

9 October 2019

Legal & General calls for planning reform to encourage more music venues

- Sound Diplomacy study commissioned by Legal & General lays ways to “plan in” culture
- More than a third of UK music venues closed since 2008, yet live music contributes £1bn to the economy
- Developers should map out music needs of areas and build more mixed-use schemes

Architects, property developers and local planners need to better prioritise music venues and listen more closely to artists and performers when designing regeneration schemes, a [new report](#) commissioned by Legal & General has said.

Report authors Sound Diplomacy, a consultancy that advised the mayors of London, New York and Barcelona on cultural policy and night time economy, says that mapping out music businesses, creating more mixed-use developments and undertaking more meaningful community engagement could help architects and planners reverse the decline of music venues.

Legal & General has invested over £22 billion in direct investments such as homes, urban regeneration, clean energy and small business finance and will continue to invest billions into improving our future cities. The company believes the time is right to start a conversation about how we value less tangible treasures such as music and culture.

John Cummins, Managing Director of Future Cities, Legal & General Capital, said:

"It's easy to think about investment in terms of pounds and pence, but when you look at any city across the world, places will either thrive or not depending on the cultural or sporting legacies that underpin them. We of course need jobs and great housing, but we also need places to enjoy your life, it all of these things together that will make our future cities better. While buildings will change and cities will evolve, music will be with us for centuries to come and as long term investors, it's our responsibility to do what we can to support it. "

Titled 'This Must Be The Place', the report warns music and culture are currently not high priorities when planning decisions are made, eroding the cultural fabric and heritage of our cities. This is reducing not just live music, but the potential for study, recreation and community uses - all of which help educate communities and reduce crime.

Britain has lost over a third of its music venues over the last decade, says charity group Music Venue Trust with iconic gig venues like The Harley in Sheffield, The Maze in Nottingham, the Victoria Inn in

Derby and Soho's legendary The Borderline, where the likes of Blondie and Oasis have played, having all closed their doors this year.

This is despite live music events generating a contribution of £991 million to the UK economy, and the wider industry being worth £4.5 billion to the UK economy in 2018, according to UK Music.

The report proposes key recommendations to foster culture across the built environment, providing a long-term plan for redeveloping UK cities, including:

1. Map the cultural offering of a neighbourhood – understanding the needs of a neighbourhood before submitting the initial planning proposal is key in providing the right venues for the area, and ensuring a long-term strategy is followed through planning to development. This means surveying the number of artists' workspaces, LGBTQ+ venues, nightclubs, and rehearsal studios amongst other cultural facilities and creating an interactive map like the GLA Cultural Infrastructure Map
2. Community outreach – inviting local artists to consult with designers and developers during planning to inform development and avoid future issues of NIMBYism. In 2016 the Greater London Authority created the role of Night Czar to ensure the Mayor's plan for London as a 24-hour city is carried out and to protect the city's venues by connecting different local groups together to support their areas. Manchester has since followed suit with the role of Night Mayor and Bristol has created a night-time forum of local businesses and residents to the same purpose.
3. Encourage mixed-use developments – using these spaces to provide music venues and community space could increase footfall to high streets and help small businesses navigate the expenses of business rates, like the amenity-led mixed-use scheme in Granary Square, King's Cross which offers frequent events, creating a strong community culture
4. Use future tax levies to fund development – by understanding the economic value cultural developments can have on a community, the report suggests engaging with local authorities and businesses to approve a tax on all cultural events to support a future funding model
5. Prioritise user experience over commerciality – with the current generation more experience-focused, it is essential that all developments think more holistically about their cultural impact and ensure a long-term strategy for town development

Support for local music and culture is also key to encouraging diversity. For example, the Sage Gateshead venue provides a place for over-50s to take part in music workshops. This has been shown to alleviate symptoms of Dementia and create strong community ties for isolated older people.

Helping gig venues through initiatives like the Mayor's Vision for London will help boost economies, tourism and build a lasting infrastructure that will support development fit for the future and foster strong communities, according to the report.

As part of its wide-ranging direct investments such as homes, urban regeneration, clean energy and small business finance, Legal & General's Future Cities drive has been and continues to encourage cultural mapping throughout the planning and development phases of their schemes, such as at their recent development, The Lexicon in Bracknell, Berkshire and Bath Quays North, showing their commitment to the report.

As a result, at The Lexicon, Legal & General invested £200 million into the development of a retail and leisure space, which transformed the town of Bracknell and established a strong music culture, including their own Lexicon Proms.

The Lexicon has since been shortlisted for three prestigious awards: one MAPIC Award and two Revo Gold Awards, under the 'Best Retail Urban', 'Re:new' and 'Re:generate' categories, demonstrating the social demand for cultural planning.

Shain Shapiro PhD, founder at Sound Diplomacy, said:

"It's really positive that major institutions are now taking such a proactive role in wanting to shape the musical and cultural footprint of our cities. Responsible investors recognise that "build and they will come" no longer works and that to create a real sense of place, fundamentals like music, art and education need to be considered at an early stage.

"The music industry offers huge economic opportunities for cities but this isn't about money - it's about quality of life. That's why finding innovative ways to sustain music and culture across entire neighbourhoods is so crucial.

"Places across Britain - from Glasgow to Bristol and Manchester to Chelmsford - have rich music histories and we have to ensure that the cultural value of communities is preserved and that investment and support isn't solely focused on London. "Legal & General's commitment to our Future Cities plan is just the support we need to engage in a proactive, rather than reactive, cultural development."

Cllr Huw Thomas, Leader of Cardiff Council, said:

"Cardiff has been working closely with Sound Diplomacy on a music ecology assessment and strategy, exploring ways to develop the sector and infrastructure so music can thrive in the city. Culture has been at the forefront of the cities transformation in recent years and now we putting music at its heart. We realise you cannot lift people's aspirations by limiting their horizons, music in a national utility of the soul which requires investment'.

Harry Pickering, Head of UK Retail and Leisure at Schroders, said:

“Entertainment, enjoyment and a sense of place are more important than ever to make retail and leisure environments welcoming for consumers.

“In this context, music and cultural experiences are a critical part of making town centres successful and, as joint owners with Legal & General at Bracknell, we have actively embedded events and entertainment within The Lexicon. It has become a leading regional destination for the area where our retailers report strong trading results and footfall remains high more than two years since it first launched.”

Chris Oglesby, CEO of Bruntwood, said:

“Bruntwood has always seen art and culture as the lifeblood of thriving cities, making them interesting places able to challenge and delight, and our commitment to this means we are the largest corporate sponsor of the arts in the North and Midlands.

“Through the business and the Oglesby Charitable Trust we have supported countless groups, projects and individuals to bring their cultural ideas to life including through the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting and Manchester International Festival which we have supported since its inception in 2007. The importance of music and culture has been central to how we think about our cities. Buildings are creative platforms but by integrating music and culture across the master-planning and development process we can create more diverse, interesting and user-centric places.

“Take the Oxford Road Corridor in the heart of Manchester where galleries, museums, theatres and cultural destinations sit alongside a cluster of innovation-based businesses and new homes in an environment that supports congregation, community and cohesion creating a real sense of place.”

Mike Emmerich, founding director of Metro Dynamics, said:

“There is more to music than Motown and Metallica. Our cities were forged in the era of Mozart and this music is an important part of our cultural heritage, something we need to remember and sustain as our urban renaissance matures.”

Tateo Nakajima, Director of Culture and Venues, Arup, said:

“Without culture, we risk losing our sense of place and identity. This study brings forth thinking that is critically needed in order to make our communities vibrant and healthy. Essential reading for anyone working in this space.”

Charlotte Hatherley, Musician and Producer, said:

“With iconic music venues closing across the country, young musicians are being left without support, inspiration, or opportunity. I began playing in the London club circuit and it was through those gigs that I

made a name for myself and ended up playing with Ash after being scouted out - it was those places that really kick-started my career.

“The music industry is a tough business wherever you are, but Sound Diplomacy and Legal & General’s work means that young musicians in the UK will have that same much-needed opportunity and network that I had to really inspire their own great music.”

Claire Gevaux, Director of Programme at Help Musician UK, said:

“We know through our insights how precarious the life of a musician can be without a supported ecosystem around them. That ecosystem is fragmented when it’s not considered as part of the fabric of our cities and communities.

“Building cultural provision into the core of planning for city development will help to improve the business, wellbeing and creative opportunities for musicians – to ensure musicians thrive, not just survive. Creating a holistic approach is something that we at Help Musicians understand is vital to the wellbeing of musicians and equally the cities in which they live and work.”

Greg Marshall, general manager at AFEM, said:

"This report pulls together a wealth of thought leadership on bringing music into the process of development plans for our cities; collating numerous examples of initiatives, structures and methods from around the world which support and enrich the development of music culture and the wider value that brings to society.

We need long-term infrastructure plans for our cities to support music in all its forms to develop vibrant, diverse and culturally rich urban environments which facilitate meaningful human connection and the creation of better places for all. This report by L&G and Sound Diplomacy is an important step towards making that happen."

Michael Dugher, CEO of UK Music, said:

"Planning decisions, licensing changes, business rates and rent rises are all to blame for the decline in music venues in recent years.

"UK Music successfully campaigned for a change in the law to deliver the Agent of Change principle to help small venues stave off the threat from developers. We also helped secure £1.5 million in ring-fenced funding for grassroots venues from Arts Council England. And we have set up new Music Boards in city regions throughout the country to coordinate help for venues and ensure local music scenes are as culturally diverse and inclusive as possible.

“But we still need more action and Government support - including in accepting the hard-fought for recommendations of the recent DCMS Select Committee report such as appointing a statutory

consultative body to promote the protection of music venues and provide advice to local authorities on planning applications and how to monitor the use of Agent of Change.

"Protecting our venues is not just about the £1 billion a year that live music contributes to the UK economy. It's also about protecting the talent pipeline, ensuring access for all to a world-leading industry and celebrating our country's cultural identity. Ed Sheeran, Adele and Stormzy are global music icons that all developed their careers in precisely the small music venues that have either been forced to close or that are now under threat. We must all do more to help them survive and thrive in our towns and cities."

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Notes to editors -

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