

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Major cultural and sporting events,
HC 259

Tuesday 6 July 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 6 July 2021.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Julian Knight (Chair); Kevin Brennan; Steve Brine; Alex Davies-Jones; Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Damian Green; Damian Hinds; John Nicolson; Giles Watling; Mrs Heather Wheeler.

Questions 1 - 54

Witnesses

I: Chenine Bhatena, Creative Director, Coventry City of Culture Trust; Dr Franco Bianchini, Associate Director, Centre for Cultural Value, University of Leeds; and Ruth Hollis, Chief Executive, Spirit of 2012.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Chenine Bhatena, Dr Franco Bianchini and Ruth Hollis.

Q1 Chair: This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and the first hearing in our inquiry into major cultural and sporting events. We are joined today by one panel of three witnesses: Chenine Bhatena, Creative Director of the Coventry City of Culture Trust; Dr Franco Bianchini, Associate Director at the Centre for Cultural Value, University of Leeds; and Ruth Hollis, Chief Executive of Spirit of 2012. Chenine, Franco and Ruth, good morning and thank you for joining us. I don't think there are any interests to declare from Members, but if I have missed anything please do so when you are asked to give your questions.

Ruth, I am going to start with you. The question that comes to mind straightaway, thinking of the Spirit of 2012, is: what have we learned from 2012, how have we applied it and what do you think still needs to be applied?

Ruth Hollis: I think we learned a huge amount in 2012 about how to put on a major event in the UK and the spectacle of putting on a very safe, successful, visibly successful Games. We learned a lot about the economic value of the regeneration in the East End and of putting on a major event in the UK. We also learned a lot about social legacy but that is something we would like to see a greater emphasis on—how events can leave a legacy of the health and wellbeing of participants, audience members and volunteers. The volunteers were a huge asset to London 2012, as they have been to events since.

Q2 Chair: What do you think we haven't learned? Where haven't we applied this? Where have the gaps come? There is a lot of talk about 2012 and the legacy. Has the legacy been everything that we wanted it to be?

Ruth Hollis: I think there is still a question about the long-term legacy. The Government set off with a 10-year plan for legacy and for the first few years were reporting on legacy annually. We are coming up to the 10th anniversary this year and the legacy of the London Games is still a priority for the GLA and locally, but I think whether it is a national priority to realise the benefits in the long term is still a question from London. Seeing that legacy as a long-term investment, a 10-year investment in the infrastructure and the social impacts is really important. We would like to see much greater emphasis placed on the long-term legacy for the people who are involved, the communities and the social impact of events.

Q3 Chair: Ruth, do you think that the pandemic has undermined some of that legacy from 2012? We have seen participation rates fall, I think by 6% in the first lockdown.

Ruth Hollis: I think that has been a consequence of the pandemic. I don't think that will be a long-term legacy of the Games. We have seen post-event participation rates increase and once we get back to whatever



the new normal is and people have the confidence to participate, they will start again. We fund projects right across the UK dealing with participation in grassroots sport, working with the very least active in terms of culture and volunteering. We see from people a real willingness to get back to in-person participation because of the benefits that it gives people for their health and wellbeing. I think it is long term and has not affected the long-term legacy of the Games. I thought it was very interesting in the first lockdown that people started talking about the London Olympics again and the Games and the feeling of pride and optimism and togetherness. I think we should not discount that spirit. That is why we are called the Spirit of 2012.

Q4 Chair: I was involved in a political sense with the Birmingham Commonwealth Games. We found it quite difficult to convince Government that we also wanted to build in a business expo with that, to have ancillary events of arts and culture and make it a cornerstone for not just sporting regeneration but wider societal regeneration. Do you think that the argument for such an approach is being made correctly? Do you think that it is still something that has to be argued, rather than taken as a bit of a given, that when you have a major event you should be thinking about all the potential for ancillary-type moves?

Ruth Hollis: I think it is a given for the event itself. We expect now when we have a multi-sport, large-scale event to have a cultural festival and community work alongside. We still need to work harder on the interplay between what happens for the spectacle and what happens in the communities on the ground. How do we translate that large spectacle, which there is a huge appetite for and which gives people a sense of pride in their place, hope and optimism in seeing something high quality and elite that can bring people together, into detailed work on the ground, making sure that people have the opportunity to participate in activity in their cultural life and in volunteering? We still need to work on the link between the two.

Q5 Steve Brine: Good morning, witnesses. Thanks for joining us. I will turn to you, Dr Franco. I am interested in the long-term planning—long-term strategy and hosting and securing major events. If we could draw back the curtain a bit and see how this starts, does it start with somebody well known from that particular sector approaching Government and saying, “We want to do this,” or is there a much longer-term plan? We know—we hope—when the next Olympics will be and the one after that and the one after that, and the same is true with all the European football and with every event. How does it work?

Dr Bianchini: The question is how it starts. It can start in a number of different ways. Normally the involvement of local authorities has been absolutely crucial in the UK for the events that I am familiar with, which are particularly the European Capital of Culture—it was called European City of Culture, initially—and the UK City of Culture. The involvement of local authorities is crucial but in some cases it does not start from local authorities. There are examples of successful European Capitals of



Culture that started from an association of citizens, of local people who had the idea and then persuaded the local authority that it was a good idea to bid. It can start in a number of different ways.

Q6 Steve Brine: Is there a long-term plan that you know of within Government to look at the Olympics for 2051?

Dr Bianchini: No. There might well be, but I don't know about this plan if it exists.

Q7 Steve Brine: Should there be?

Dr Bianchini: Well, 2051 is a long—

Steve Brine: Clearly that is a figure I am plucking out of thin air. There will be an Olympics in 2051, pandemics notwithstanding, but should there be a long-term plan for hosting major events?

Dr Bianchini: Yes, I don't see why not. If the plan had been prepared a couple of years ago, it would have to be redone because of the incredible structural, systemic impact of the pandemic. It would be a good idea to do the plan now that we can see the world emerging out of the pandemic, which, as you know, has had a tremendous impact, particularly on mega cultural and sporting events and on tourism of different kinds, including cultural tourism. If I were the Government, I would begin to prepare the plan now. It is the best time to do it.

Q8 Steve Brine: Chenine, you were nodding furiously at that. Was that for 2051 or the idea of the plan?

Chenine Bhatena: Good morning. I was thinking of the importance at a local level of having a long-term event strategy. When you bid for these programmes, they are more than a festival. What we are doing in Coventry is more than a one-year festival. It is a city change programme, and for that we need to be looking long term. We have put in place a theory of change with a set of long-term impacts and outcomes. We are calling it our story of irreversible change. It is very much about how we see our city in the future, and the role our city will play in the UK in the future. Part of that is having a major event strategy—thinking beyond City of Culture and thinking to other events and other policy-related opportunities that we might want to also be waving a flag for, for our city—which allows and enables the city council and the regional authority to deliver against their local and regional plan. I think it is absolutely essential.

When I worked at the Greater London Authority on the Olympics there was a long-term plan for legacy for east London, for the development of the Olympic site, but there were also the partnerships we built and the ambition that was created. The way in which we approached it in making the event sustainable and accessible—starting to change the way we work and operate—was absolutely crucial to that event. For every event that comes after that, we have to keep making that better and changing



it more. As Ruth mentioned, the social value is absolutely essential to that as well. I hope to see a longer-term strategy with any big major event bid.

Q9 Steve Brine: What else is in your longer-term strategy? Give us an exclusive.

Chenine Bhathena: When we have been developing City of Culture in Coventry, we have put legacy at the centre of everything we do right from the beginning. We have seen it as a city change programme, as I mentioned—the story of irreversible change. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our city to imagine its future and to do that with our communities, to tackle inequality, to create equity, to work with Government on the levelling-up agenda, to think of the environment and climate change, to think about tech for good, to think about health and poverty and the connection between the two, and to tackle some of those issues in our society. Not that we have the ability to resolve it all, but it is about looking at how we embed everything we do across the city's policy so that we support the work that the city council and the regional authority are doing through this programme of change.

We are still creating a joyful, magical, entertaining, mischievous year of culture, but we are also thinking about the social change that we want to see happening in our city and aligning ourselves with some of the big global agendas that are coming towards us, like climate change.

Q10 Steve Brine: A mischievous year of culture in Coventry. Presumably you talk to your opposite numbers in other cities and areas. Are you ahead of the pack, or are you middle of the field? Where do you sit in that? Do others have the same level of ambition and planning as you do?

Chenine Bhathena: Last week we hosted all of the cities and subregions that are planning to bid for the 2025 UK City of Culture. I think they could see that what we are doing in Coventry is evolving the model of UK City of Culture. We are only the third UK City of Culture and so it is still a very young programme, but we are looking at how we put communities at the centre of everything we do, how we think about decision-making and co-creation of programmes, how we invest in local leadership, in people, in artists at a local level. The legacy we leave behind us is a city that is able to continue to grow and develop long beyond the City of Culture.

We are also working closely with charities in the city and thinking about the role that culture plays in areas like mental health and isolation, poverty and homelessness, young people at risk, the integration of new communities coming into our city. Culture is such a golden thread that connects so many different areas of society, so we are trying to look at that across all the work that we do.

Q11 Steve Brine: Has it been particularly difficult this year? I notice you had various events spread around the city for the launch, as opposed to the



big events that you had planned. Has it been particularly difficult for the cultural workforce? Although the Culture Recovery Fund has helped a lot of the institutions, a lot of the workforce were not able to claim the self-employed support scheme and had to go and seek other employment to stay afloat. Has it been difficult to access the workforce?

Chenine Bhathena: We have been incredibly fortunate that we have held the City of Culture title in this period. We have been in a very different position to most other places around the UK and have been able to invest in people and make sure that they didn't have to be furloughed. We have been able to invest small amounts in local arts organisations and community organisations to keep them with us on the journey and to make sure they were able to plan towards City of Culture with us. We have even put investment into the hospitality industry and the business improvement district. We have supported the events theme at the cathedral. We have tried to keep everyone on the journey of City of Culture so that when we opened this year we were able to open together rather than us as the trust going alone.

Q12 **Steve Brine:** Have you found people who don't want to be on the journey? Have you found organisations, individuals or businesses who would rather not?

Chenine Bhathena: We have not really come across businesses or cultural organisations that don't want to be on the journey. There is always the odd individual who may not understand the value of being a City of Culture, but, having opened our year with the big signature event on 5 June, I think we have changed hearts and minds because people suddenly understand what this is all about. The fact that we have been able to create a major event in a pandemic without being able to target a live audience—using broadcast channels, our relationship with the BBC and various other broadcasters, radio, television, digital means, online, newspapers and social media to create an event for our times—has brought the city behind the whole thing.

Q13 **Steve Brine:** Have you pivoted after yesterday's announcement and 19 July when we arrive at our bus station known as "terminus"? Have you pivoted to change the events?

Chenine Bhathena: We were planning a very low capacity audience for a number of events, particularly indoor events. We now have to look at the guidance when it is published next week to see how we increase those capacities but also what our approach to social distancing will be going forward. Clearly, there is still a lot of concern among communities. People are still very cautious and we need to be able to show them that we are taking the Covid scenario seriously as well as joining with Government in moving forward.

Q14 **Steve Brine:** To be clear, you said that you would decide your approach to social distancing. There is no approach to social distancing, because there is no social distancing after 19 July and venues are able to act at



capacity. Are you saying that you are going to diverge from the Government's position, and on what authority are you going to do that?

Chenine Bhathena: We will be looking at the Government's guidance, but we also have to align ourselves with audience sentiment and that is still cautious. That might change as we go into July and August, but we need to be aware of it. No, we are not diverging from what the Government are saying—we have not seen the official guidance yet; that will come next week—but of course we need to be aware of how our audiences feel. There are already some case studies in the region where people are still worried about social distancing and the impacts on their families and the risk of contracting Covid, even if they have had jabs. We have to be aware and while, of course, we want to increase our capacity so that more people can enjoy the events that we are going to be putting on, we have to be mindful of how people engage with those events.

Q15 **Steve Brine:** Do you accept that there is a balance between you following Project Fear and you leading? At the end of the day, people are always going to be anxious, but you are putting on a cultural event and three-fifths of the country have been double jabbed and it will be even more by 19 July. Do you have to lead or do you have to follow?

Chenine Bhathena: I think we lead, but we do it carefully. We are absolutely in a leadership position and we work very closely with the DCMS and local, regional and national Government, but we also have to be aware of how our audiences are feeling. We will take a line with our board and our partners once the official guidance is published, and of course we will be in a leadership role on it.

Q16 **Damian Green:** I want to pick up on the legacy point that Chenine has been talking about, maybe with Ruth. It is a standard mantra before any event that legacy is what matters. Looking back at 2012 and the Olympics—a howling success, we all know—we can see now, 10 years later, that physically that part of east London has been absolutely transformed for the better. The before and after is inescapable there, but at the time there was this thought that it had changed the national mood and brought us together—all that kind of thing. Inevitably, over the last decade, quite a lot has happened to puncture and change that. It is nobody's fault; stuff happens. When we say that a legacy of a big event has to be all transforming, I wonder whether that is over-ambitious. You can make a physical transformation and you can alter the lives of individuals, but is the idea that you change society because you hold a big successful event just a bit of waffle, basically?

Ruth Hollis: I think that is right. There are a couple of things I would say. First, anecdotally, we have long had a risk on our risk register that asks when our name is obsolete—when does our name, Spirit of 2012, become something nostalgic and of the past? We find that when we speak to people about 2012, they want to tell us their stories. Those are normally stories of people coming together, pride in their place, local athletes, the torch relay and the softer things around the event, rather



than going to see Mo Farah win a race. I think we must not discount the impact of that collective memory and the feel-good factor of an event.

We need to be incredibly wary about creating legacy as a panacea for all social ills, and I don't think we can do that. One of the examples that is often talked about is the Paralympics. Did the London 2012 Paralympics change people's perceptions of disabled people and disability? Arguably it changed people's perceptions of Paralympic athletes. Did it make a difference to disabled people in our society? Well, probably not in the long term. Scope has published some really interesting research on that. Yes, speaking to the large-scale optimistic spectacle, the memory, the bringing people together is important. I think not overplaying the legacy in being able to address everything you want to change in a society is right.

Q17 **Damian Green:** Thanks. Franco, what do you think about that?

Dr Bianchini: The question is about the importance of legacy. Could you repeat the question, please?

Damian Green: Basically to boil it down to one question: is legacy overdone, particularly the non-physical legacy we talk about all the time? Do we overdo that?

Dr Bianchini: Not at all. If anything, looking at this phenomenon of mega events internationally, I think we have underdone it. It is only really in the last few years that the question of the social impact of legacies—for example positive impacts on the health and wellbeing of people, positive impacts on social capital, on making people feel more confident, skilling them up, increasing pride in a locality—has become central. What they are doing in Coventry now, Coventry 21, is really important. I think we are seeing probably the emergence of a new model of City of Culture where legacy is not an afterthought but absolutely central to everything they do, and it permeates the whole project. I don't think we are overdoing that at all.

It is probably more important than physical legacy in the long term, because we have seen a lot of examples of physical infrastructure created by cultural mega events that have not worked, have not been fit for purpose and have become redundant pretty quickly. The worst examples are, for instance, the large stadia built in Portugal for the European Football Championships in 2004. Obviously, they were built because Portugal wanted the tournament, but they were too big for the size of many of the cities hosting the championships. Another notorious example is a lot of the infrastructure built for the Olympics in Athens in 2004, and another bad one is the infrastructure created for the Formula One grand prix in Valencia in Spain towards the end of the 2000s. These are all examples where they didn't get it right with the physical infrastructure. You could argue that social impact legacies are probably more important for the longer-term impact on a city, in line with what Chenine was saying earlier.



Q18 Damian Green: Picking up on that, can we establish a pattern of who the winners and losers are when you hold a major event? Is it possible to pinpoint who are likely to be the winners and losers in a particular city or country?

Dr Bianchini: Unfortunately in some cases there are losers, and we cannot deny that. We have seen the use of European Capitals of Culture, but even more so the Olympics and Expo, to drive processes of gentrification. I am not one of the academics who argue that gentrification is always bad. For example, gentrification in Hull in the fruit market area, which was an area of largely derelict warehouses on the Humber, was a positive thing, largely. It was done in a way that privileged and prioritised local businesses through an agreement between a developer, Wykeland, and the city council that made sure that the businesses locating in the fruit market are owned by local people and there are no multiple stores in that area. That example of gentrification is positive, but we have also seen many examples of gentrification that have produced displacement of local residents and, in some cases—paradoxically, even within a European Capital of Culture—the destruction of important aspects of local heritage.

The worst example is probably Istanbul, the European Capital of Culture 2010, when they razed to the ground an historic district called Sulukule, which was inhabited in part by Roma communities. They offered them alternative housing but it was 20 or 25 kilometres away from the area where many of these people worked, in many cases as artisans and in some cases as street musicians. It was a pretty awful example of destruction of very important Ottoman heritage and displacement of low income, socially marginalised communities.

I think you have both in events like this. The risk of increasing social inequality is there, so we have to be very careful. There needs to be a plan to prevent that.

Q19 Damian Green: As a final question to you, Franco, before I turn to something else: can you identify cases where there has been a major event and, frankly, it would have been better for that city or country if they had not hosted it at all?

Dr Bianchini: Yes, there are several. The majority are positive and I think all three UK Cities of Culture in different ways with different objectives have been successful. Derry/Londonderry had a very strong emphasis on conciliation between the Protestant and Catholic communities in the city, and a very strong emphasis on peace. Hull had a strong emphasis on city marketing and changing the image of the city and increasing the visibility of the city. Coventry, as we have heard earlier, has a much stronger focus on social inclusion, young people, diversity and human rights.

These are likely to be successes but there have been examples of failures, or at least relative failures. The most common reasons are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

corruption, in some cases, and in other cases insufficient preparation time. For example, the city of Patras in Greece, which was the European Capital of Culture in 2005, clearly left the preparation a little bit to the last minute and it did not work. In general, the UK model of the City of Culture, holding the event every four years is a good idea and it is more successful than other countries, including Italy, where the Italian Capital of Culture is held every year. I think that is problematic because it does not give sufficient preparation time for the cities and also it perhaps does not create a sufficient sense of occasion for the media. It is not special enough, in a way, if it happens every year.

Q20 **Damian Green:** Thank you. Coming back domestically, and maybe to Ruth, how do you see DCMS's role in all major events? Do you think it is effective at it?

Ruth Hollis: It plays a major role in leading the UK City of Culture programme and arguably it has been very successful at that. As Franco said, the three UK Cities of Culture so far have been very successful events in different ways. We can see a real appetite for that to continue in the 2025 competition. We can see cities and towns now wanting to take part in that because they can see the benefit of it. I think DCMS can create massive value in taking a leadership role or bringing potentially bidding cities together, creating a cohesive environment for those events. Taking a lead in how we measure the social impact of events is another very important role for DCMS, so that we have some coherence, some gel between the events and how we measure what success looks like over the longer term. Arguably it will be there over the longer term whereas the organising committees will pack up and leave after the event, and in the local authority things move on and priorities move on.

The other thing we have seen very effectively around Coventry, and a role that DCMS can play, is bringing funders together to try to create more cohesion in the funding landscape. I am sure Chenine might talk about this later, but it becomes a very complicated patchwork of funders wanting to fund different things to meet their own trustees' objectives and priorities. It is important that DCMS is able to corral funders and interested parties together in the interest of the event, so that it can almost protect the city from some of that.

Q21 **Damian Green:** Chenine, how do you find the DCMS? I am conscious it is your funder at the moment, but be honest.

Chenine Bhatena: We have had a really good working relationship with officers in the DCMS. They have backed the approach that we wanted to take with our City of Culture year. They have backed our funding bids, despite the fact that it takes a while for them to go through. They have helped us to get good access to Ministers, which is important because we are so focused on making change in a policy environment. It has been so helpful to have that access. I think the team is probably under-resourced to fully support a major event. It means that mega events like the Commonwealth Games or Festival UK* 2022 or even the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Queen's Jubilee become more of a priority than we are because we are a smaller event, I suppose.

The DCMS is putting about £7 million into our budget—our budget is about £42 million—but it took us a year of negotiating, bidding and proposals to get that £7 million. I recommend that in future the winning city is just guaranteed some funding, because it would save so much time and allow the winning city to move forward a bit more quickly. We knew that we would get the funding; we just had to work out with DCMS where it was going to come from and what it was for. I recommend that, but overall it has been a very good working relationship.

Q22 Damian Green: That is a really interesting point about trying to do a medium-sized event like a City of Culture and Festival UK* 2022 at the same time. Ruth, do you think that we are almost too ambitious as a country? If you have the regular City of Culture thing and we are regularly applying for sporting events, does having other festivals on top of it mean that we may not have the capacity to cope with this many at once?

Ruth Hollis: Next year is a particularly big year for events, isn't it? Having a Commonwealth Games in the same year as a Jubilee and Festival UK* 2022, and in the same year as Coventry has unfortunately had to shift forward because of the pandemic so it is also in 2022, is an unusual year. Developing the capacity to host and deliver major events is important and we should not shy away from an ambition to host some of the bigger events as well as having our own pattern of UK City of Culture and smaller events.

Q23 Chair: Chenine, to pick up on a couple of points that you discussed with Damian, you said it took a year to get the £7 million from DCMS. It is often a popular refrain on this Committee that DCMS is 0.5% of Government spending but 23% of the UK economy. In your experience, was this a matter of DCMS always having to go to the Treasury to have the £7 million authorised, or was this an internal process?

Chenine Bathena: I can't 100% answer that, Chair, but I think there was clearly an internal process going on about where the funding would be realised from. They have been great at encouraging proposals from us for different opportunities that have presented themselves, within DCMS. I think it is just historic that there has not been a prize or a funding award that goes with the title. Now that the competition has been agreed as long term and is going to happen every four years, it feels like it would save everyone a bit of time and energy if an agreement could be made on a guaranteed investment to get those cities—

Q24 Chair: You said about an internal process. Did the money come from just DCMS or did it have to go around to MHCLG, Treasury and so on saying, "We will need you to pay for the £7 million"? Where did your money come from? Was it strictly from a DCMS pot or was it from elsewhere?



Chenine Bhatena: I think it came from DCMS pots, but maybe more than one. We have had some support from Treasury since then for something else, but the main programme came from within DCMS funding pots.

Q25 **Chair:** There is an argument, I suggest, that if Cities of Culture were guaranteed a sum of money on winning their bid, like a prize, that could curtail looking around for private funding. What do you say to the point that although the taxpayer should be there to help out Cities of Culture, at the same time it would be even better if the private sector could do so first?

Chenine Bhatena: In our case, through the bidding process we got the commitment of 100 businesses in the city who didn't just commit to support the bid, but committed to support the programme for four more years if we won. They made a five-year commitment in the bidding process. Once you win, clearly then you need to deliver your programme. I believe there is a clause in the agreement with DCMS where you need to agree that you will reach a certain figure. I think it is around £20 million or £22 million that you have to guarantee that you will fundraise. That includes the DCMS contribution and Arts Council as well.

It is still a significant figure to fundraise in a relatively short timeline. I started in July 2018 and we would have been opening in January 2021, so it would have been a two-and-a-half-year window, in which time we also had to programme the event, build the partnerships and start delivery. It is quite a tight turnaround. If there were some guaranteed investment, whatever level that might be, whether it is at £5 million or something, that does not negate the need to go out and find more money. Clearly you need to do that. Ours is a £42 million programme and we have been very ambitious with our partners and the local authority.

I mention off the back of that the appetite to keep growing how big these Cities of Culture are, and whether or not that is really sustainable long term. You could assume that every four years it will be bigger and better but that is going to be very hard to maintain, particularly coming out of the pandemic, and now that we know that this is a long-term competition, there is going to be much more competition.

Q26 **Chair:** I think that is a really interesting point you have just made. It could be like an arms race, essentially. With the Olympics you are expected to shell out billions of pounds to hold them and you may not get that money back. We have even seen it with some of the bidding areas as well. It is not just cities; there are regions applying for this in the future. Is there a danger there? Should there be thought that Cities of Culture need to be able to pay for themselves and be self-generating rather than be a potential bottomless pit?

Chenine Bhatena: It is a difficult one, because it is a city change programme and a growth programme. If you go into it thinking like that, it is about long-term investment in your people and your place. It is



about supporting your visitor economy and your local business environment. It is about investing in people, skills and talent. If you approach it in that way, it can only be a winning situation and then the investment and the subsidy makes complete sense because it is about the long-term change that you want to see in your places.

Q27 Chair: You mentioned to Steve Brine before that you were potentially going to retain social distancing beyond 19 July. Who pays for that? Presumably that means that not as many people will be going into particular events. Does that go from the bottom line?

Chenine Bhatena: I don't think I said we were retaining social distancing. I think I said we were going to look at the guidance when it comes out and then review it in line with audience sentiment. If it did mean a level of social distancing or if we had slightly reduced capacities to give comfort to people that if they needed a bit space there was space there, it would come from our bottom line as a charitable organisation and would have to be approved by our board. We have a very strict governance in place, obviously, but clearly at the moment the ticket sales and the capacity levels are very low, so being able to increase substantially is going to be a win for us.

Q28 Chair: Did you have discussions about potentially, down the line, being in the ERP, and that sort of thing? Have there been discussions about any lessons that you have learned from those programmes? Have you been hotwired into that process?

Chenine Bhatena: We have been closely involved in the testing programme through our relationship with DCMS. We have been talking to the team who have been leading the testing programme. We were invited to put ourselves forward with events for the testing programme but we didn't have the right kind of events that would have given the Government what they needed. But we have been monitoring closely everything that has been happening and we have been looking at the report that came out last week for any learnings that we can take forward.

Q29 Chair: Thank you. Dr Franco Bianchini, I know that you specialise in cultural value in your work, but do you also look at sporting events? Can you give us a report card of what you have seen to date about Birmingham and the Commonwealth Games? Do you think that it is along the lines of the success that you have outlined for other cities in the past or it is going to be more like an Athens or other types of less successful events?

Dr Bianchini: No, I can't say that, I am afraid. As you said, I am more of an expert on cultural mega events. With the Commonwealth Games, the difficult challenge is communicating beyond the Commonwealth. I have noticed relatively little interest in the Commonwealth Games in my country of Italy, for example. There is perhaps some more imaginative work to do around that, which was, incidentally, a little bit of a problem



for the World Student Games when they were hosted by the city of Sheffield in 1991. The media return on the considerable investment by Sheffield was perhaps lower than they expected because, as an event, it was not as easy to communicate as other, much better known events. I see there is that challenge, but there are impact studies of the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and Manchester that are encouraging. As you said, I am not an expert.

Chair: That is very interesting. Thank you.

Q30 **Clive Efford:** How long should we take over assessing the success of a major event? For instance, are we still measuring the benefits or the impacts of the Olympics in 2012 in London? What should we take into consideration when we assess the pros and cons of investing in a major event like that?

Chenine Bhathena: I was involved in London 2012. I worked for the Greater London Authority and delivered the creative programme for London. From my perspective, what I saw coming out of the legacy of the programme was a bigger ambition, lots of new partnership working across the city and a real understanding about how different policy areas would support each other. For example, there were high streets and business districts wanting to partner with cultural organisations, and there were transport organisations and big development zones in London wanting to partner with culture—seeing the joined-up value of coming together.

On how long it takes to measure, in 2018 Liverpool delivered its 10-year impact study from Liverpool 2008. I think they could probably go on for another 10 years, because you continue to see the impact that these major interventions have, particularly when you have clear vision at the beginning of what you are trying to achieve as a city and the way you want it to affect the economy, life and wealth of the city, and the way in which communities build pride. I think a good 10-year cycle is very strong, but potentially it could be longer. I don't know if Franco is aware of longer studies.

Ruth Hollis: I agree with Chenine on the 10-year span. We need to look at the long-term benefits, and now that wellbeing benefits are in the Green Book I think we need to look at the long-term wellbeing benefits of major events on people—not just hosting one event, but the arc of cities that host lots of different events. For example, we might look at Glasgow starting with the garden city, going through EU City of Culture and then going to the Commonwealth Games. Taking a long view of the impact on the city of being an event host over a long timespan is important.

Dr Bianchini: One of the most important effects of these events when they are successful—when they go well, as in the case of Glasgow, which is a very good example—is that they increase the level of ambition in a city. They increase the sense of what is possible and, in some ways, also the resilience of the city. Glasgow has a long string of events that started



with the Garden Festival in the late 1980s, continued with the European City of Culture in 1990, then the UK City of Design in 1999 and the Commonwealth Games. It is not by chance that it has been able to do all these events. In a way, there has been a process of building confidence as well as international credibility that you can achieve. Glasgow is not the only example but probably the clearest example in the UK of this kind of process.

Q31 Clive Efford: Are there situations where you would say it is not worth a country considering hosting a major event? In what circumstances would you suggest that it would not be worth a country's while? Chenine, you have said that you need to have a clear vision about what you want to achieve, but what else would need to be in place before a country should take the decision, or take the plunge?

Chenine Bhatena: From my perspective, looking at it through a slightly smaller lens at the London Borough of Culture competition that I set up with the Mayor of London, we saw a number of local authorities bidding for that. There are 32 local authorities and I think 22 of them applied to be London Borough of Culture in 2018. What separated them was the real commitment to long-term change and the commitment across policy departments to understanding how this can help them take forward strategically the work they want to do and make that change happen. I think you can see that in the bids. When a country or a borough is not quite ready, it comes through quite clearly. I think you have to have strong cross-party political leadership because you can't do these things without political leadership. You need your business community, education community, cultural community and everyone with you on the same journey. If it does not work it may be that places have not been able to secure that.

Q32 Clive Efford: Thinking about the infrastructure that is needed for the big mega events, like the Olympics, the World Cup bid for the British Isles—because it is going to be a multi-country bid, I believe—we already have major infrastructure in place. We have excellent stadia that are capable of hosting major football matches across all of the countries. Can it detract from the benefits that you glean from hosting a major event like a World Cup if you don't have a major infrastructure aspect to the bid?

Dr Bianchini: One thing that is very noticeable in the Olympics is that the appetite for hosting something as complicated as the Olympics seems to be less now. Countries are more reluctant to bid for the Olympics. As you said, it is different for the football World Cup considering that the UK already has an adequate infrastructure of stadia, so it is much simpler in many ways. It seems to be the trend generally for cultural mega events that there is much more of an emphasis on reuse and adaptation of existing infrastructure. After all, the 2010s have been geared to austerity and public expenditure cuts. Things are changing now—economic policy is beginning to change now—but I have noticed countries being much more cautious in accepting the parameters, for example, of the IOC and



embarking on bids for the Olympics because of the costs of new infrastructure.

Chenine Bhathena: There is a very tight structure to the big sporting events that you have to adhere to. There is a set of partners and sponsors and an infrastructure that goes with those big competitions all around the world. We don't have that from a UK City of Culture perspective. We can decide how to shape and design the governance, the infrastructure of our programmes, and so we can make sure there is a local benefit because we have it in our power to do that. I wanted to separate the two of them because they are slightly different in how they are shaped and designed and the contractual obligations that you have as a city.

Q33 **Clive Efford:** How can host nations or cities maximise the value of the bidding process itself?

Chenine Bhathena: I can just talk on behalf of Coventry. I know that when we were bidding as a city it was a city partnership. It was the city council, the regional authority, the two big universities in the city, Warwick and Coventry, and also the business community. There was a real partnership in place in that bid. I think even if we hadn't won, it put the city in a really different place, because we spent three years as a city building a bid together, talking about the value of culture and embedding it across the city council. We were talking about arts and culture in schools, health, regeneration and planning. We were thinking across the board about the value that culture has. Through that discussion and debate, through the investment during in the bidding process and through the allegiances and partnerships that were built with the BBC, the British Council and many other partners, already the change was very noticeable. We saw the same with the London Borough of Culture programme. The process of a local authority coming together to bid for these programmes really connects people into their local plan and their vision, looking to the ambition for that place.

Ruth Hollis: I think that is right. The process of bidding can make cities think about their assets, including their volunteers. We have seen some fantastic examples of cities that either have not won or, like Leeds, have lost out on European City of Culture, but that have continued with their plans anyway. In Sunderland, the fantastic volunteering effort they have brought together has enabled them to host other major events and to look in detail at the assets in that city, including their volunteer and civic infrastructure. I think has been very valuable. We would like to see some sort of—it is a terrible phrase—consolation prize for cities that have been through the bidding process and put the infrastructure in place, to help them make the most of it after the bidding process.

Q34 **Clive Efford:** Yes, I would certainly support that. As somebody who was there when Greenwich was part of the Olympic 2012 bid, I saw at close quarters the effort and the resources that went into the bidding process. Yes, it is a consolation prize. I do not know what we would have done



when we were standing in that field on Woolwich Common, with all those schoolchildren, if they had shouted out Paris instead of London.

Chenine Bhatena: In the London Borough of Culture competition, there is investment in the boroughs that do not win the title. There is a number of funds—smaller amounts of funding—that go in to support a strategic project that the borough can highlight in its bid. Even if it does not win the title, it gets some investment to take forward an area of work. I think that is a good model to be explored.

Q35 **Clive Efford:** I would say so. It makes a lot of sense. Finally, Birmingham 2022 might be the last Commonwealth Games of its size. What does that indicate about the cost-value ratio of major events?

Dr Bianchini: I can't answer that, but I can certainly endorse what has been said earlier about the value of bidding. Put simply, bidding has been very positive for a number of cities across the world and also in the UK for the Commonwealth Games and the UK City of Culture. It creates public/private/voluntary sector partnerships. It is an opportunity to discuss the future of the city, to put together a vision to enthuse the city, including the volunteering programme, as Ruth said earlier, which in some cases can be very large. In the case of Hull they involved nearly 1% of the total population.

As Chenine said, there are ways of rewarding, as the London Borough of Culture competition does, good projects put forward by the boroughs of cities that are not successful. A previous example was the urban cultural fund created by the Labour Government in 2010, where they gave some funds for very good projects by some of the cities that did not win the competition for European Capital of Culture 2008. Bidding usually provides good opportunities to articulate a vision for the future of cities, which is especially important in this time of reset as we are coming out of the pandemic, when we need to rethink the retail, office, night-time, tourism and hospitality economies of cities.

Ruth Hollis: The other thing to add on Birmingham is that we have clearly seen benefits in Manchester and Glasgow from hosting the Commonwealth Games—long-term legacies in Manchester in its volunteering infrastructure, and the Glasgow International Festival in its confidence in delivery of major events. Birmingham did not go through that international competitive bidding process. It took the city designation when another city failed to do it, so it has not had as long to develop its plans. Arguably, it has not had as long to go through that initial process of consensus and partnership building that Chenine described.

In looking at Birmingham, we need to take that into account. It has stepped in as a confident host city. It has not had as much time to develop its plans. In the middle of that came a pandemic, and it did not have the time to do that really early planning around legacy and social impact that it might have done were it bidding from the get-go.



Q36 **Clive Efford:** Does the lack of interest in hosting the Commonwealth Games in the future suggest that there is a limit to the number of these mega events that are sustainable going forward?

Dr Bianchini: That is a very good point. Personally, I think that we need to recognise that. The fact that the European Capital of Culture, for example, continues to attract a lot of interest, especially in the large countries with as many as 21 Italian cities bidding for the 2019 European Capital of Culture—indeed, the UK City of Culture seems to continue to attract significant levels of interest—would suggest to me that those are the mega events with a future. Perhaps other mega events have a more uncertain future.

Clive Efford: On that note, thank you.

Q37 **Julie Elliott:** Good morning, everyone. Before I ask my questions, I need to declare a non-remunerated interest in that I was on the steering group for the city of Sunderland's bid for 2021 City of Culture. I would absolutely endorse what was said about the bidding cities that lose out. The continued regeneration and cultural development has happened and is continuing to happen.

Ruth, what potential is there for major events to divide instead of uniting communities?

Ruth Hollis: I think that there is potential to do that. The Commonwealth Games is always an interesting example, a bit like the Euros at the moment. We are competing as home nations; we are not competing as Team GB. Team GB has a unifying factor for an Olympic Games and Paralympic Games that is not the same in other events.

We can make potentially divisive events work as long as we understand where the division may come from. A good example is 14-18 NOW, which worked in Northern Ireland by employing local co-ordinators and working with local organisations. The whole programme was UK-wide. What it did in Northern Ireland was very locally rooted and responsive to the needs of the community and the division that already exists.

While it can reinforce division, with a really careful narrative we can start to break down some of that division. We ran a programme called Breaking Boundaries, which was built around the Cricket World Cup in 2018, bringing young people together from different communities in Bradford, Birmingham, east London and Manchester around their shared love of cricket. What we saw was young people able to express their plural identities. They were very happy to be cricketers and volunteer at Headingley. Equally, they were supporting both England and their national team from their heritage. There is the potential to divide, but with careful narrative and careful building around the events we can avoid some of that.

Q38 **Julie Elliott:** Chenine, how has Coventry handled this potential for divisiveness?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chenine Bhathena: It is a really interesting question. By the way, congratulations to Sunderland because it has done some great work in the last few years. I know some of the team there.

What we found when we set up in Coventry is that you inherit long-standing inequality in communities. Obviously, the Covid landscape has brought that to light even more. We said right from the beginning that we wanted to put all of our communities at the centre of our programme, hand over some of the decision-making and give them some of the power to decide what happens in our year of culture so that they are taking a lead in curating, reimagining their city and telling stories.

For us it is also about understanding where the barriers are and thinking about how we lift them. That is not just to do with ticket prices; it is to do with so many different things in a city. A lot of it is attitudes, cultural behaviours, concerns about safety and so many different things. It is understanding the city that we are in and the changes that we want to make with the city council, because they are a close partner, and also our charitable sector.

We are doing a fantastic programme that is supported by Spirit of 2012, where we are working with four charitable organisations in the city to focus some attention on some of the big challenges. We have a big issue in the city around mental health, wellbeing and isolation, around young people at risk of exploitation, and lots of issues around poverty and homelessness. We welcome lots of new communities travelling into the UK from all over the world, and it is about how we give them a welcome and provide sanctuary and integrate them into the city and the culture of the UK.

There is a lot of work to be done on the ground in communities to get them ready and then to help them meet up with other communities to build that confidence. It is really hard to do that in this time period, which is why we have embedded ourselves with existing organisations in the city so that we can add value to the work that they are doing rather than trying to start from scratch. It is the same with education and schools, embedding ourselves in the cultural education partnership, and with our programme around green futures, working with nature and heritage organisations, wildlife groups and communities in the city so that we can add value to the ongoing work that those communities are leading.

We are trying to understand where the inequality is. We are trying to make sure there is greater equity, and obviously in doing that some people maybe feel a little bit of inequality, but I think we have to do that in order for people to feel that equity in the city. It is a long-term project. It is not going to be resolved through our City of Culture year, but certainly as we come to the end of our year I think that we will see a city and a society in our city that is more open and more connected, and where we have promoted better understanding among each other. It will be for the city council and the cultural organisations and the charitable



sector to work closely together to continue to build on that in coming years.

Q39 Julie Elliott: Thanks. That leads me on to asking Franco: it is easy enough to quantify the economic benefits of major events and things like the City of Culture, but how do we measure, and how should we measure, the social or symbolic benefits that arise from these events?

Dr Bianchini: There is really no problem with the social impact because we can use both qualitative data and telling, if you like, a story of change, but also quantitative data. There are lots of quantitative indicators that are used to measure with numbers the impact on social cohesion, health and wellbeing, the development of social capital and the development of a more inclusive model of leadership of the city—which, by the way, going back to your earlier question, is absolutely crucial to reduce the potential issue of divisiveness.

Once again, I would like to commend what they are doing in Coventry now because it seems to me that they are moving towards adopting a more inclusive model of leadership. Obviously, it is too early to say because it has not been evaluated yet—it is just beginning—but one of the problems in the past has been the creation of resentment and some divisiveness in the cultural sector in previous European Capitals of Culture. That has been a problem in some cases.

For social impact, there is no problem, I would say. On social impact now we can use both numbers and telling a story of change in a qualitative way. On the broader issue of division, that I think is something that can only possibly be narrated. Some cities have achieved important results by tackling divisive subjects. Sometimes you have to talk about difficult topics to grow. It is the same for individuals and couples, and it is the same also for cities.

One example is the city of Linz in Austria, which in 2009 was European Capital of Culture. It was a very controversial decision by the artistic director, but maybe because he was Swiss he had a bit more freedom than if he had been Austrian. He decided to talk about Hitler in a major section of the artistic programme. Hitler, of course, was born near Linz and they did a major conference and exhibition about Hitler's project to make Linz the cultural capital of the Third Reich. This was obviously a very divisive topic. The artistic director and his team were accused of neo-Nazi nostalgia and the risk of encouraging that, but as a result of the project there was a very significant debate in the city, in the media, in schools, in universities. It was a sort of skeleton in the cupboard that was talked about, and most people think now that it was an important thing to do for Linz for civic growth, let's say. Sometimes you have to deal with divisive issues, yes.

Q40 Julie Elliott: Thank you. Ruth, do you think the intangible social benefits that come from these events are sufficiently incentivised by policymakers and funders?



Ruth Hollis: Part of the intangible is dependent on the success of the event and the feeling that is created around the event. I think we can pay attention to it. Some of it, like the torch relay around London 2012, was more impactful than people perhaps thought it would be at the time. By paying attention to pageants, to the torch relay and to the Queen's baton relay, we can bring some of those intangibles.

Hull did a lot of measurement around civic pride and what it means to be from Hull. We are still supporting the volunteer programme in Hull and we know that City of Culture had a real impact on how people feel about that place. How do you measure the lift of a chin and feeling better about the place you live? We do need to pay attention to those measures. There are lots of good data out there that can be used, things like Understanding Society, the Community Life Survey, and the wellbeing data. We just need to get better at thinking about those things that contribute to a wellbeing or pride benefit, and then looking at the data that allows us to tell that story. I think that we would see more tangible measures around some of the intangible benefits, if that makes sense.

Q41 **Julie Elliott:** In the bidding process for funding for these events and how you tick all the boxes, do you think that there should be a little bit more emphasis on these intangibles than there is at the moment?

Ruth Hollis: I think there should, yes. One of the complicating factors in that is that the bidding process is dependent on what multiple different funders want to see from a city. That is not just about the ambition of the city; that is also about the priorities of the funder. In general terms, yes, there ought to be more attention paid to things like civic pride, those intangible—or less tangible—benefits of hope and optimism. They are not intangible, they are just less tangible than some of the harder benefits.

We need to see that as a long-term project, coming back to what Franco was saying about looking at some of the statistics. What we need to avoid is looking at and quantifying the impact around the immediate, during and post-event bounce that you are going to see. If you look at Hull's wellbeing statistics, there was a bounce within the year and in the year after. It has gone down, but it is how you look at the longer-term impact on people's wellbeing and that detailed work you can do in the community to continue, particularly around volunteering. There is a huge role for volunteering in generating some of these less tangible benefits for people.

Julie Elliott: Thank you very much, everybody.

Q42 **Damian Hinds:** Good morning, everybody. Can I start with you, Ruth, briefly? We talk a lot about the public benefit of major events and what people want. What do people want? Do they find it easy to articulate that, or is it more a case of "you know it when you see it"?

Ruth Hollis: It depends on the event. We need to be careful about creating a single narrative around the legacy of an event. The legacy of a very high-profile mega sporting event like the Olympic Games, multi-



sport plus culture in one place, is going to leave a very different legacy from a single sport, multi-location event like the Cricket World Cup and the Rugby World Cup. They in turn will leave a different legacy to the Cities of Culture. We need to look at what people want in those locations, how the cities—

Q43 **Damian Hinds:** But what is it? What do people say they want, and do they change their minds subsequently?

Ruth Hollis: I think for the mega events, what people want is that large-scale spectacle, and there is real value in providing that large-scale spectacle. Where an event is more rooted in a community, like the Cities of Culture—the Women’s Euro will be in various towns across the UK next year—what people want is regeneration. They want opportunities. They want opportunities for their young people, opportunities to volunteer, a good education programme and some civic development. It is different, and it changes with the perceived success of the event.

Q44 **Damian Hinds:** Sure. Chenine, can I put that same question to you? I am guessing for the Olympics people know what it is all about and they can picture some of these things. For a City or Capital of Culture event, it is a bit more intangible, I guess, for most people. How do you tease out of people what it is they hope to get from it?

Chenine Bhathena: I suppose there are different people, aren’t there? There are the local authority and the policymakers, who clearly have ahead of them the long-term vision of the city, and investment in skills and talent retention, the visitor economy and regeneration—all those kinds of things.

For the cultural sector, it is about investment and support for them to grow, to become more stable and to create the infrastructure, which might be workspace or buildings or it could just be supporting their infrastructure as companies to be able to continue long term. What they do not want is to be controlled and told what to do. They want to be given the freedom to develop their own journeys but supported by us.

In the community it is interesting because I think that there is a general fear for many people in society about change and what change will look like. It is very easy to look backwards towards your history and your heritage and to glamourise that and think about what it used to be like in the old days. Our journey in the City of Culture in Coventry is to absolutely be rooted in the history and the heritage of our place—most of it really great, some of it a little bit tricky—and to then be looking at who we are now as a city and setting a journey or a vision for the future with our communities.

Our communities want to talk about inequalities. They want to get engaged in discussions around social justice and human rights. They are interested in green futures and the environment. They want their kids to have a great future in their city. They want to have more of a say in the



facilities as well. A lot of our work around co-creation is really, I suppose, almost like testing how you work with a community to co-create programmes so that the city council can start to understand how you might take that learning and co-create services or provision and build those relationships between the public sector, the private sector and the third sector.

There are lots of different needs. There is clearly an ambition from the education sector to look at the role of creativity and the importance of creativity in children's education. Everybody wants something slightly different. Clearly, people want to feel love for their city. They want to have a great year. They need that kind of soul food, if you like. They want investment in local talent. We are creating a lot of stages and spaces and platforms for people from the city to demonstrate their creativity, and that is an amazing thing. They are also up for being inspired by things they have never seen before.

Q45 **Damian Hinds:** Finally from me, can I turn to you, Franco? With these major events, there are generally also sceptics. Yes, there are, as Chenine says, many people who are enthusiastic about many aspects, but we all know—and as politicians I guess we hear from them probably disproportionately—there will also be people who, because of the cost of an event, query its priority. Sometimes, because of the intangibility of the benefits, there will be scepticism, which as we all know can take hold in communities and spread. From your experience in looking at different examples across the world, are there striking examples where scepticism has been turned around and communities that had not been on side have been brought on side?

Dr Bianchini: There is scepticism all the time, and the scepticism is a good thing in many ways. It is important in evaluation not to marginalise dissent and scepticism because that tends to produce a more honest and truthful evaluation. One of the problems with these schemes is that there is often a lot of boosterism and a bit of hype, a bit of overpromising and perhaps also overloading responsibilities on culture and sport to try to solve all the problems of the city.

A bit of healthy scepticism is not a bad thing at all, but I have seen the scepticism being turned around in so many cases. There is no doubt that the UK cities that have engaged in these cultural mega events have been watershed cities. There was a lot of scepticism in Glasgow. The very notion that Glasgow should be European City of Culture 1990 was regarded as risible by many Glaswegians, but it was the first city in this culture-led regeneration game to systematically link culture with urban regeneration. It set a model for the European City of Culture and later European Capital of Culture that all other cities followed. It ultimately also led to the UK City of Culture that was an idea of Phil Redmond after the successful Liverpool 2008 European Capital of Culture.

There was also scepticism in Hull about the UK City of Culture, but it was wonderful to see a palpable sense of relief by local people during the first



week of the programme in January 2017. When you asked the question earlier about what people want, probably in Hull what they wanted was to be recognised. They wanted the world to find out, first of all, where the city exactly was, and we discovered that quite a lot of people in the UK were a little bit vague about the exact location of Hull. They also wanted to go beyond the story of stigmatisation of the city that had been a big problem, not only in economic terms. It was important that they saw that Made in Hull, those wonderful light projections in the first week of the programme in January 2017, were of excellent quality. It was a source of pride. Equally important was the fact that the BBC included Hull on the weather map, and I think that remains one of the legacies of 2017, increasing the visibility of the city. That is probably one of the most important effects.

Scepticism is always there. Sometimes it is justified; sometimes it is not. Sometimes it is just the fear of the unfamiliar. It is going beyond stereotypes of the city, which in some cases are held not only by outsiders but also by local people, who struggle to believe that a transformation is possible.

Damian Hinds: Thank you all very much.

Q46 **John Nicolson:** Dr Franco, can I begin with you? You have given us absolutely fascinating testimony throughout this hearing and have told me things I did not know. I did not know anything about Istanbul, for example, and the clearing of the Roma area with its Ottoman heritage, which seems tragic.

Dr Bianchini: Unfortunately by Mr Erdoğan, who was mayor of Istanbul at that time, if I am not mistaken.

John Nicolson: I dread to think. Having been to Bucharest and seen what a deranged leader can destroy in a relatively short time, it is a salutary lesson. I did not know the detail about Linz either, although I have always been fascinated by Albert Speer.

Let's start with Glasgow, because Glasgow is the city that I was born in, grew up in and went to university in. You have been very generous about the Glasgow Garden Festival. I remember quite distinctly the Garden Festival because it was my first gig as a young TV presenter, presenting the daytime show from the studios there. It was called the Glasgow Garden Festival Show, and I sat there and I interviewed popstars and celebrities. I would wander around this magical park that had been created, with the old trams running past and the wonderful planting. I remember all the promises about what would happen to all of this—the urban regeneration and how the riverfront would be revitalised in a way that it is, for example, in Gothenburg, which has a similar shipbuilding heritage.

I think Glaswegians have very fond memories of the festival, but if you look around now, I do not know what its legacy is. There are a few pedestrian buildings, BBC Scotland and STV headquarters—very



anonymous buildings. All the trees and plants were sold off to a garden centre and distributed around the country. The funfair was sent to Wales, as I recall. All the promised housing just did not materialise. One of the beautiful old docks was filled in instead of being used as heritage for the shipbuilding industry. Aren't you being a little bit overly generous to the Glasgow Garden Festival and isn't it actually a lesson in how not to have a legacy?

Dr Bianchini: You are right, I am familiar with the problems that you mention. I mentioned the Garden Festival as a positive thing only in one sense. The virtue of the Garden Festival in 1987 was that it created a bridge between the beginning of the culture-led regeneration of Glasgow, which started with the cleaning of the beautiful sandstone buildings, the creation of the Mayfest festival, and the opening, of course, of the new art gallery in the Burrell Collection building.

There was this flurry of activity at the beginning of the 1980s. Then there was the Garden Festival, which, as you said, was enjoyed by Glaswegians but left a problematic infrastructural legacy and was disappointing from many points of view. But what it did was at least to continue the formation of a very successful public-private partnership, which I think was called Glasgow Action, which then almost created the conditions for the consolidation of that and then led to the successful bid for the European City of Culture 1990.

Sorry; in my answer I didn't have time to elaborate on the specifics of the impacts of the Garden Festival, but garden festivals are often problematic. You find similar problems with the Liverpool Garden Festival a few years earlier. It was not from that point of view, as you correctly say, an example of success.

Q47 **John Nicolson:** Okay. I think that we are agreed on that and you are certainly the expert, but some of the things that you cite, for example, the cleaning of the buildings, that was often disastrous as well. They took these wonderful old stone buildings. They sandblasted them very crudely and very quickly, drilling out all the pointing and the face of the buildings, often doing enormous harm to the sculptures that were on the buildings. They tarted it up but they left a lot of long-term damage.

Edinburgh, by contrast, did not sandblast its buildings. They are still all moody and dark. In fact, I remember the Glasgow Lord Provost at the time suggesting to Edinburgh that they should sandblast the Scott Monument on Princes Street. He thought he would give them a bit of a tip. Edinburghers recoiled in horror, and thank goodness they did because one of the beauties of Edinburgh is these fabulous old dark buildings with the history written all across them.

I am also interested in the housing legacy. Again, you look at Glasgow and I would have thought the legacy of that should have been urban regeneration, bringing people back into the city centre, reversing some of the disastrous decision taken to abandon the city centre and to put



HOUSE OF COMMONS

people into commuter belt towns without adequate transport or, indeed, facilities—huge housing estates where people were just dumped, many of which were subsequently demolished.

I say this as somebody who adores Glasgow, so I am saying it in this context, and lots of people are trying to work out how to regenerate Glasgow now. Isn't the model Berlin in many ways, where they decided to rebuild the city centre on a human scale; that the new buildings would be built replicating the style of the old buildings—less fancy, but the same height, the same materials and the same window openings; and to recreate the cityscape of the centre? That is something that I think all of us are going to be struggling with as we try to recover from Covid. How do we regenerate our city centres? How do we get people living back in the city centres more in the European model, which will perhaps provide for businesses that may well lose many of their business customers and will be looking to have domestic customers?

Dr Bianchini: It would be interesting to hear Chenine and Ruth on these issues as well, but I think you raise some important questions there.

There are two things. On the old relationship between city centre and periphery, I have written about Glasgow, and I have highlighted in a book that I published in 1993, that one of the limits of the Glasgow European City of Culture 1990 was that it was very city-centre focused. It did very little to address the issue of multiple deprivation in places like Pollok, Drumchapel, Castlemilk, Easterhouse and outer housing estates. It has been a criticism of Hull 2017 as well that it was very city-centre focused and not enough activities were happening. Although some certainly did, there was a deliberate and understandable use of the city centre as a showcase to project the best possible image of the city for attracting inward investment, for place marketing and for tourism. That is a problem.

Your idea about the city centre now and a possible culture-led regeneration strategy that brings people back to live in city centres, and uses culture to regenerate city centres after the crisis of central business districts, tourism, the night-time economy and retail, is an interesting one and a good one. It has also been proposed by Richard Florida, an American planner and economist, in a recent and very influential article.

We have to reflect on another question, though, which is how we improve the quality of cultural life and how we improve the facilities generally—not only cultural facilities—in neighbourhoods, including peripheral neighbourhoods. One of the revelations of the pandemic, and one of the things that has changed, is that we tend to spend our lives more in the neighbourhood. This has been recognised, for example, by the Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, who has commissioned a new urban renewal project focused on the idea of the 15-minute city, where essentially you have all the facilities you need, including cultural facilities, within 15 minutes' walk or cycle from where you live.



There are two important challenges there. How do we use culture to improve the quality of life in neighbourhoods, including outer areas and outer neighbourhoods, and can we use culture for a process and a project of regeneration of city centres? They are two important challenges for the future.

Q48 John Nicolson: They are both excellent questions, of course. Before we leave Glasgow, I am always reminded of Billy Connolly's line that Glasgow is one of the few cities that decided to build a ring road right through the middle of the city, which caused such terrible devastation. You are right, of course, about using the city centre as a showcase, but one of the other mistakes Glasgow made—it is a beautiful Victorian city—is façadism. It decided to present itself to the world so that the fronts of the buildings were retained. I remember at the time skips filled with beautiful plasterwork and marble and mahogany because everything behind the façade was being dumped. Developers were allowed to ride roughshod over beautiful buildings that none of us had ever seen because they were bank headquarters and ship headquarters. I think that we lost an enormous amount then.

Let me move on to Ruth. One of the problems about legacies surely must also be the fact that they benefit some but a lot of people lose out. We have talked about Glasgow. Let's talk about London a little bit. I am just looking at some of the house prices now in the East Village. They are extraordinary. Just looking at Zoopla, a one-bedroom flat, £420,000 average; two bedrooms, £550,000; a terraced house, £1.15 million. I do not think that is what London East Enders thought would be the legacy, was it?

Ruth Hollis: No, I don't think it was. As somebody who lives outside London, those prices are obviously staggering to people who do not live there. That is a consequence of the economy of the place, I would say. We do not deal with the built legacy in that way. I don't know whether Chenine has a view on that from the GLA perspective. Yes, I would think that people in the East End of London feel even more disconnected to their place as a result of rising house prices than they did before. We have seen that in other cities. We have seen it in Sheffield; Franco mentioned the Student Games. Where places are regenerated for events, there can be that gentrification, I guess, of housing.

Q49 John Nicolson: Chenine, are we strict enough in what we say to developers before these big events? They are always built up enormously, aren't they? They are going to be a great event and we can all get swept along by them and we are all in this together. We go along, we buy the merchandise, and places are tarted up and look great. I suppose the recurring theme from all the evidence we have heard thus far is that ordinary people quite often lose out when we look back at what has been achieved, whether in Istanbul or some examples within the United Kingdom. They overpromise to local people and do not always deliver.



Chenine Bhathena: In the case of London, it is a city that is run by developers. The developers are everywhere and they seem to be able to set the course. When I was working at the GLA in the culture policy team, we had to set up a culture risk department because cultural organisations, cultural quarters and creative enterprise zones were at risk because of the amount of development that is happening in London. We did a big piece of work in London with the planning department. We commissioned a report called “A-Z of Planning and Culture” so that we could understand how to work better with planning teams to ensure that the culture of places, not just the cultural organisations but the culture and the identity of places, was retained when development was happening. We did a huge amount of work in London and I know that that is ongoing—having to put in place creative enterprise zones, and thinking about where artists and cultural organisations work because they are being priced out.

John Nicolson: Yes, they are.

Chenine Bhathena: They cannot afford to work in London either. One of the projects I led on was the Thames Estuary Production Corridor, looking at using an area of east London—it was being developed, but would not be able to have housing because it is by the river and it would be tricky—as a production corridor so you could build production centres and spaces. You could have film studios and artist workspaces. It is having a proactive approach to cultural infrastructure, because—

Q50 **John Nicolson:** Yes, but, of course, London has a particular model, doesn't it, which is one where the mayor can call in any planning application? A local authority, for example, or a local community—one of the boroughs—can have something that goes through the whole planning process and they can take a decision with local democracy, and then the Mayor of London can call in the plans and overrule them. I think that I am right in saying that Boris Johnson, when he was Mayor of London, overruled local people on every single occasion to side with the developers over the locals, without exception.

Chenine Bhathena: I don't know the statistics on it, but some new planning rules came through towards the end of Boris Johnson's reign and in the early part of Sadiq Khan coming in to understand the role of culture and the night-time economy. Some great planning work was done between planners and the cultural sector to ensure the livelihood of culture and communities in our cities, using tools like section 106 and various others to arm communities with the ability to have a voice in what is happening in their own places.

John Nicolson: All right. Many thanks indeed.

Q51 **Mrs Heather Wheeler:** It is a fascinating discussion today; thank you, everybody. This question is to Ruth, please. Getting back to the nuts and bolts of this, I am quite interested in whether there is enough time for the Birmingham 2022 plan to deliver this meaningful legacy that we are



looking for as well as being a successful event. What are your thoughts on that, Ruth?

Ruth Hollis: We are working closely with the cultural team as part of Birmingham 2022. We have various investments with them. I think they have time, but it is more challenging than it would normally be. The lead time for delivering the event plus a pandemic has not helped with their ability to plan and their ability to deliver on the ground. I think that they are in a good position as far as we can see, but it is clearly challenging.

Q52 **Mrs Heather Wheeler:** Okay. That makes sense, absolutely. My next question is about Covid. Chenine, with the challenges that you have had to face over the last 18 months or so, do you think that the Coventry City of Culture is going to be able to overcome the challenges of Covid? What are you going to change for your events coming up next year?

Chenine Bhatena: I would not use the word “overcome”—maybe that is not quite the right word—but certainly we have had to respond. We have had to be flexible. We have had to be creative. We have had to think out of the box.

With our signature event, we went through eight different versions of what that might be. We started working on it in January 2020. Obviously, in the summer of 2020 we had to change our dates. Instead of opening our year in January 2021, we then opened in May 2021. We then had to move our signature event from our opening day due to concerns and not knowing what the roadmap was going to be until March. All the way along we have had to be very flexible. We have had to be very responsive. Brilliantly, I have a very resilient team. We have to keep our eye on the goal, I suppose, and not get too distracted, but it has been incredibly difficult. All around us the cultural industry and the creative industries have been in the most challenging times of their lives—artists, freelancers and big organisations as well as small ones. It has been very hard for us to keep going when all around us is devastation. As I said earlier, we have tried to make sure that at least locally we can support those organisations to continue that journey with us by making sure that people in those teams can continue to work.

Clearly, some of our ambitions have been hit—things like shorter-term ambitions around tourism. That is challenging in a Covid environment. We are getting ourselves ready for the moment when people can come back, and hopefully that is going to be very soon. Delivering live events has been challenging because we have not been able to market live events to live audiences.

What it has done is to present some new opportunities to us, particularly around our partnership with broadcast. If you saw the signature event on 5 June, the partnership we had with the BBC, being able to do the storytelling we wanted to do through pre-recorded films, livestream, storytelling on social media, websites that were full of images capturing the event as we were going along, and then the documentary that we



HOUSE OF COMMONS

were able to produce that was on the BBC on the following Monday, in all of that I wonder whether we would have had such a strong partnership with broadcast in a non-Covid era.

One of my learnings to the bidding cities last week was that if I was to do this again, I would have a whole broadcast team. It is a whole new area of work that I think maybe the cultural sector is opening its eyes to now. We have been so focused on live, which is absolutely the focus, but there is a real opportunity with broadcast, social media, web and all of those digital sources.

The only thing I would say is clearly there is a digital divide, and we are aware of it in our city. We have a huge amount of people who live under the poverty line. They do not have access to wi-fi or equipment. They do not have smartphones. We have to be aware of that all the time. Clearly, in a Covid landscape, it is very difficult developing projects with communities when you cannot be on the ground with them. On the other hand, it is more important than ever.

We have been trying to look at how we meet these challenges, working closely with our partners at the city council and in the charitable sector, so we can continue to grow and develop those. Overall, my summary would be: by being very flexible and creative.

Finally, we were talking about monitoring and evaluation earlier. One of the things that we have put in place is a sentiment analysis. As we have been going along, we have been able to monitor how people are feeling in the city generally as well as their feelings towards City of Culture and the engagement with City of Culture. We have been doing regular reporting on that and we have been able to respond to it in a live way. In a Covid environment, that has been absolutely essential because we have been able to spot where we may need to go into a community and do more work or more engagement, where people are feeling isolated or where there have been more issues and concerns. It has been brilliant to have that data, that evidence and that knowledge as we have developed our programme.

Q53 Mrs Heather Wheeler: Excellent, thank you. This is my final question, and by all means chip in, all of you. The 2022 events are clearly something for everybody to look forward to. How can they best contribute to the levelling-up agenda, in effect rebuilding the sporting and cultural infrastructure post pandemic? That really would be a legacy, wouldn't it?

Chenine Bhatena: I will just quickly say that from our perspective, we are doing some consultation about our legacy plan. That will be coming out later this year. We are looking at the legacy of the trust as an organisation and its role in leadership for the city. We are looking at the legacy and the impact of the programme on the cultural sector, so some of the cultural infrastructure that is coming into play—for example, the old Ikea building becoming a new art collection centre—but also the



impact it has had on the cultural infrastructure in the city and new priorities coming forward. We will also do a lot of work around artist workspace and workspace for communities to gather and come together. Going back to my point around broadcast, there is a big interest now in TV and film production.

On levelling up, having the spotlight in our region for the best part of seven, eight, nine or 10 years is amazing. It has brought a huge amount of investment into our region. It has given us a voice. It has given us a platform and a spotlight. It has enabled us to pitch for funding that we were not able to get before, not just cultural funding but also growth funding and funding in regeneration. We are going to get a brand new train station in Coventry, which we have not had since it was built. The public realm across the city centre is now looking incredible, in response to Donald Gibson's masterplan from post World War II but bringing it back to life as a place for the 21st century.

I think that we will see a huge amount of development and growth, and the levelling-up agenda has enabled that, because having the spotlight in this region has been absolutely essential.

Q54 Mrs Heather Wheeler: I am very tempted to leave it there, because that is a high note to leave it on. Ruth or Dr Franco, if you want to chip in, by all means do. If you are happy with that, I am happy with that.

Dr Bianchini: I will add something. Perhaps the main legacy of the important events of 2022 is not physical infrastructure. I hope they will help to advance the argument for cultural education; for a much stronger presence of arts in schools; for building much stronger bridges between cultural and sport policies, between arts and sport; and for a more systematic approach throughout the country towards cultural activities in health settings, something that has become more important because of the mental health crisis that has been caused or exacerbated by the pandemic. We already have really good examples across the country of cultural activities on prescription and social prescribing that could become much more widespread.

Lastly, as Chenine said, there are massive opportunities around broadcast and digital, which I think could lead to the UK taking a leading role in advancing that. In that sense, Festival UK* 2022 could be interesting because it seems to be very interdisciplinary—very much across arts, science and technology. That could help to make the argument for arts in schools, and it could help to further this potential leading role for the UK in broadcasting and streaming culture. Those are some of the opportunities, perhaps, for 2022.

Ruth Hollis: The only thing I will add is that there is a critical mass of events next year that we need to capitalise on. We need to capitalise on those outside the major cities and the host cities, looking to some of the towns where Festival UK* 2022 will go to; looking to where we will host the Women's Euros; and looking to places that often get left behind, for



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the ways in which they can use these events as a lever to level up infrastructure for sport, culture and education, but also volunteering opportunities and their pride in place.

Mrs Heather Wheeler: Thank you very much indeed.

Chair: That concludes our session today. Thank you very much to our witnesses, Chenine Bhatena, Dr Franco Bianchini and Ruth Hollis, for your evidence today.