**Section 1. Context**

1. How does your proposal demonstrate delivery of the 2050 Ambition?

P+J 2. The variety and quality of our outstanding cultural and leisure offer has increased and we have become the first choice English coastal destination for visitors, P+J 1. There is a tangible sense of pride in the place and local people are actively, and knowledgeably, talking up Southend. P+J 4. Our streets and public spaces are clean and inviting. O+P 2. We have a fast-evolving, re-imagined and thriving town centre, with an inviting mix of shops, homes, culture and leisure opportunities. O+P 3. Our children are school and life ready and our workforce is skilled and job ready.

- With Forum 2, we shall expand the brand and cultural offer of Southend-on-Sea, supporting the
regeneration of the Town Centre, by establishing Focal Point Gallery’s offer as a premier contemporary arts presentation and creative production institution, specialising in creative digital skills, operating on a national level of excellence. Once complete in 2021, FPG will have an expanded venue and resources to produce and deliver a more ambitious programme of exhibitions and events of international reputation. We will significantly add to Southend’s reputation as the key destination for viewing and creating art with ease of access from the capital, following the example of regeneration projects in towns such as Margate, Hastings and St Ives. We shall diversify the cultural offer with digital arts in keeping with Southend’s pioneering history of embracing new technologies.

O+P 5. Southend is a place that is renowned for its creative industries, where new businesses thrive and where established employers and others invest for the long term. O+P 3. Our children are school and life ready and our workforce is skilled and job ready.

- With additional space and resources, FPG shall support more creative practitioners and networks, on a local and national level, and offer an expanded creative learning programmes at both introductory and more advanced levels, with state of the arts production spaces, and professional development skills training. We are working closely with South Essex College on the specification for Forum 2, and shall continue to work with them to deliver activities and resources of mutual benefit to the creative and wider communities in Southend. This will encourage more creative industries to locate in Southend, through the facilities of this venture, and the wider effect of increasing the reputation of the town through a major arts institution. The project will support local talent to gain skills for employment in new businesses, with particular focus on digital and creative skills, those needed for twenty-first century employment. Forum 2 will be a key venue in the emerging Local Cultural Education Partnership, which FPG is leading on behalf of the Southend area, and align with the objectives of the Thames Estuary Production Corridor, brought to life through the Cultural Development Fund, in which Forum 2 is sited as a key project.

C & S 4. Southend is a leading digital city with worlds class infrastructure, that enables the whole population.

A+I 2. The benefits of community connection are evident as more people come together to help, support and spend time with each other. A+I 4. A range of initiatives help communities come together to enhance their neighbourhood and environment.

- Forum 2 will be a centre of excellence for creative digital skills development, both on a professional level, through new digital art production spaces, including self-contained studios, sound recording and postproduction facilities and a green screen room for filming, but more importantly for the wider community, with a project space in which to run programmes to gain confidence and acquire digital skills through creative learning and engagement, particular targeting marginalised groups who would not usually access these resources, such as schools in deprived wards, and older residents. All residents will have access to the facilities of the building as their skills develop, ensuring ongoing learning and support.

- Forum 2 will increase the public events and learning offers for our community, creating more environments for people to come together in cultural engagement. The wider landscaping (linked to town centre projects) will also play a role in this, ensuring new engaging space to congregate.

2. What evidence have you got that this approach will deliver of the outcome?

**Evidence growth of Focal Point Gallery**

Over the last 30 years, FPG has grown from a small project space in the old Southend Library, to becoming a renowned, medium-scale leading national arts organization and needs to be resourced accordingly. FPG has an excellent track record of reaching local and visiting audiences (including our off-site activity, reporting 1,740K visitors for FY 18/19) and in particular engaging with children and young people (360 children form areas of low socio-economic engagement accessing digital learning, 150 Discover Arts Awards), working specifically with schools in deprived areas, Home Ed groups, including those with special needs, Family days to encourage intergenerational engagement, free talks and workshops, all with the common goal of providing guided access to contemporary arts and culture, at a time when this provision is being eroded in formal education. As the only dedicated contemporary art gallery in South Essex we regularly ‘punch above our weight’ leading on county-wide initiatives such as Radical ESSEX, playing a pivotal role in Southend’s
reputation as a cultural destination. We have an excellent team in place with new leadership, and we are therefore in the perfect position to further develop the organisation and Southend’s cultural offer. Working with greater diversity of artists, including international, we will be able to further support increased production and presentation of new and recent contemporary art that challenges us to think and feel differently about locality, our sense of self and the importance of communities.

Regeneration through Culture
More widely, arts venues from Tate Liverpool in the 1980s, to Baltic in the 1990s, to Turner Contemporary 10 years ago demonstrate the positive impact on urban regeneration, tourism and positive perception shift of an area or town. Sir Peter Bazalgette’s Independent Review of the Creative Industries highlights the significance of these sectors to the UK’s Industrial Strategy. They contributed over £90billion in GVA in 2016, over 5% of the UK economy (comparable to the construction or information sector) and between 2010 & 2016 grew by 45% - faster than any other sector. Cultural organisations and practitioners contributed just over a third (£26.8billion) of the GVA generated by the Creative Industries. Recent Guardian piece from Arts Council Chair Sir Nicolas Serota elaborates on this: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/26/art-revive-britain-towns-hull-margate-creative-high-streets-nicholas-serota

Digital Agenda
A government initiative, led by the DCMS under the title ‘Culture is Digital’ set out to bring together and develop joint initiatives between the tech industries and cultural sector: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-is-digital The Centre for Economics and Business Research 2018 World Economic League Tables has identified the UK’s long term economic future will be driven by a combination of its artistic and cultural creativity and technical expertise. Likewise Arts Council England have made Digital one of their key priorities for ensuring successful objectives for the cultural sector. As an ACE NPO, we are committed to supporting this agenda. We know that the skills needed for the future will come from the creative and digital sectors, through the investment proposed in this case, the facility can provide our residents with this support.

User Engagement
A consultation was carried out with potential users of the facility, working closely with SEC, including local creative practitioners, and those that might be inspired to engage with the area through the facility being present. These conversations have defined the contents of the building, in particular the resources of the digital facilities, ensuring the demand of the facility, and that there will be excellent take up, evidencing the assumptions of the business model. This will support the creation of creative industries, and draw new industries to the area.

Cultural Impact on Wellbeing
Visiting art galleries makes you happy: research commissioned by Arts Council England evidences that the presence of arts and culture has a positive effect on a person’s sense of community, well-being and their overall satisfaction with their location. The 2019 study titled: ‘The Value of Arts and Culture in Place-shaping’ looked at six different sites across the country, including Birmingham, Halifax, Hastings, Redruth, Southampton and Stoke-on-Trent. The report draws on 1,756 responses to a survey conducted in the UK in 2017. It found that 65% of people think that arts and culture are good for wellbeing and 36% think arts and culture are ‘essential to life’. The study also found that 44% of those who stayed in an area and 43% who moved, said that arts and culture were important contributing factors in their decision, an equivalent percentage to those citing schools as their reason to move to a particular place. 49% of people also believed that attending arts events helped them to feel part of a community.

Strategic and Partnership Engagement
The Forum Project has been a long term ambition of SBC with the highest support. Developing this facility in partnership with South Essex College, and with design expertise from ADP, ensures the highest quality of facility and support to make this a centre point of our town with wide engagement, contributing to continue use and shifting perceptions of what we have to offer.

3. What are the measures of impact, success and how will you embed learning?
Since 2009 we have been funded regularly by Arts Council England, requiring us to monitor, evaluate and evidence our successes and achievement in artistic excellence, audience development, and contribution to the diversifying of the cultural sector. We are therefore well accustomed to embedding learning into everything we do, as well as working to SMART objectives in our yearly business plan to ensure we address any areas that need development.

The measures of success will be monitored through:
- Increased numbers of visitors and participants who come to FPG, and engage with our programmes
- Number of residents reached in creative digital engagement sessions, tracked each quarter
- Feedback on our Audience Finder Surveys about visitor’s experience and reasons for coming to FPG
- Number and quality of press articles
- Success in reaching our targets for earned income – particularly through those engaging with the digital facilities, recording room bookings, waiting lists, artist turnover and membership numbers.
- Peer to peer feedback from fellow Council officers, and other arts professionals
- Through consultancy with the local creative community, in particular local artists and arts organisations
- Consultancy and feedback from other stakeholders working with children, young people and community groups, such as schools, social service providers and community groups
- Focus will be given to measuring meaningful experiences and outputs of the facility, for example products such as films, artworks or advertisements created, and their trajectory when entering public consumption. Storytelling will be key, responding to activities users of the space have in month and years to come.

We shall use this monitoring information to evaluate our work at regular intervals, making adjustments to our work and objectives as necessary on a regular basis, in particular our annually updated Business plan.
Section 2. Aims, Objectives & Collaboration

4. What are the key aims and objectives of the proposal?

Aims
With an additional 267m2 of Exhibition and Project space, on top of the 210m2 currently occupied, we shall more than double our available display space, enabling FPG to build upon our reputation as a reputable cultural hub, by delivering a more ambitious programme of exhibitions, events of the highest quality and ambition with the intention of becoming the number one global destination for contemporary art in the region. We shall develop a wider range of learning projects and engagement to serve the local communities in Southend, with a dedicated focus on making digital technologies more accessible. We shall offer a major contribution to the cultural life of Southend, attracting more visitors to the area, enabling Southend to have a tourist offer all year round. With state of the art digital spaces and resources, Focal Point Gallery will offer a practical and sustainable way to support professional development for the creative industries, support and retain local talent, and offer a dedicated programme for digital skills and training through creative learning for wider communities in Southend.

Objectives
In addition to FPG’s existing offer we shall extend our activities and reach in the following ways:

- Commission and deliver a pioneering, more ambitious programme of 3-4 exhibitions a year including local artists alongside international practitioners, which confirms Southend as a regional centre of excellence for contemporary art
- Commission and deliver an innovative and high-profile programme of live performance, talks, artist’s film, offsite commissions and learning activities
- Integrate the use of digital technologies, and related social and ethical themes, across all our programme, in particular our Learning offer
- Reach 30% higher audience numbers once we take on occupancy of Forum 2, with a year on year increase.
- Reach 40% more school children, young people, and those who would otherwise not access contemporary arts, in particular now that the access to the creative arts has been reduced within the school curriculum.
- Establish and earn income from a Membership scheme for the digital art production spaces and studios, and a supporter’s scheme for FPG (see spreadsheet for income forecast)
- Secure regular grants from Trusts and Foundations and sponsorship from Corporate partners, with year on year increase to support the programme, particularly in support of digital cultural activity (see spreadsheet for income forecast)

Resources required
This proposal sets out the additional revenue income we need to deliver this outcome. This includes the direct costs – business rates, overheads, recharges, utilities) of occupancy in Forum 2, and investment in staffing, specifically:

- A Gallery and Technical Manager. It will not be possible to run a state-of-the-art suite of digital production spaces, based on a paid membership scheme, without dedicated technical support. We propose combining this with gallery manager role, which is currently outsourced to a freelancer. Monies currently spent will be combined to support this role. There is also potential for this role to work across other developing project for FPG, including High St studios and Twenty One.
- Assistant Curator for Digital Learning and Engagement. With Forum 2, we will have the opportunity to double the Learning offer with an additional, and timely, focus on digital training and learning. However, we need additional support and expertise, to complement the skills and experience of our current Curator for Learning and Engagement. This investment will ensure the outcomes of upskilling our residents will be met, with expert guidance and support.
- A Development manager, who can source external funding opportunities and support on accessing larger strategic funds, which SBC/FPG is well placed to apply for, but is currently under-resourced in
time and expertise. This role could work across departments to identify collective opportunities for the Beecroft Gallery, Southend Museum and Central Library, as we continue to work more collaboratively together in the delivery of cultural services.

- Marketing and Membership Officer. We plan to run the digital production spaces on a membership scheme (equivalent to a gym membership) to enable maximum access to as many residents as possible with modest revenue income. We also plan to launch a supporter’s membership scheme for FPG, offering benefits such as discounts on sales and special events. In order to generate this income, we need dedicated marketing and membership responsibility. Communications is currently split across the Curatorial team, with reasonable track record, however this detracts them from their main responsibilities and is not as effective as it could be. With the increased gallery space the curatorial team will need to dedicate themselves to conceiving and delivering the programme. In tandem, it is universally agreed that the Forum offer across the board is not as well-known as it should be as a public resource. There is therefore significant work to do in this area once Forum 2 completes this 10 year development project, working collaboratively with partners.

In addition, we have set out the budgets required to deliver an expanded programme of exhibition, events, and learning. These are still modest on the assumption that we will need to continue to raise additional funds to deliver more ambitious projects. With the above roles, FPG will have a team in place that is standard for an arts organisation of its size and standing, and necessary to take us forward to fulfil our potential.

5. Who else have you involved in discussions and how have they helped to shape the proposal?

We have been in discussion with Amy Botfield and Hedley Swain, of Arts Council England, Eastern Region since the development of Forum 2. We have also been in extensive conversations with our colleagues in the Culture department of SBC. During the Feasibility Study for Forum 2, the FPG with the Project team reviewed relevant case studies, such as Spike Island in Bristol and Space Studios, Art + Technology programme. In addition, Arts Council England has just launched the Digital Culture Network to establish best practice, and support arts organisation to use digital technologies and their application to best effect, which offers guidance on best practice.

We have consulted with colleagues in the South East area through the SECEN and CVAN networks, with the practitioners we work with, and our visitors, and with council colleagues in particular, across the economic development, property and capital teams.

An artist consultation was held to understand what facilities where needed by the sector, and what might encourage a membership scheme. The feedback from this consultation have defined the contents of the Digital Studios Facilities.

The scheme was discussed at the Creative Networking Group, and received high approval from local practitioners.

The scheme is currently undergoing planning approval, which the public will feedback on, and their comments taken into account.

Subject to approval, we propose establishing an external Advisory Board in Autumn 2019, to help guide FPG through this period of expansion with a particular focus on inclusivity and diversity.

The project has played a key part in Southend’s portion of the successful Cultural Development Fund bid, being discussed with the partners of the Thames Estuary Growth Commission, and SECEN networks.

6. What are the links and dependencies with the other outcome proposals?

There are no dependencies on other outcome proposals. Our outcomes are dependent on the completion of Forum 2, which is a fully funded regeneration project and on track to open in July 2021. This outcome proposals ensure the revenue budgets are in place to realise the significant investment in Forum 2.
The proposal links to other projects, including Twenty One (PJ2.1a), which are expanding under FPG’s remit. Close consideration of these projects will allow resources to be shared long term, and the wider brand of FPG to be more impactful, feeding into cultural tourism and regeneration on a larger stage. The project links to wider regeneration plans for the town centre, installing public art on the high street, alongside wider landscaping encompassing the Forum area, (PJ2.1d) and building artists’ studios on the high street (PJ2.1c). These proposals are being merged with other activity in the town centre area, with progression continuing through external funding possibilities.

The proposal has strong links to other proposals in the P+J theme, particularly place branding, and the A+I theme, regarding community integration and working together, Forum 2 can be a galvanising point for this completing this part of the town centre as a creative and learning quarter. Through business development and digital outcomes, O+P and C+S are being heavily supported.

7. Who are the partners (or potential partners) and how to you envisage their role(s) in collaborating to delivering the proposal to achieve the outcome?

We shall share the building, reception and facilities with South Essex College. FPG already has an excellent relationship with SEC, collaborating with them on Big Screen Southend, and various talks and professional development activities. We shall work together to deliver learning and skills programmes making Southend a centre of excellence for the training those seeking employment in the Creative Industries, in particular through digital skills development, and through making the facilities accessible and available to Southend residents.

We shall work with our regional Arts Council’s representatives to ensure we continue to have their support and to develop any further opportunities for funding. We will build relations with new funding partner through various trusts and foundations, the Development Manager position ensuring this will be the case, bringing new investment and attention to Southend.

As FPG are leading Southend’s Local Cultural Education Partnership, Forum 2 will been be a galvanising point for activity, with FPG extending schools outreach and engagement beyond the 10 schools we already work with. Additional resources will allow up to increase this outreach. We are building better relation with council teams and colleagues, including the Youth Offending teams and Social Inclusion teams to ensure the best outcome for the community.

We anticipate increased business partnership and investment in the facility, with Forum 2 on the horizon we are currently in talks with City Fibre and through them Vodafone to invest in our creative digital learning programmes, and with public event space will allow the ability to showcase their products.

FPG will continue to play a key role in the local and wider artistic community through a professional development programme, and input from artist stakeholders, who will drive the use and activity of the facility.

Through a developed site and more consolidated offer, we will work with Southend Tourism Partnership and Visit Southend to place the facility at the centre of our cultural tourism offer.

8. What potential challenges do you anticipate in respect of a) implementing this proposal, b) caused by this proposal once implemented?

Business modelling the income models for the Digital Arts Studios, to ensure the facility is self-sufficient and eventually profit making. Evidence shows this will be robust and well received.

Key to delivery of this service will be appointing and keeping the best staff in the organisation. Much of the investment in for staff development. We will work closely with the recruitment team to see the best appointments to deliver the 2050 vision.

Ensuring community interest and engagement in the facility will require excellent partnership working and outreach ability, delivered through the staff appointments and marketing budget. We need to ensure good relations with the artistic community in Southend and beyond to ensure the studios facility is well used.
Section 3. Social Value

9. How could the proposal deliver social value - in terms of the local community, businesses, economy and environment and what will the specific impact and benefits be?

FPG’s audiences have been increasing year on year. Once the Forum area is completed with the new building, Southend’s creative quarter and economy in this area has the potential to thrive, led by FPG, working in collaboration with Southend Central Library, South Essex College, and many other organisations with whom we collaborate. With an expanded venue we anticipate significantly more visitors to FPG, who will in turn contribute to the local economy and businesses. The Digital Art Production Spaces and Studios will provide direct skills training and resources for the creative industries, supporting local talent to stay in the Southend area. In turn, local businesses will have access to digital expertise and trained candidates for recruitment. We shall also run more introductory courses to break down any barriers through creative learning for members of the community who are intimidated by digital technologies. Overall we should make a significant contribution to the regeneration of the Town Centre.

10. What is the perceived impact the proposal will have on groups with ‘protected characteristics’?

Our programme prioritises individuals and groups with protected characteristics, as well as lower socio-economic communities. Moving forward we have set SMART objectives to specifically address ensure inclusion is embedded across everything we do.

- Across all our programme, those with protected characteristics are represented by at least 30%, with a particular focus on Ethnicity, LGBTQ+ and Age.
- Ensure our venue and everything we do is fully accessible to all, working with local users and service providers to ensure any barriers, whether perceived or real, to accessing our facilities and activities are proactively removed.
- Reach a broader audience for our work that reflects the increasing diversity of the communities we serve across the Southend-on-Sea area.

Our Learning programmes prioritise work with children and young people with protected characteristics, and Southend residents from lower socio-economics wards.

The building itself is being designed with accessibility experts, ensuring a comfortable, welcoming environment for all needs. In addition to requirements, we have ensured gender neutral toilets on the ground and first floors, enabling space for our audiences.

11. What is the proposal’s potential direct or indirect impact on the wider community?

FPG has proven track record for having a positive impact on our audiences and participants. We conduct regular surveys working with Arts Council funded evaluation provider, Audience Finder. From a total of 380 surveys (recommended survey sample from Audience Finder), last year our audiences told us that:

- 87% of visitors believe that FPG encourages participation in community life and events.
- The main reason audience gives for visiting FPG is to be inspired.
- 95% of visitors believe FPG is good for Essex’s image.

This project will provide key support to the town centre regenerations, encouraging our current and potentially new residents to think differently about central Southend.

FPG is a unique model, as part of the local authority. Building FPG’s expansion for the benefits of our residents will show SBC to be a pioneering, forward thinking organisation putting creative, digital skills and cultural
wellbeing at the heart of our community.

With more resources, staff and a larger venue we can broaden our reach and ensure the benefits of engaging with arts and culture reach wider communities. Through FPG’s digital learning programme, we shall introduce wider communities to ways of engaging with and utilising digital technologies through creative learning, particular those who may perceive barriers to digital literacy. We shall also commission digital art works that will be experienced and enjoyed by the wider community.

We plan to launch Forum 2 with an ambitious dedicated group exhibition centered on what it means to be human in relation to our digital selves, and the impact of technology and AI. This will provide the opportunity to foreground Southend’s aspiration to become a digital city, raising awareness of both the positives associated with this, and the challenges we need to address together.