

# Canterbury City Council Cultural Strategy 2026 – 2036

DRAFT SEPTEMBER

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## Foreword by Cllr Charlotte Cornell

As a resident, writer and Cabinet Member for Council Services, Culture and Heritage

- What the strategy represents
- Thank contributors



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## A vision for the future

**Canterbury will be a district where everyone belongs, creativity thrives and culture is valued for its power to connect people, enrich lives and drive social and economic growth.**

Our district will be known as a vibrant hub of creativity and for distinctive visitor experiences.

Culture will be central to daily life, with high levels of engagement across all communities.

From exploring our shared heritage in museums and enjoying world-class performances at the Marlowe Theatre, to joining festivals and parades in our coastal towns, people of all ages will celebrate diversity through a rich and accessible cultural offer.

Creative businesses and cultural organisations will drive our local and visitor economy.

Our district will be internationally recognised as a key destination for an authentic experience and creativity.

We will inspire creativity and production supported by our diverse educational institutions, striving for excellence and nurturing future talent.

We believe in the power of culture to build stronger communities, support wellbeing and foster a shared sense of belonging.

We will be a district that embraces difference, leads with empathy and cares for people and planet through creativity and innovation.

## Definition of culture

### Culture means different things to different people.

Arts Council England (ACE) defines culture<sup>1</sup> as all activities related to the art forms and organisations it supports.

These include combined arts (festivals and carnivals), dance, libraries, literature, music, museums and collections, theatre and visual arts.

In this strategy, we define culture to encompass everything that ACE covers as well as the creative industries supported by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) new Creative Industries Sector Plan, such as film, television and new technologies such as new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Extended Reality (XR)<sup>2</sup>.

Heritage includes buildings, collections and oral history stories shared by individuals.

We also include creativity-inspiring activities that foster shared identity, such as festivals, food and art appreciation.

This broader definition highlights the role of shared cultural experiences in shaping places.

## The value of culture and why it matters

*“Everyone deserves the chance to be touched by art. Everyone deserves access to moments that light up their lives.”*

*Prime Minister Sir Kier Starmer*

### Did you know?

- **Art and culture contribute £10.6 billion to the UK economy** - the creative sector is worth £27bn, with culture bringing in £850m annually via tourism.<sup>3</sup>
- **Arts and culture helps tackle social injustice** -venues like theatres and libraries unite communities and enrich lives.
- **Our creative industries are successful throughout the world** – ACE National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) earned £57m overseas last year.
- **More than 2.4 million jobs in the UK are attributed to the creative industries**

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<sup>1</sup> Arts Council England [definition of culture](#)

<sup>2</sup> Creative Industries Sector Plan [Creative ecosystem](#) page 8

<sup>3</sup> Why art and culture matter [The Arts Council made a case for creativity and culture](#)

Contributing £124 billion gross value added (GVA) to the economy, generating knowledge spillovers that drive innovation and activity across the wider economy.<sup>4</sup>

When used effectively, culture can contribute to revitalising communities<sup>5</sup>.

Evidence tells us participating in culture and heritage significantly increases overall life satisfaction and contributes to health and wellbeing<sup>6</sup>.

The Local Government Association (LGA)<sup>7</sup>, ACE, and the Centre for Cultural Values<sup>8</sup>, highlights culture's vital impact.

A DCMS commissioned report by Frontier Economics shows cultural engagement improves adult health and boosts children's self-esteem.

It also explores methods for valuing and monetising the effects of culture<sup>9</sup>.

Non sector-related bodies such as Age UK also state that creative and cultural activities are key to wellbeing in later life.<sup>10</sup>

The recently launched [Creative Industries Sector Plan](#)<sup>11</sup> repositions the UK's creative industries as central to the UK's growth plan.

The sector's impact ranges from innovation and production across the creative industries to revitalising high streets to support a vibrant visitor economy.

This strategy aims to create a shared vision to celebrate and support our local cultural sector.

Through joint ambitions and a clear framework, we aim to co-design activities that promote equal access and harness the economic value of culture and heritage.

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<sup>4</sup> Ministerial Foreword the Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

<sup>5</sup> [LGA Cultural Strategy in a box 2020](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#)

<sup>7</sup> Local Government Association (LGA) Cornerstones of Culture report (2022)

<sup>8</sup> Centre for Cultural Value, Vision Paper: [Culture, health and wellbeing](#) (2023).

<sup>9</sup> [Culture And Heritage Capital](#) Monetising the Impact of Culture on Health

<sup>10</sup> Age UK: [How important is creative and cultural participation to our wellbeing?](#)

<sup>11</sup> UK Government [Creative Industries Sector Plan](#) 2025

## Introduction to our district

The district is in the east Kent region of England, which also includes Dover, Folkestone and Thanet.

A population of nearly 160,000 people is spread over 41 villages, the seaside towns of Whitstable and Herne Bay, and the city of Canterbury itself.

It covers 30,885 hectares of rural Kent and boasts 21.6 km of award-winning coastline.

Often described as the Rome of England, Canterbury has been defined by its Christian roots, which date back to the 6<sup>th</sup> Century under Queen Bertha and King Ethelbert<sup>12</sup>. and iconic structures such as Canterbury Cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey and St Martin's Church are recognised internationally as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.<sup>13</sup>

The district hosts more than 130 events annually and is home to more than 80 cultural and heritage organisations<sup>14</sup>.

This includes three National Portfolio Organisations (NPO)<sup>15</sup> and three universities, recognised nationally and internationally for their outstanding contributions to the sector.

Cultural icons like Aphra Behn, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Sidney Cooper, Michael Powell and the creators of Rupert Bear and *Bagpuss* have shaped Canterbury's legacy.

The 1960s saw the counter cultural revolution, with the Canterbury music scene emerging as the epicentre of progressive rock.

Today, culture thrives in Canterbury through the award-winning Beaney House of Art & Knowledge, the Canterbury Roman Museum and the 1,200-seat Marlowe Theatre - Kent's largest creative employer.

The city also proudly hosts the Canterbury Festival and is home to the Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries (ICCI) which includes the Gulbenkian Arts Centre which produces bOing! Kent's largest international family arts festival.

Creative businesses and events thrive throughout the city centre, offering a diverse programme of activities, events and products inspired by the district's unique character.

From the Medieval Pageant in summer to the Christmas market in winter the city is alive with activities throughout the year.

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<sup>12</sup> Britannica [Canterbury England](#)

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO [World Heritage Convention](#)

<sup>14</sup> See appendix 1 for Cultural Infrastructure Map

<sup>15</sup> [National Portfolio Organisations](#)

In 2023, Canterbury was awarded £20 million from the government to support the ambitious *Connected Canterbury*<sup>16</sup> project.

This investment revitalised key heritage sites across the city, enhancing public spaces to make them more accessible and welcoming.

This includes nine so-called story gardens designed to share Canterbury's rich role in England's history through place-based storytelling.

The funding also supported the restoration of Canterbury Castle's keep.

The coastal towns of Whitstable and Herne Bay are home to a thriving artistic community, coming alive during the summer through outdoor happenings, festivals, artist open houses and maker trails.

Whitstable, once home to the writer Somerset Maugham and actor Peter Cushing, more recently became known for the internationally-recognised Whitstable Biennale (now Cement Fields).

The Whitstable Community Museum is ACE-accredited, while the Horsebridge Arts Centre offers theatre performances, music events, film screenings, exhibitions and engaging learning opportunities designed to enhance the lives of residents and visitors alike.

Annual events in the town include the Jack in the Green procession, Whitstable Carnival, Whitstable Harbour and Boat Show and the Rock Oyster Festival.

Over the years, Herne Bay has captured the imagination of visitors and artists alike including the surrealist artist Marcel Duchamp in 1913 and acclaimed film Director Ken Russell in 1963, who chose Herne Bay as the setting for his first feature film, *French Dressing*.

Most famously known for its historic coastline, which is part of the Saxon Shore Way across the southeast of England, it boasts the spectacular views from Reculver Towers<sup>17</sup> and Roman Fort to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Herne Bay Pier, Clocktower and bandstand.

Herne Bay's history also looks to the sky with pioneers such as Amy Johnson the first female pilot to fly solo from London to Australia and Barnes Wallis, inventor of the bouncing bomb both associated with the town.

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<sup>16</sup> Connected Canterbury: [Levelling Up Project](#)

<sup>17</sup> English Heritage [Reculver Towers](#)



More recently, the town has attracted crowds with events like the Herne Bay Cartoon Festival and the Herne Bay Jazz Festival.

It also has the ACE-accredited Seaside Museum, Beach Creative arts hub and The King's Hall, a 500-seat venue by the sea, which is undergoing a £2m restoration to its Edwardian glory.

The district is also home to a rich rural landscape, with 41 villages that play a vital role in the area's cultural life. Village halls are often at the heart of these communities, not just buildings, but vibrant hubs for connection, creativity, and cultural expression.

Our rural communities also hold remarkable cultural legacies. In Bishopsbourne, the acclaimed writer Joseph Conrad lived until his death in 1924, producing several of his most notable works, including *Victory* and *The Shadow-Line*. In Bekesbourne, Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond made his home at *The Old Palace*. And in Kingston, the renowned sculptor Henry Moore lived at Burcroft, where the garden inspired his lifelong interest in placing sculpture within natural landscapes.

These connections reflect the depth of cultural heritage in our villages and highlight the exciting opportunity to celebrate and support their ongoing cultural life ensuring they continue to thrive for generations to come.

The varied landscapes across the district have attracted television and filmmakers throughout the decades including popular series such as Black Mirror, Whitstable Pearl, Joan and Heartstopper.

## What will this strategy help us do?

**This 10-year strategy champions an inclusive, creative district powered by culture.**

The strategy builds on the council's Corporate Plan - Returning Pride to Our District<sup>18</sup> which aims to create a greener, fairer and stronger district.

A key priority is to improve public participation in cultural activities.

It sets out strategic aims to help the council, organisations, businesses and residents use culture to:

- better understand the current cultural offer and assets in the district

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<sup>18</sup> [Returning Pride to Our District Corporate Plan](#) Key Priorities

- support longer-term investment in culture
- increase cultural participation
- join up opportunities for culture delivery across the district

It aligns with the Kent County Council’s Cultural Strategy’s ambition to create a place where<sup>19</sup>:

- “investment in creativity and innovation ensures that entrepreneurs and extraordinary cultural practitioners choose to invest, live and work in Kent”
- “enchancing, surprising and innovative things happen”
- “diversity is celebrated and thrives”
- “our transformative cultural product is recognised nationally and internationally”

It encourages collaboration and innovation across institutions to help us remain resilient and adaptable in an ever-changing world.

### **Our past shapes our future**

Canterbury’s global heritage draws millions annually and defines the district’s identity.

As an education hub, the city supports more than 40,000 students, offering a unique opportunity to fuse heritage with youth-driven innovation.

However, 60% of cultural infrastructure sits in Canterbury, compared to 22% in Whitstable and 18% in Herne Bay, creating gaps in access and opportunities for redistribution.

Our narrative is often reduced to *Canterbury Tales*, yet our creative impact in literature and theatre deserves far greater recognition.

### **Falling behind the future - or ready to leap?**

Our large student population offers the potential to break from tradition and embrace bold, future-focused culture.

Although only 36% of residents engaged with the arts online our educational assets position us to lead in digital creativity and innovation<sup>20</sup>.

By connecting heritage, creativity and education, we can shape the future of culture and lead on emerging technologies and their ethical considerations.

### **Culture rich, insight ready**

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<sup>19</sup> [Kent Cultural Strategy](#) Ambition p9

<sup>20</sup> DCMS Main Report for [Participation Survey 2023- 2024](#)

According to the DCMS participation survey about 90% of our residents engage with culture mostly through TV, film (74% and 68%) or visiting heritage sites (69%).

Engagement in our museums (47%) and theatre (43%) also surpasses national averages.

However, fewer residents participate in hands-on creative activities like music, dance, drama or game design, revealing untapped potential.

With better local data, we can target investment to close gaps and widen participation, especially among young people.

National data gives us an overview but localised insight is needed to shape inclusive, community-led initiatives.

### **Funding challenges, growth potential**

Although the creative industries have been growing nationally, inflation and the rising cost of living has limited local funding opportunities and investment which has slowed progress and innovation.

A collaborative and joined up approach to cultural development presents an opportunity to attract local investment to unlock the economic and creative potential across the district.

## Shared vision

Cultural stakeholders representing a variety of organisations and disciplines across the district, from the Marlowe Theatre to independent artists, expressed a clear desire to collaborate and strengthen the cultural offer.

This strategy reflects that momentum, setting a joint vision to widen access, inspire creativity and drive cultural development.

It captures community ideas and defines a collective path forward.

## Exploring our core themes

### **Our Culture Strategy is shaped by three key themes:**

#### Together

We will strengthen collaboration across the creative, cultural and heritage sectors opening doors, removing barriers and building clear pathways for participation and growth.

#### Belong

Culture will foster belonging by creating inclusive experiences for all. We will welcome residents and visitors alike through opportunities that reflect our diverse communities, celebrate our heritage and showcase our landscapes.

#### Value

We will champion the role of culture in improving wellbeing, strengthening communities and boosting the local economy. By valuing creativity, we empower individuals and organisations to thrive.

## Ambition and actions for cultural sector and partners

| Ambition                         | What it means                                                                            | Actions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Engage children and young people | Empower the next generation through access to creative experiences and careers.          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect young people to cultural opportunities and ensure they have a voice in shaping programmes. Particularly at key venues such as The Marlowe Theatre, The Beane House of Art and Knowledge and The Kings Hall.</li> <li>• Support access to employment and training in the creative industries by working with our local businesses and educational institutions.</li> <li>• Retain graduates by helping them build creative careers locally, by offering advice, guidance and placements where possible.</li> </ul>                                                                                                      |
| People, places and destinations  | Promote our district's identity by celebrating heritage, creativity and community pride. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Champion local assets, heritage sites, coastline, green spaces as cultural destinations via Visit Canterbury and other tourism networks.</li> <li>• Support events that combine heritage with contemporary practice, through our events policy and process.</li> <li>• Enable creative interventions in public spaces that reflect local identity, such as public art.</li> <li>• Work with partners like Canterbury Cathedral to increase access to archives. Promote our literary legacy and cultural stories past and present through our story gardens and ambition to pursue UNESCO City of Literature status.</li> </ul> |

|                                            |                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Grow the creative economy                  | Position creativity as a driver of regeneration, innovation, and inclusive economic growth. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop digital and tech-enabled cultural programmes linked to universities, colleges and young people.</li> <li>• Champion Herne Bay as a hub for regeneration through culture.</li> <li>• Embed creative enterprise in town centre strategies and BID partnerships.</li> <li>• Celebrate our maritime history by working with the Harbour Board to make Whitstable Harbour a national destination.</li> </ul> |
| Improve health and wellbeing               | Unlock culture's power to boost wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote social prescribing and creative health initiatives through the local health alliance.</li> <li>• Support healthy ageing through intergenerational activities and creative engagement through public programmes, particularly those at the Beaney.</li> <li>• To provide local representation at the national Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance.</li> </ul>                                         |
| Enable participation and promote inclusion | Ensure everyone has access to meaningful cultural opportunities                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with cultural organisations and community partners to reach those least likely to engage, particularly in lifelong learning.</li> <li>• Champion accessible design in public spaces and cultural venues.</li> <li>• Celebrate cultural diversity at events and community programmes</li> </ul>                                                                                                             |

|                                              |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Promote environmentally aware practice       | Encourage sustainable cultural practice aligned with climate action goals.          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with partners to reduce environmental impact across the sector, through joint training programmes.</li> <li>• Encourage active travel and climate responsibility to cultural events and activities.</li> <li>• Apply learnings from Canterbury Connected to enhance green infrastructure in coastal towns.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Build an evidence base to attract investment | Use data and research to make the case for cultural investment and strategic growth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish shared methods for evaluating cultural and social impact.</li> <li>• Use local data to map gaps and inform targeted action.</li> <li>• Develop an evidence base to support infrastructure funding through developer contributions (e.g. S106, CIL)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Lead by example as a cultural Council        | Champion culture through leadership, stewardship and collaboration                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserve and promote cultural assets through planning and museums development.</li> <li>• Redevelop The King's Hall as a cultural anchor for Herne Bay.</li> <li>• Support the expansion and development of the Marlowe Theatre to continue their growth and support creative production.</li> <li>• Activate public spaces for cultural events and shared experiences.</li> <li>• Embed cultural provision in the Local Plan and advocate for investment.</li> <li>• Establish a districtwide cross sector Cultural Forum, creating a dedicated team to champion the strategy and drive its action plan forward</li> </ul> |

## How will we know we have been successful?

We will adopt a flexible approach, regularly reviewing and evaluating our progress to ensure our efforts remain relevant and responsive.

Additionally, we will incorporate continuous learning throughout this journey.

We will collaborate across the sector within the district to implement action plans for each ambition.

The action plans will identify key cultural outputs and outcomes for residents, visitors and stakeholders which will be measured annually.



## Strategic context

This strategy adopts a broad perspective on culture and creativity, informed by the [Let's Create Strategy](#) from Arts Council England (ACE)<sup>21</sup> and Kent County Council's cultural strategy, [Inspirational Creativity: Transforming Lives Everyday](#)<sup>22</sup>

The strategy is aligned with and supports the delivery of Canterbury City Council's Draft District Local Plan<sup>23</sup> and the [Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028, \*Returning Pride to Our District\*](#)<sup>24</sup> Stronger: improve public participation in cultural activities.

[Cultural Strategies Community of Practice](#) University of Southampton and the Local Government Association, led by Professor Dan Ashton (co-author of the [Cultural Strategies and futures report](#)) and Ian Leete (Local Government Association Senior Adviser – Culture, Tourism and Sport).

The strategy also draws together targeted strategies and partnerships, including but not limited to:

[Climate change action plan | Canterbury City Council](#)

[Canterbury heritage strategy delivery plan 2022 to 2023 | Canterbury City Council](#)

[Canterbury District Green Infrastructure Strategy 2018 – 2031](#)

[Creative Estuary National Cultural Planning Toolkit](#)

[Creative Industries Sector Plan 2025](#)

[Canterbury events management policy](#)

[Whitstable Harbour Strategic Plan 2024 – 2034](#)

## Acknowledgements

Applause Theatre, Bay Unite, Be Connected, Beach Creative, Canterbury Business Improvement District, Bright Shadow, Brit school, Cabin FM, Canterbury Academy, Canterbury Cathedral, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury Commemoration Society, Canterbury Festival, Canterbury Kids Literature Festival, Canterbury Society, Creative Estuary, EKC Canterbury College, Ethnic Minority Council, Francis Knight, Gulbenkian Arts Centre, Herne Bay Festival, Herne Bay Jazz Festival,

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<sup>21</sup> Arts Council England [Let's Create Strategy 2020-2030](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Inspirational Creativity Transforming Lives Everyday:](#)

<sup>23</sup> Canterbury City Council's Draft District [The Local Plan](#)

<sup>24</sup> Canterbury City Council's [Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028](#)

Herne Bay Pier Trust, Herne Bay Community Radio Association, Horsebridge Arts Centre, Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries, Jason de Caires Taylor, Kantab Lounge, Kent Library Service, Khachkar Peace and Reconciliation Project (KPRP), Kent University, Marlowe Theatre, Moving Memory Dance, Music for Wellbeing, Odds and Sods, One New Street Gallery, Open house Canterbury , Open house Herne Bay , Open house Whitstable, People United, Playtime Theatre Company, Pride Canterbury, Sarah Baulch Gallery, Seaside Museum, Shakespeare Festival, Sidney Cooper Arts, Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health, University of the Creative Arts, Westgate Hall, Whitstable Tail, and Whitstable Community Museum and Gallery.

## Appendix 1

The map below shows the location of cultural organisations in the district.

NB. this map is for illustrative purposes only.

