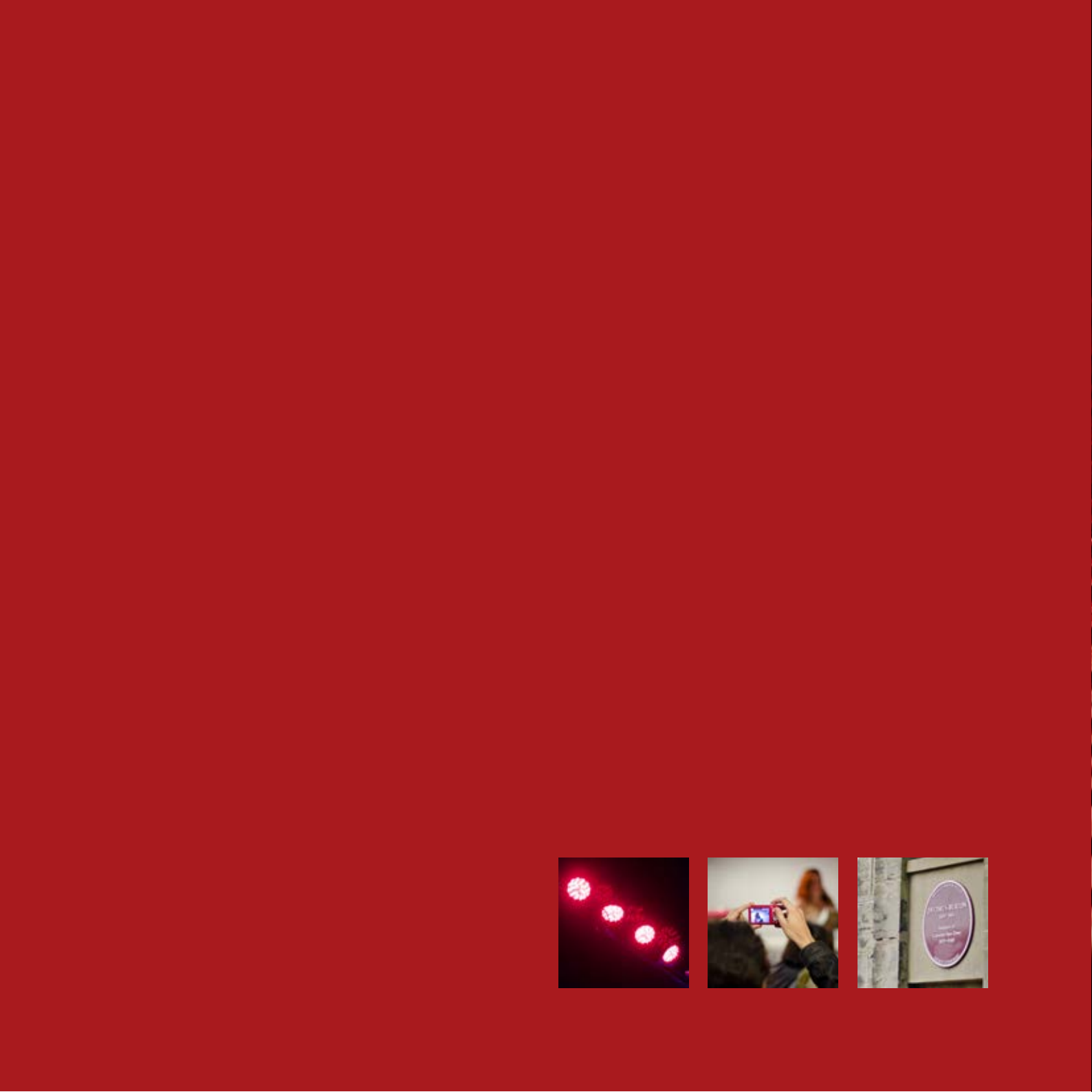
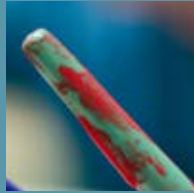


Cultural Strategy 2014-24



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*‘Culture is integral
to everyday life’*

Introduction

‘Definitions of culture vary, but often they include museums, galleries, theatres, cinemas and libraries; music, dance, drama and comedy; visual arts, crafts and sculpture; digital, media and photography; books, poetry and writing; architecture, design and the built environment; parks, gardens and the natural environment; retail, food and fashion – in fact many of the things that can be found throughout the Borough of Tunbridge Wells.

Culture is integral to everyday life. It contributes to the **economy**, to a sense of **place** and enables **people** to work, learn, play and create together. It is one of the things that makes life better.

Over the last 12 months Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has been listening to the community and to the many who have been advocating for us to develop an ambitious cultural strategy. Reports such as the Cultural and Creative Industries Framework 2012, the Civic Complex Consultation Report 2011 and the work of the Town Forum’s Working Group on Leisure, Culture and Tourism 2013 have been core to developing our vision.

Culture is an important component in broader borough council plans — the borough’s Draft Economic Strategy, Sustainable Communities Plan, and adopted and emerging Planning Policy documents. This cultural strategy document builds on those plans and outlines the high-level ambitions, cultural strengths & challenges, and the borough’s intentions to deliver these plans.

This strategy is necessarily pragmatic, with a focus on that which Tunbridge Wells Borough Council directly controls, and that which, in partnership, we believe we can deliver.

We look forward to working closely with individuals, community groups, creative businesses and arts organisations so that together we can make Tunbridge Wells a vibrant cultural centre.’

Councillor Jane March
Cabinet Portfolio Holder

‘An ambitious ten year vision’



Vision

Our Vision 2014-24:

Informed by consultation, the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Cultural Strategy sets out an ambitious ten year vision:

‘To grow our role as the cultural centre of the Kent & Sussex High Weald, so that by 2024 the Borough of Tunbridge Wells is nationally recognised for its vibrant cultural provision’

We believe that there is more that we can do with our cultural assets to make a real difference to the economy of Tunbridge Wells, to the lives of the people who live in the borough and to those who work and visit here.

With a focus on collaborative working and achieving long term goals, this strategy will enable us to work with partners and the community to create positive change.

The Cultural Strategy sets out Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's plans to move towards this ambition. This is a five year plan and will be reviewed annually, until 2019 when a comprehensive review will be undertaken.



The Borough

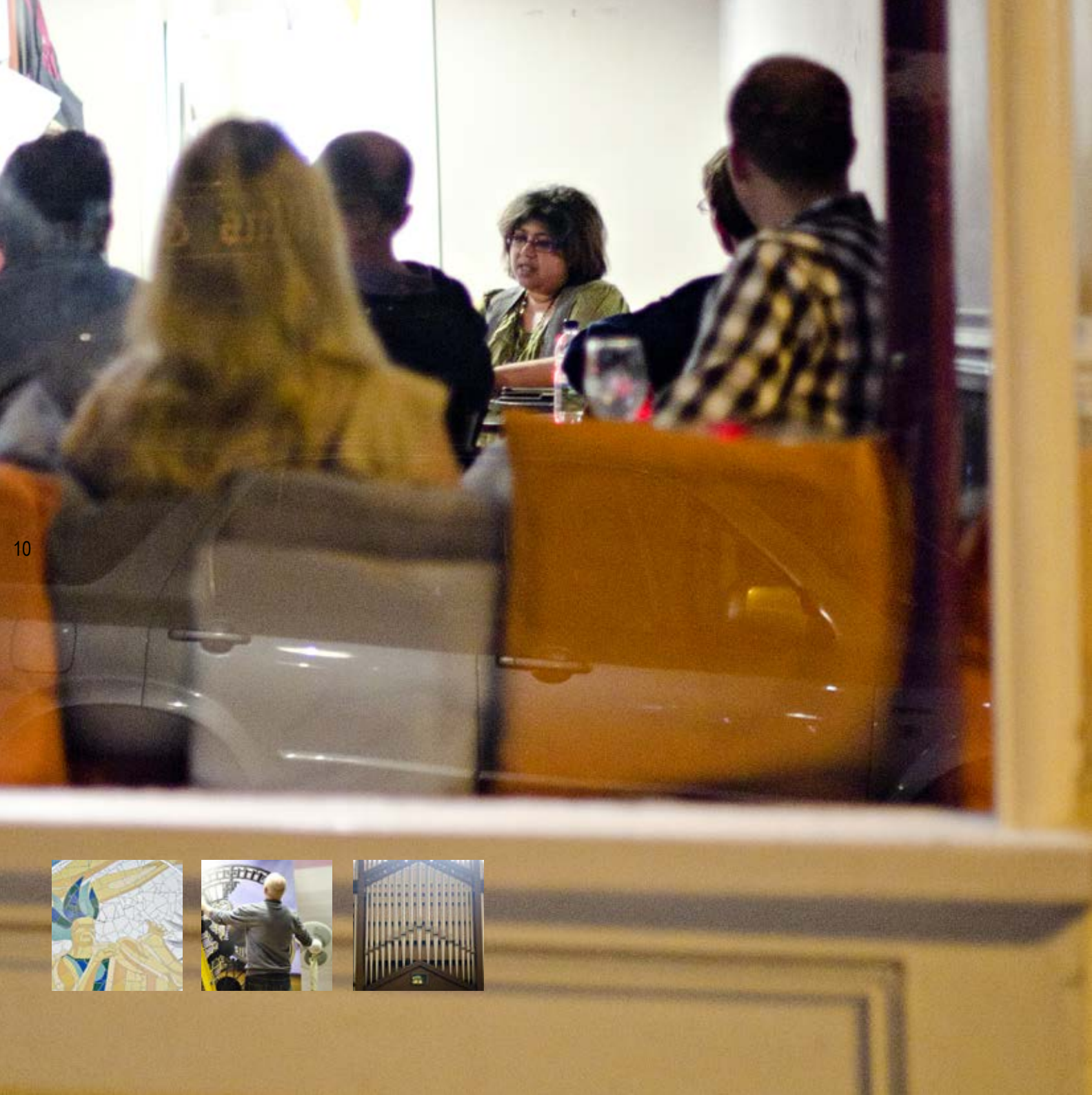
The Borough of Tunbridge Wells is set in the High Weald of Kent, 69% of which is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and in which stand approximately 3,000 listed buildings and 41 historic parks and gardens. Of the 115,000 population, about 55% live in the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells, and 45% live in rural towns and villages. The borough is bordered by the districts and boroughs of Sevenoaks, Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling to the north, whilst to the south it borders Wealden and Rother in East Sussex. For more information about the population of Tunbridge Wells see Borough Population at www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk.

The Borough of Tunbridge Wells has considerable cultural heritage. There are museums and galleries across the borough in Cranbrook, Goudhurst, Paddock Wood and Royal Tunbridge Wells; four theatres ranging from 200 to 1000 seats and with programmes ranging from amateur to West End musicals; rural touring, independent cinemas and a nationally acclaimed small music venue; all supported by a range of cultural organisations operating from within the borough, some of whom already have a national and in some cases international profile.

A mapping exercise will be undertaken with partners during 2014. This will document the cultural offer of the borough, in order to better understand the base on which the cultural strategy can build.

Cultural facilities owned and operated by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council:

- *The Assembly Hall Theatre, Royal Tunbridge Wells*
- *Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery, Royal Tunbridge Wells*
- *Parks and open spaces*



The Challenges

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is aware that other nearby towns are currently championing culture to bring inward investment, attract new businesses and residents, and enhance visitor numbers. Large-scale investment in cultural infrastructure; in Canterbury, Hastings, Maidstone and Margate is now being used as a visible sign of ambition and confidence, with some of the cultural attractions in the county gaining national and international recognition.

If Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is keen to deliver the ambition of being recognised as having a major cultural scene, there is a need to review existing cultural infrastructure including the breadth and quality of the offer, and its visibility and impact within and beyond the borough boundary. The borough council needs to play its part in maintaining its cultural assets, work from the borough's cultural strengths and acknowledge the challenges it faces.

In some areas of our borough, the architectural fabric that is part of the attraction for both its residents and visitors is in need of attention. The 2011 Town Centre Advisory Panel Report stated that the *'constituent parts (of the town) are in need of improvement and investment'* and that the consultation had identified the need *'to provide more and accessible space for the library, museum and art gallery'*.



Both the Assembly Hall Theatre and Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery provide quality arts activity and, in the case of the Museum, house nationally important collections. Despite this, there is a recognition that both services could offer more and provide a better cultural focus and attraction in Royal Tunbridge Wells to complement that offered on The Pantiles.

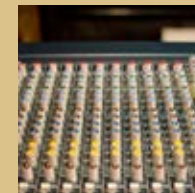
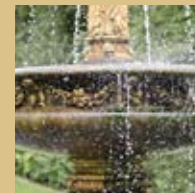
In order for Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery to really deliver and have a national impact, attention needs to be given to its building, facilities and programme of work. Currently as little as 10% of the Museum's collection can be viewed at any one time, and because its facilities are out-dated, the ability to put on appropriate, contemporary exhibitions and corresponding arts activities for the public is severely limited. The Assembly Hall Theatre, the only large-scale venue in the borough, would benefit from enhancement. Facilities will need to be improved if it is to continue to meet the demands of its audiences as well as meeting the technical demands of the larger touring shows.





Away from the built environment, the borough faces the challenge of maintaining and developing one of its key cultural assets – the natural environment. In order for everyone in the borough to be able to access and enjoy open spaces, and for the borough to continue to be a significant visitor destination, there needs to be careful and active management of outdoor spaces and places. The council recognises the importance of the natural environment to the borough and the continuing need to utilise its parks and open spaces effectively, in partnership with initiatives such as the Kent High Weald Partnership and local community groups.

The independent Cultural and Creative Industries Framework Report (2012) acknowledged that there is a good arts infrastructure and ecology of arts organisations and that Tunbridge Wells is recognised as having a strong creative industry sector with digital media, PR and marketing activities. It also stated, however, that this relative success was ‘understated’ and that Tunbridge Wells was in danger of losing its creative appeal to areas of Kent that had been more aggressive in their approach to the creative industries and culture-led regeneration.



The report recommended that the borough needs to diversify its creative industries, introduce a younger demographic and ‘*establish visible and high profile hubs for sector activity that encourage collaboration, trade and innovation.*’ From in-depth consultation with creative businesses in the area, the report’s authors found that the borough ‘*lacks a distinctive creative narrative, which in turn makes it less attractive to would-be incoming creative businesses. This also means existing businesses are less able to benefit from a ‘Tunbridge Wells brand’ and wider sectors such as retail and tourism do not have a contemporary story based on creative production to sell.*’ This is echoed by the independent Town Forum Working Group on Leisure, Culture and Tourism (January 2013) who noted that there could be ‘*more confident and coherent marketing of what is available and a high profile for (Tunbridge Wells’) unique features.*’

There are difficulties to be overcome if the borough is to realise its ambition, but we believe that in partnership there is much that can be done to make Tunbridge Wells a vibrant cultural centre in the next 10 years.

‘The borough needs to diversify its creative industries’



‘The largest cultural and creative industries sector in Kent’



The Plans – economy

The borough's cultural offer is integral to the success of the visitor economy. Tunbridge Wells welcomes some 4.5 million visitors a year, with an estimated spend of £241m, and the sector employs nearly 4,500 people.

In addition, the borough has the largest cultural and creative industries sector in Kent, with particular strengths in digital media, PR and marketing. A recent European Report stated that cultural and creative industries have a positive impact on *‘innovation, welfare and well-being, social cohesion, new models of entrepreneurship, knowledge society ... local identity, and environmental sustainability.’*

We need to ensure our cultural and creative industries stay and develop, providing new jobs for the borough.

Key Priority – Economy

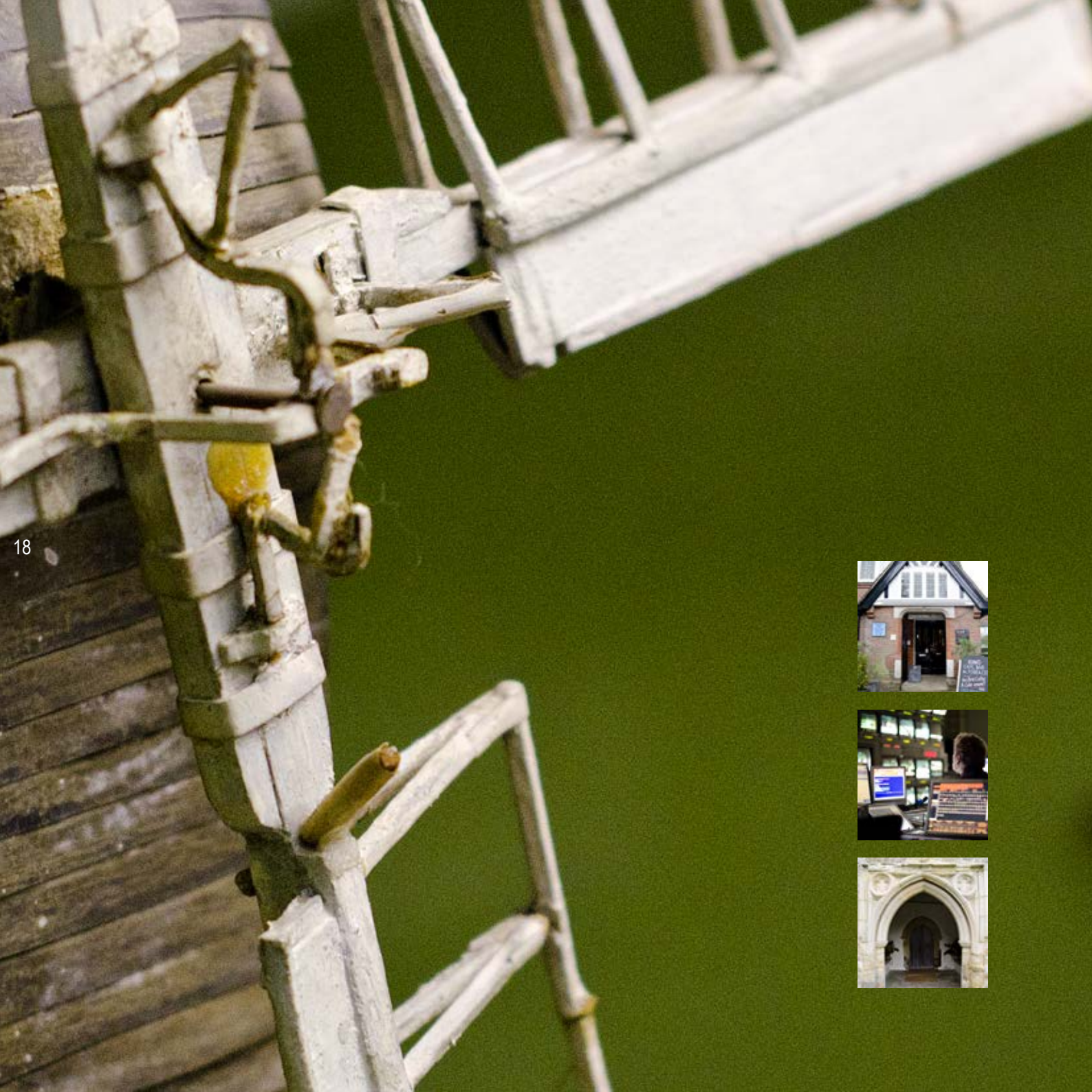
Support the growth of existing creative businesses and new start ups

Actions:

Take forward the recommendations from the recent Cultural and Creative Industries Framework Report:

- *Deliver dedicated workspace hub (or hubs) to support growth in the Creative Industries Sector*
- *Set up a cultural leaders group:*
 - *to raise the profile of the creative sector in Tunbridge Wells*
 - *to begin to work together to ‘sell’ the story of the Tunbridge Wells creative economy in order to attract and retain more creative professionals to the area*





The Plans – place

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council understands that high quality public spaces are of importance to the attractiveness and safety of the borough and are one of the factors that attract visitors and businesses to invest.

Our cultural buildings, together with the activities they generate, should help define Tunbridge Wells as a place where culture is important. Businesses, including the cultural and creative industries, recognise the commercial value of working within an attractive environment.

The built and natural environment are vital in creating civic pride, encouraging a sense of belonging and contributing to residents' well-being and health.

Key priority – Place

Promote, develop and protect the borough's existing cultural strengths

- *By working with partners to better promote our cultural heritage*
- *By being passionate and responsible stewards of our built and natural environment*



Actions:

Promote

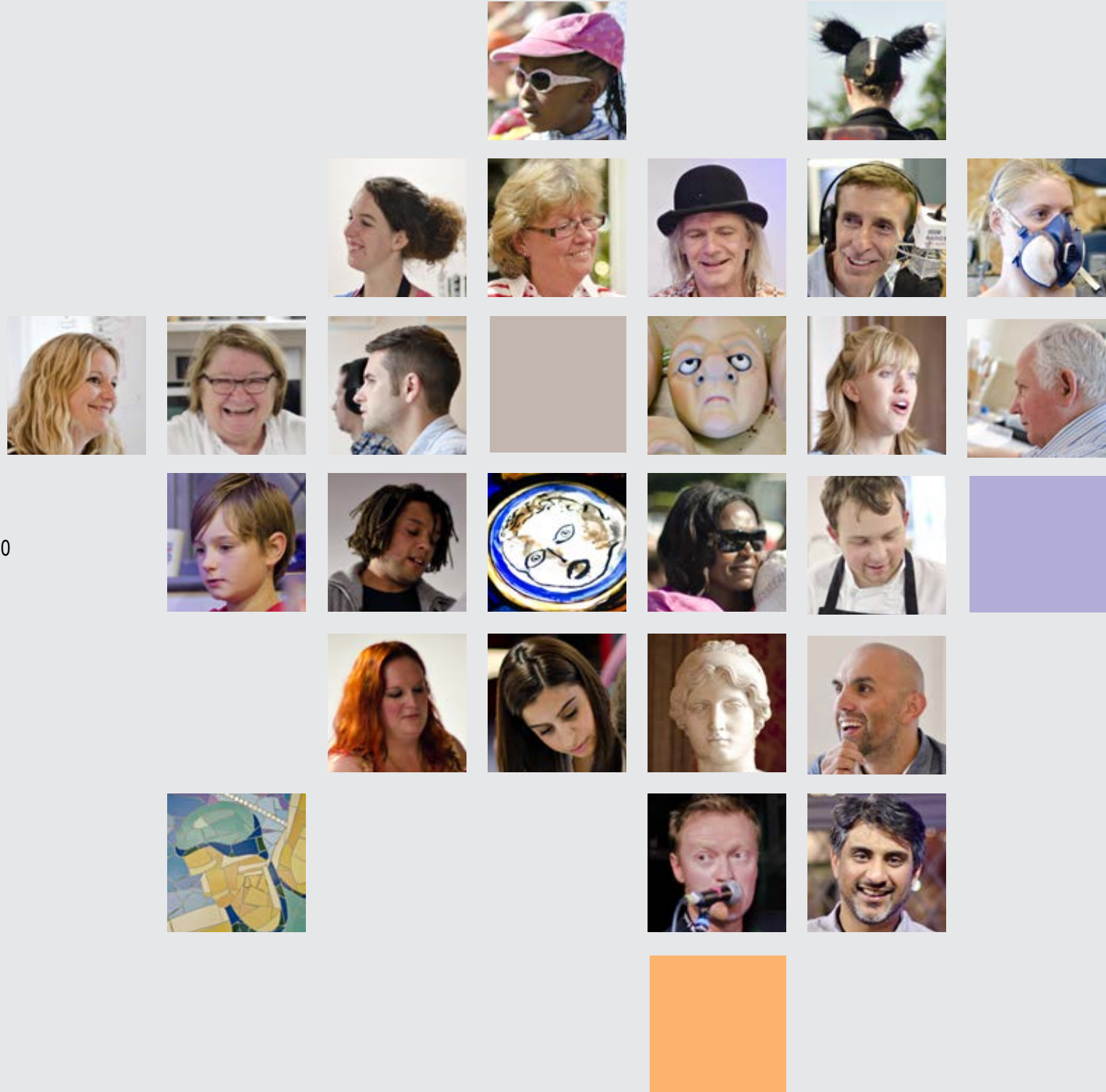
- *Work with the cultural leaders group and partners to raise the profile of Tunbridge Wells as a cultural destination*
- *Develop a Destination Management Plan, in partnership with Visit Kent, to market the borough to tourists*
- *Investigate ways in which TWBC can support cultural promotion across the borough*

Develop

- *Develop and implement a public art policy to help shape art in the public realm*
- *Seek ways to enliven parks and open spaces with cultural activities*

Protect

- *Protect, and where there is opportunity enhance, the borough's historic buildings, landscapes, parks and gardens*



The Plans – people

A vibrant cultural offer includes opportunities for all to take part in inspirational creative activities.

Participating in creative activities can boost self-esteem and self-expression, and broaden horizons and ambitions. It can unlock potential at any age, and develop skills that can result in employment opportunities or entrepreneurial activity. Creative learning can often benefit those for whom formal education is difficult and for whom mainstream training is not appropriate.

For many, culture is an avenue for civic participation and volunteering, allowing people to give something back to their community. Arts and cultural organisations thrive on volunteers, and many societies and Friends organisations have been set up to support culture, with benefits for both the individuals who give their time and the cultural organisations they support.

Key Priority – People

Redevelop Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery and enhance the Assembly Hall Theatre to enable more people to have an opportunity to participate in culture.

Actions:

- *Ascertain the scope and size of the redevelopment of the Museum and enhancement of the Theatre:*
 - *commission a feasibility study and, based on the results, decide on the way forward*
 - *investigate the feasibility of approaching Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for funding to support the project*
 - *work with partners such as KCC to investigate how the Library and Adult Education Centre might fit within redevelopment plans*
 - *consult the public about the redevelopment of Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery and the enhancement of the Assembly Hall Theatre*
- *Ensure that Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery and the Assembly Hall Theatre have participatory programmes that are inspirational and inclusive*
- *Provide support and advice to smaller cultural organisations throughout the borough to help them develop engagement programmes for their sites*
- *Develop inspirational programming for new cultural spaces*

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has aligned its strategy to relevant local, regional and national strategies:

National

The TWBC Cultural Strategy is also set within a national framework and acknowledges Arts Council England's 10 year strategy for Arts, Museums and Libraries as set down in 'Achieving great art for everyone' and 'Culture, knowledge and understanding: great museums and libraries for everyone'. This strategic framework is underpinned by Arts Council England's five goals:

- Goal 1**
Excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums and libraries
- Goal 2**
More people experience and are inspired by the arts, museums and libraries
- Goal 3**
The arts, museums and libraries are **sustainable, resilient** and **innovative**
- Goal 4**
The **leadership and workforce** in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and highly skilled
- Goal 5**
Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries

Regional

- Kent County Council's Cultural Strategy — *Unlocking Kent's Cultural Potential - A Cultural Strategy for Kent 2010-15* — sets a regional context and TWBC will thereby contribute to its three intentions:
- 1 We will grow Kent's creative economy by being welcoming and cooperative hosts to the creative workforce
 - 2 We will protect Kent's existing strengths by being passionate and responsible stewards of Kent's built and natural environment
 - 3 We will increase Kent's potential by being ambitious and resourceful cultural planners

Local

- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council strategies that impact on culture:
- *TWBC Local Development Framework*
 - *TWBC Cultural Strategy Officer Projects 2014*

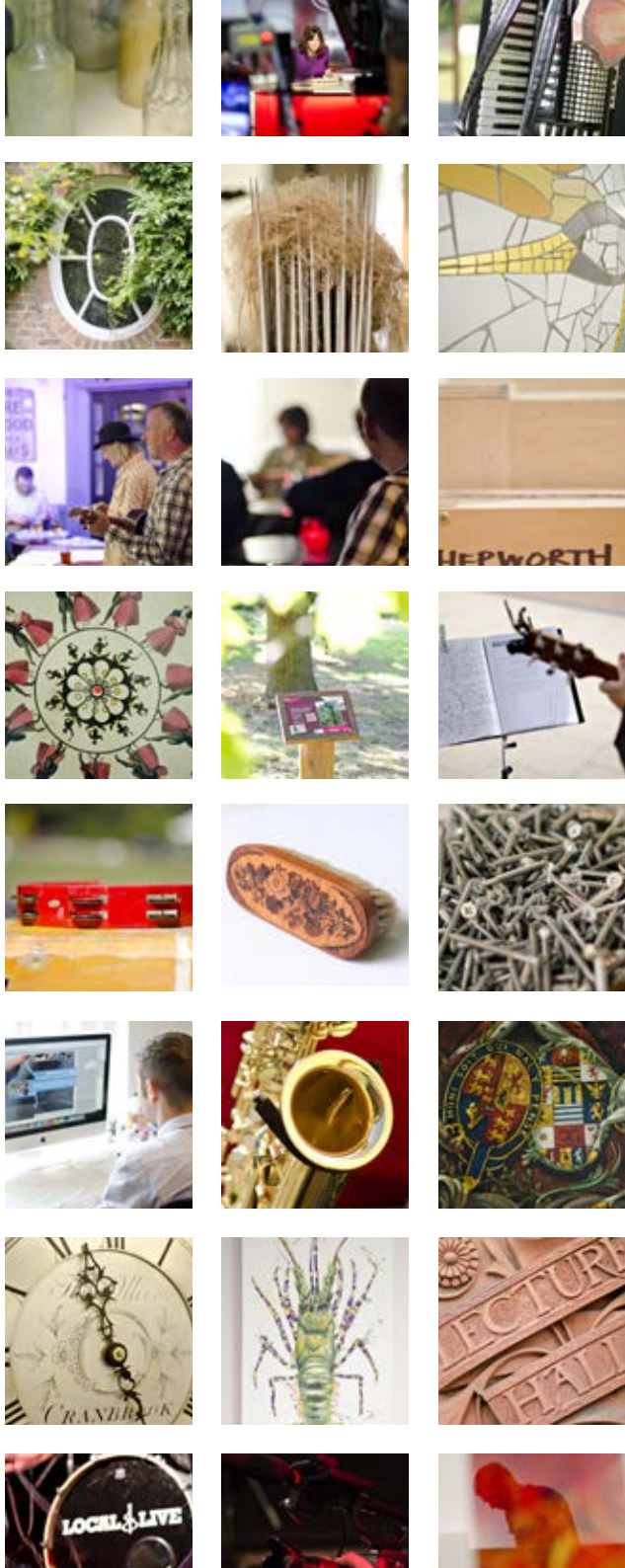
For more information on these strategies see:

National
Arts Council England:
www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/our-vision-2011-21
www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do2/our-vision-2011-21/our-vision-for-museums-and-libraries

Regional
Kent County Council:
shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/leisure-and-culture/arts-development

Local
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council:
www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/residents/planning/planning-policy/local-development-scheme
www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/culturalstrategy





Photos

All photos (except Cllr Jane March) by Chris Shoebridge

front cover: Strangeface Theatre Company

page 02: The Forum; Read Your Words in association with Javabeen and Tunbridge Wells Writers; Calverley Grounds

page 03: The Forum

page 04: Assembly Hall Theatre art workshop; Cranbrook Museum; Tunbridge Wells Ukulele Night Thing; Cllr Jane March x 3

page 06: Strangeface Theatre Company; BBC South East; Grey Lady Music Lounge; Illyria Theatre Company, Bedgebury Pinetum

page 09: Bedgebury Pinetum, Mascalls Gallery, Dunorlan Park; Finchcocks Museum; Calverley Grounds

page 10: Read Your Words in association with Javabeen and Tunbridge Wells Writers; Oliver Budd mosaic at Weald Sports Centre; BBC South East; St Mary’s Church. Lamberhurst

page 11: Rosemary Shrager Cookery School; Cranbrook Museum; Arthur Ellis, artist

page 12: Yoyo Design; Grey Lady Music Lounge; Bedgebury Pinetum; Trinity Theatre; Strangeface Theatre Company

page 13: Assembly Hall Theatre art workshop; Dunorlan Park; Grey Lady Music Lounge; Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery; Trinity Theatre

pages 14 & 15: The Pantiles

page 16: Yoyo Design

page 18: Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery, Kino Cinema, Hawkhurst; BBC South East; St Mary’s Church. Lamberhurst

page 20: Illyria Theatre Company, Bedgebury Pinetum x 2;

Rosemary Shrager Cookery School; Tunbridge Wells Ukulele Night Thing x 2; BBC South East; Strangeface Theatre Company;

Yoyo Design; Rosemary Shrager Cookery School; Yoyo Design; Strangeface Theatre Company; Finchcocks Museum; Arthur Ellis, artist;

Tunbridge Wells Ukulele Night Thing; Read Your Words in association with Javabeen and Tunbridge Wells Writers; St Mary’s Church, Lamberhurst; Illyria Theatre Company, Bedgebury Pinetum; Rosemary Shrager Cookery School; Read Your Words in association with Javabeen and Tunbridge Wells Writers; BBC South East; Finchcocks Museum; Yoyo Design;

Oliver Budd mosaic at Weald Sports Centre; The Forum; Tunbridge Wells Ukulele Night Thing

page 22: Illyria Theatre Company, Bedgebury Pinetum x 3

page 24: Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery; BBC South East; Illyria Theatre Company, Bedgebury Pinetum; Finchcocks Museum; Cranbrook Museum; Oliver Budd mosaic at Weald Sports Centre;

Tunbridge Wells Ukulele Night Thing; Read Your Words in association with Javabeen and Tunbridge Wells Writers; Mascalls Gallery;

Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery; Bedgebury Pinetum; buskers in The Pantiles;

Illyria Theatre Company, Bedgebury Pinetum; Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery; Mascalls Gallery;

Yoyo Design; Illyria Theatre Company, Bedgebury Pinetum; Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery;

Cranbrook Museum; Rosemary Shrager Cookery School; Kino Cinema, Hawkhurst;

The Forum x 2; Mascalls Gallery

Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery x 2

page 25: Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery

pages 26 & 27: Mascalls Gallery

back cover: Illyria Theatre Company, Bedgebury Pinetum

