

**BIG BURNS SUPPER**

STRATEGIC PLAN

2020-2024

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## **FORWARD**

It is hard to believe we are conceiving a plan which will take us up to 2024, but the momentum and legacy that has been shaped around our success demands that we focus our energy and resources in the right direction and at the right pace. Central to that, has been observing our earliest ambitions and understanding why certain product innovations worked, and where there was room for improvement.

Our audience are who we create our artistic programmes for, and we consciously try to present and create work that surprises and gives them a moment to think a little differently. We are ready to think innovatively about how we continue to inspire our loyal followers by thinking outside the box, particularly with regards using different space for performance as part of our effort to play to our strengths.

In the course of creating this plan, we committed to the idea that we were free to establish our own blueprint, develop our own sets of working conditions which is influenced by our unique rural environment which operates outside of the creative hubs in more populated areas. We reject the idea of formal structures to our business because we have tried lots of different models.

The strength of our festival brand is only possible because of the huge energy that our partners, volunteers, investors and audience give us agency to fulfil. It means that our relationship with our stakeholders is probably even more critical if we are to continue to grow the legacy of our ambition into the future.

Graham Main  
Founder & CEO

Karen Clapperton  
Chair of the Board

March 2020

## **OUR MISSION & PURPOSE**

We create cultural experience by curating a major festival programme in South Scotland and year-round community arts programmes with lots of different artistic and community partners to develop our people, our place, our profile and our position in the world.

## **OUR VISION**

Big Burns Supper will become some of the most popular cultural events in the UK and our social co-operative model continues to transform our people and place.

## **OUR AIMS**

Big Burns Supper is an independent curator and presenter of performance and community arts. Our three cornerstones are

- We raise the profile of our place within UK, Europe and internationally.
- We create culture that offers our audiences an experience they will never forget, and we use culture as a means for social connection.
- Our organisation continues to thrive, and we deliver a balanced portfolio of projects that are sustainable into the future.

## **CONTEXT**

Our work takes place in a rural area which has low levels of cultural infrastructure which creates a barrier to the arts and around 50% of our young people are inclined to leave the area because there is a lack of opportunity. Together with our extraordinary partners, we have tried to think impossibly about defying these environmental conditions, and we sought to conceive a blueprint that would bring a major cultural festival which is sited in the town centre.

We face considerable challenges in raising finance to be able to achieve our ambitious plans, and we face even greater challenges in trying to get people outside of the region to think that strong artistic programmes can happen outside of the conventional places. But where there is ambition and kindness, there has been a thousand helping hands and local businesses who have been quick to support our vision. Without these powerful allies, our dream would not be possible.

We are still limited to the range of artists we can present because of the scale of our spaces, but it has resulted in us programming imaginatively and playing to our ultimate strengths; intimate, authentic and meaningful.

*“A new creative force has emerged in Dumfries”*  
**Joyce McMillan** (The Scotsman)

## **OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

In this evolving and challenging context, Big Burns Supper seeks to set ambitious, imaginative and achievable strategic priorities.

By setting these priorities, Big Burns Supper is looking to balance the needs of our audiences (existing and new), and our artists, promoters and participants.

Big Burns Supper takes into consideration our funding, our physical and virtual infrastructure, our expertise and collaborative capabilities, and our unique, rich legacy.

## **PROFILE AND POSITION**

We raise the profile of our place within UK, Europe and internationally.

## **AUDIENCE & ARTISTIC PROGRAMME**

We create culture that offers our audiences an experience they will never forget, and we use culture as a means for social connection.

## **ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Our organisation continues to thrive, and we deliver a balanced portfolio of projects that are sustainable into the future.

“Big Burns Supper is now the cornerstone for Burns Night”  
**Kevin O’Sullivan** (Events Base)

## **PROFILE AND POSITION**

We raise the profile of our place within UK, Europe and internationally.

Develop an international profile of Big Burns Supper and increase awareness of our in the global marketplace by experimenting with the creation and distribution our artistic programmes of work digitally.

Attract new audiences for our work and to continue to create groundbreaking initiatives with partners that help to remove the barriers to arts and culture by sustaining high levels of social engagement and involvement with our festivals.

Engage young people, emerging artists and lifelong learners in the creative industries by providing them with progression routes to employability and develop more opportunities and approaches for 18–25-year old's to engage with our festivals.

## **HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THIS?**

We will continue to explore the use of digital technology in helping us connect our programmes with a younger and more international audience, utilising available content to help build our brand presence.

Programme artists and shows that have significant pulling power with both the public and media outlets which will shine a spotlight on our festival destinations, and launch parts of our programme in June of each year.

Redevelop our language and tone of voice outside Dumfries & Galloway to make our programme of work accessible to a wider audience through a series of themed partnership with target markets to the festival, including national and international pilots in this field.

We are going to consolidate our creative pathways by working with partners on joint strategies for performing arts, and we will deliver short level pathways for creative industries wrapped around our festival teams, rather than year-long industry training.

### **SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIC OUTCOMES BY 2024**

- National broadcast broadcasts content from Big Burns Supper
- We deliver one iconic audience development project per year
  - Our streaming audience reaches 85,000 per year
    - 5% of our audience are international
    - 10% of our audience are from rest of the UK
  - 40 emerging producers have worked in live training roles
- 2,000 people a year participate in our major community projects

## **AUDIENCE & ARTISTIC PROGRAMME**

We create culture that offers our audiences an experience they will never forget, and we use culture as means for social connection.

Inspire our participants in weekly programmes of performance led community arts which is meaningful, authentic and, inclusive.

Bring artists from around the world and use our festivals as a way to connect the with South Scotland.

Develop an artistic programme and audience for culture in the South of Scotland through our festival programmes with social and artistic programmes in public spaces

## **HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THIS?**

We are going to explore and examine the use of alternative spaces around which can breathe life into our artistic programme, and help to build a strong programme of work

We are committed to siting major pieces of community and socially engineered theatre using known works and writers to help establish a mass audience for drama and live performance in rural areas, by establishing site sympathetic models which play to our strength of poor venue infrastructure.

We are particularly driven to develop stronger levels of public and free to view work in an effort to increase an audience for culture through our festival programmes.

We will work to build the artistic and collaborative relationships that we have with our existing and new partners with the view that this will create the greatest impact over a longer period of time.

We want to be an agent for collaboration, but not necessarily the facilitator and we will play a stronger role in supporting work, rather than always leading it.

### **SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIC OUTCOMES BY 2024**

- Audience grown to 50,000
- Create one piece of home-grown theatre and dance biannually
- Curate 10 international artists in our programmes between 2020-2024
  - Profile new music from Scotland at our festivals
  - Profile new music from Cumbria at our festivals
  - 10% of our audience are aged between 16-25
- 2,000 people a year participate in our major community projects
- Renew our Access Policy and make all parts of our festival accessible



## **ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Our organisation continues to thrive, and we deliver a balanced portfolio of projects that are sustainable into the future.

Manage our organisation using project management and evidence driven platforms for a wide range of projects to thrive with good budgeting and strong reserves.

Engage our stakeholders, customers and people in a continuous cycle of feedback to constantly improve our innovative stewardship of our social structure into the future.

Maintain the collaborative platform for the festival and continue to seek out new partnerships and encourage local people and artists to be centre stage at our festivals.

## **HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THIS?**

We have restructured the company in preparation for this strategic period, and we will continue to test and re-model this by increasing the capacity of our freelance collective by developing strong in-house training and collective membership which brings strong benefits to our people. .

We will continue to drive forward our activity without a central hub, but instead deliver our projects in multiple partnership locations as we feel this offers the best value for our work.

We are investing in increased levels of commercial management and staffing to maximise the potential of our commercial value, whilst maintaining profitability.

### **SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIC OUTCOMES BY 2024**

- Develop the Volunteering Capacity of the Organisation
  - Diversify our board each year
  - Build reserves of over £85,000
- Develop the Strategic Plan for 2025-2030
  - Increase benefit-in-kind to £200,000 per year
  - Increase public funding by £150,000 per year
- Increase commercial revenue to £500,000 per year
  - Attract brand sponsorship and title partnership
    - Increase membership to 200 per year
    - Invest £120k in our event infrastructure

## **ABOUT US**

**Big Burns Supper is a grass-roots community arts organisation, nestled on the Borderlands between Scotland and England with projects across Dumfries & Galloway with a dynamic ensemble of freelance producers who deliver different our social and cultural projects.**

We are a unique social cooperative with over 100 members who help underwrite our year-round costs. We are registered as a charity and as a company which is limited by guarantee, governed by a board of 7 voluntary trustees, and we employ over 80 different freelance staff a year to deliver a diverse range of cultural projects.

Our signature projects lead inspirational programmes of work including Big Burns Supper, Carlisle Fringe Festival, Le Haggis, Queer Haggis, Burns Night Carnival, Dumfries Youth Theatre, Dumfries Community Choir, Creative Sparks and the Producers of the Future.

We seek the most inspirational performance talent from across the world to create our ambitious artistic programmes.

We create exciting partnerships with our local community and with national and international collaborators.

We inspire emerging artists and the next generation to seize their creative potential with us.

We create the space and time for our community to participate in high quality arts activities.

We contribute socially and economically to our local area.

“It’s not just how good Carlisle Fringe is, it is how well it has been organised”  
**The Cumberland News**

## **CONCLUSION**

The strategic objectives set out in this plan are based on a considered appraisal of the opportunities and challenges which Big Burns Supper, as a signature national cultural event, producer will confront in the five years to 2024. Festivals are particularly sensitive to broader technological, social and cultural shifts. We seek to embrace all of these changes in delivering our work into the future, and we recognise that our unique social co-operative helps us to unlock the overall potential of this.

We are ready to embrace the next five years using different models of working, but with the same integrity and values that our unique social collective has been built on.

## **DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

The purpose of this document is to set out the direction, goals and aspirations of Big Burns Supper for the five-year period from 2020 to 2024. This document has been developed through consultation with the executive team and board members as well as stakeholders

## **KEY FUNDERS**

Dumfries & Galloway Council

Event Scotland

Hollywood Trust

## **KEY STAKEHOLDERS**

Our audience

Our artists

Our volunteers

Our partner venues

Our sponsors

Our peer organisations

Our international peers