating rehearsal spaces, recording facilities and providing musicians with services for their journey through the formative stages of practice and rehearsal to live performance and finally to recording their own material. This can provide young musicians with the training, resources and guidance required to progress and develop their talent. The review also found that rehearsal spaces were in high demand and venues across the region offering such facilities had seen them well used by musicians of all ages and styles. So a venue for music performance can be about so much more and providing other services can help to ensure the sustainability of a venue and help towards its recognition as a place to play.
- 6.4 Potential audiences need to know what is going on in the city. It is important that knowledge of events reach as wide a market as possible and this could mean exploring a variety of media to ensure the best fit for Sunderland. Looking at websites, directories of services, poster boards and event magazines are some of the possible ways mentioned during the review by witnesses. Advertising and awareness raising is crucial for audience development within the city and also in creating recognition for venues as positive places to play. Good feedback from musicians can soon spread via internet blogs and music dedicated websites and create a knock-on effect. Also if there was a centralised ticketing area within the city this could help to stimulate and increase the size of audiences going to gigs. It is important to make events easy and accessible for anyone to attend.
- 6.5 Work is already underway to enhance the cultural and visitor attractiveness of Sunderland city centre through investment in the City Library and related facilities. Proposals to invest in these facilities, in order to enhance the city centre's cultural and visitor attractiveness can only help in developing a distinct identity and reputation for the city. It will also help to change the way people view and use the city centre and create an environment that is conducive to creative industries and be a place where people want to spend their time and money. The ambitious

project will see Sunderland work with partners to ensure a joined up approach which aligns itself with current planning policy, strategies and also maximises the opportunities and resources available.

- 6.6 It was also evident from the investigations carried out that any initiatives in music development need to have a collective and coordinated approach across the city. It is important that everyone works together for the collective purpose of improving access to gigs and music performance in Sunderland. Is it the sole responsibility of the local authority to develop and create performance spaces? While no one can argue that the local authority has a lead role to play in helping to develop and realise the potential of the city in relation to music there are other principal stakeholders who can also play their part. The Sunderland Music Forum, Sunnyside Partnership, Sunderland University and the Sunderland Heritage Forum to name but a few all have a part to play along with local projects, bands and the music going people of the city. It is important that all the initiatives and drives to improve access to music in Sunderland compliment each other and provide a complete experience from gig listing through live performance to going home.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 18:** To identify resources within the City Council to address issues identified throughout the review report that will develop the infrastructure required for music to grow and develop in Sunderland in line with the overarching music strategy for Sunderland.

**Recommendation 19:** To look at the creation of a music development group, that includes the key music stakeholders within the city, to ensure a coordinated and joined up approach to the development and implementation of the recommendations of this review and the wider music strategy delivery plan.

**Recommendation 20:** To devise a delivery plan including key actions, milestones and costings to monitor progress on the review report and its recommendations, that will sit within the wider delivery plan for music development in Sunderland.

## 7 Recommendations

7.1 The following recommendations are made as a result of this review. The Committee would like Community and Cultural Services to report on the progress made in relation to these recommendations, on a quarterly basis.

**Recommendation 1:** To identify potential sites for poster points in and around the city and also to identify the resources to purchase poster point.

**Recommendation 2:** To undertake research into best practice with regard to the management and maintenance of poster sites.

**Recommendation 3:** To explore the development of a promoter's network for Sunderland including other forms of entertainment like dance and theatre.

**Recommendation 4:** To identify existing and emerging promoters and look to develop support mechanisms within the city for promoters.

**Recommendation 5:** To continue to ensure that music plays a prominent part in festivals and flagship events and that relationships with the local music scene are further enhanced.

**Recommendation 6:** To support the development of music with both young people, adults and professionals through the development of Arts Centre Washington as a music venue.

**Recommendation 7:** To hold discussions with youth development groups to consider the issues around transport for young people to access music events within the city centre.

**Recommendation 8:** To identify and develop a Sunderland directory of rehearsal and performance spaces for performers, promoters and audiences.

**Recommendation 9:** To explore the notion of a centralised ticket sale facility for the city.

**Recommendation 10:** To raise awareness of the current marketing avenues available to promote music events and to explore a variety of different methods including the use of new technology.

**Recommendation 11:** To raise awareness of existing venues through the development, production and distribution of a Sunderland Music Directory.

**Recommendation 12:** To continue to explore opportunities for a small to medium sized venue within the current regeneration of the city centre.

**Recommendation 13:** To raise the profile of the diverse range of music venues currently available in and around Sunderland that already cater for a variety of music genres.

**Recommendation 14:** To develop a venue network for the city that provides support and assists venues in supporting themselves.

**Recommendation 15:** To highlight and signpost Springwell Village Hall as a model of good practice as a local community venue.

**Recommendation 16:** To support the refurbishment of Holy Trinity by the Churches Conservation Trust through partnership working that realises the potential of the venue as a hub of creative activity.

**Recommendation 17:** To continue to offer advice, support and information to the University Big Band.

**Recommendation 18:** To identify resources within the City Council to address issues identified throughout the review report that will develop the infrastructure required for music to grow and develop in Sunderland in line with the overarching music strategy for Sunderland.

**Recommendation 19:** To look at the creation of a music development group, that includes the key music stakeholders within the city, to ensure a coordinated and joined up approach to the development and implementation of the recommendations of this review and the wider music strategy delivery plan.

**Recommendation 20:** To devise a delivery plan including key actions, milestones and costings to monitor progress on the review report and its recommendations, that will sit within the wider delivery plan for music development in Sunderland.

## 8 Bibliography

8.1 The following documents have been used for information during this review:

Music in the City, June 2008 – Sunderland five year music strategy. Sunderland City Council.

Making Music, Autumn 2008 – Dateline North East. Making Music North East.

Survey of Live Music in England and Wales 2007. BMRB Social Research.

Arts Council Press Releases.

Making Every Child's Music Matter – Music Manifesto Report.

Glastonbury Festivals, 2007. Baker and Associates for Mendip Council.

## Appendix 1 –

### **Poster Advertising in Leeds and Liverpool**

Promoters put forward at a focus group held early in the review process the notion of poster billboards and location points where bands could legally advertise gigs and music event and people could see what was on in the city. During these discussions promoters highlighted the positive work done in Leeds and Liverpool around this very issue. As part of the research over the phone discussions were held with officers from both Leeds and Liverpool local authorities respectively.

#### **Leeds City Council - Senior Music Officer, Leeds International Concert Season**

Regarding poster sites in Leeds, during the Concert Season we have our own poster site right outside the Town Hall which holds 5 A0 size posters. This belongs to the council and is used exclusively for council organised concerts. The council has found that it is well used by the passing public who stop to see what's on and many quote it as the main source of finding out about a concert.

Also in Leeds, a company called Street Sites owns several poster drum sites around the city which they use to promote various events at theatres and music venues. As we have our own site we don't use this company but colleagues who work for other venues have used these sites with success. They are regularly updated and well used by the city.

#### **Leeds Grand Theatre and Opera House**

Our experience of poster sites is that we use a company called Frontline to do LEGAL fly-posting for us around the City on specifically designed octagonal poster drums. We believe they hold the licence and are the only people allowed to post on these drums. We pay so much per poster depending on size and length of time we want the poster up for. We believe this is an integral part of our marketing campaign for each show and raises awareness in a very cost-effective fashion in the city centre and on arterial routes into Leeds.

#### **Liverpool City Council – Neighbourhood Management Services**

In Liverpool a third party company, City Centre Posters, are used for the poster site scheme. The council outlines and defines the sites to be used by the company for legal fly-posting and most of these are in the 'clubland' area of the city and on the backs of buildings. None of the sites are in the city centre. City Centre Posters maintain the sites clearing old posters, adding new posters and removing illegal fly-posters there is no cost to the council for any of the work done by City Centre Posters.

Revenue is generated by the costs bands and promoters pay to have there posters displayed at the sites. There is a sliding scale of charges based on the bands size and popularity e.g. a big act like Madonna would pay the premium fees to advertise on the boards whereas a new local band may get there first gig advertised for free and then pay a small fee for each subsequent advertising. The scheme has been very successful and Liverpool still prosecutes illegal fly-posters in the city. Initially, however, new bands are signposted to City Centre Posters and the legalities surrounding fly-posting and the consequences of repeated offences. Again this has proved successful and the cases of illegal fly-posting in the city have dropped. There are also agreements with the music venues in the city that

performers will not fly-post otherwise lead to prosecution and the gig being cancelled.

Another successful initiative was the 'off the wall' project. This was funded through NRF money (approx. £6-7k) and was a fortnightly publication listing all the gigs happening in and around the city. The council are looking to re-start this publication but it does require some funding and a third party company are currently looking to develop it. Again the project was very successful and the publication was a well used resource by music goers in the city.