

Cultural Strategy for Solihull 2025-2035



Contents

Foreword	4
Solihull Cultural Strategy 2025-2035: A new ambition for Culture in Solihull	5
Vision and Ambition	9
Scope	10
Pillar 1: A bold and connected leadership for Culture	11
Pillar 2: For the benefit of all people and places of Solihull	12
Pillar 3: Grow infrastructure to allow Culture to flourish	13
Pillar 4: Valuing and investing in Creative People	14





Foreword



I am delighted to introduce Solihull's inaugural Cultural Strategy, developed collaboratively with residents, the cultural sector, artists, freelancers, businesses, educational institutions, and the voluntary and community sectors.

I am immensely proud of the vibrant cultural community that thrives in Solihull. Our ten-year vision aims to build and nurture the cultural sector, ensuring it continues to flourish within the Borough. From place to people to prosperity, culture has profoundly transformed our borough and remains vital to our future. It has been a key driver of economic development, health, and wellbeing in Solihull.

This Cultural Strategy is our pledge to maintain Solihull as a vibrant, welcoming, and inclusive cultural hub. Our vision is for a borough that invites visitors and residents to experience our rich cultural heritage alongside contemporary creative innovation and enterprise. With your support, we will work together to broaden access to culture, enhance wellbeing through arts participation, foster thriving creative businesses, create new jobs, and develop numerous creative spaces.

To achieve this, we want culture and creativity to be a common thread in everything that happens in Solihull. This document serves as both a vision for a new approach and a practical roadmap to make a tangible difference.

Culture is our identity, collective narrative, and the glue that binds our vibrant communities. It enriches lives, fosters connections, drives growth, addresses challenges, and embraces change. Inclusivity is at the heart of our vision; every resident should have the opportunity to shape and participate in Solihull's cultural tapestry, regardless of background, interests, or lifestyle.

Working in partnership across the arts, cultural and creative sectors, this strategy ensures that the arts and culture are integral to all residents' lives. This Cultural Strategy is our commitment to a bold and ambitious long-term creative vision for Solihull, embedding arts and culture at the heart of the borough.

This first strategy is an invitation to you, our residents, businesses, VCFSE sector arts partners and creative practitioners to collaborate with us to create meaningful experiences and the right conditions for innovation to flourish and culture to be established as a driving force in our borough. We extend our sincere gratitude to all partners, including the residents, whose invaluable contributions have shaped the borough's first Arts & Culture strategy.

Councillor Wazma Qais
Cabinet Member for Communities

Solihull Cultural Strategy 2025-2035:

A new ambition for Culture in Solihull

By 2035, Culture and Creativity will be valued and invested in as a key driver for economic growth, wellbeing, and happiness. By working with our partners Solihull will have a flourishing and growing cultural workforce, delivering an ambitious and innovative cultural offer for everyone in Solihull.

This Cultural Strategy is a golden thread running through the council plan and the main council priorities. The cultural strategy puts residents' wellbeing, the environment and economy at its heart and is a commitment to ensuring Solihull is vibrant and welcoming with a shared cultural identity where all residents have access to arts, heritage, and culture.

Our new vision 'Solihull: a great place to live, work, invest and enjoy', which seeks to capture what is best and most unique about Solihull where a thriving economy, health & wellbeing and sustainability go hand in hand. It builds on strong foundations and makes the most of what Solihull has to offer our residents, our partners, and our businesses.

Solihull Council Plan



Why this strategy, why now?

This cultural strategy begins with the people and places of Solihull and is rooted in the experiences, needs and ambitions of all those who live, work and visit the borough. This strategy builds on the work that has taken place so far in Solihull. There is much to celebrate and acknowledge, but also many ambitions to realise for the role that culture can play in Solihull.

The landscape for grassroots culture in Solihull is rich, and there are many opportunities. Solihull has a varied creative and cultural life. Residents in the borough take part in, experience and create culture. The borough has a wealth of creative people, working as artists, in the creative industries and for major employers. However, limited infrastructure and no large creative institutions have historically slowed down the development of culture.

Developing culture provides both social and economic value to a place. A vibrant culture benefits the people who live in, and grow up there, increasing wellbeing, creativity and identity. Culture does not exist in a vacuum and this strategy marks a significant step for the borough, its stakeholders and partners in making a concerted effort to work together and ensure that the conditions for culture to develop are nurtured, supported and advocated for.

As a council we recognise the importance of culture to Solihull's economic growth and our 2023-2024 Economic Strategy identifies a number of actions related to developing the creative and cultural economy. Taking this strategic approach to culture in the borough, will lay the ground for increased benefits through culture, leading to a thriving cultural ecology. There is a growing cultural community within the borough, with significant interest from other organisations that see Solihull as a great place to support and grow their work.

However, to make the most of these opportunities this strategy recognises that overall, the sector in the borough has been underdeveloped. There has been a significant amount of developing and testing of activity in the borough and now is the time to formalise the priorities and outputs for culture, establish the baselines to measure impact and fully embed culture as a key priority.

Now is the moment to bring together all of the great work that is taking place and realise the role that Solihull Council, its partners and stakeholders can take in leading and shaping the cultural and creative life in the borough; we will do this through working together to realise the ambitions of everyone living, working or investing in Solihull.

We commissioned Culture Central and Indigo (an audience development agency) to work with us to develop an ambitious Cultural Strategy which draws upon the borough's strengths and identifies opportunities for development. This strategy will ensure that residents can engage in and access quality activities in arts and culture, support local freelancers and creative and cultural businesses, and develop the cultural economy and enhances the borough.



The strategy's purpose is to:

- Raise the profile and importance of culture.
- Create, develop, and enhance opportunities for residents to engage with culture and arts.
- Support the growth of the cultural and creative infrastructure and wider economy.
- Identify important needs, gaps and opportunities.

This strategy has been informed by a series of consultations, research, surveys and workshops made up of the cultural ecology in Solihull, alongside partners and stakeholders all working to support the people and places of the borough. The research, consultation and consensus building have shaped and informed this strategy and provide a series of baselines and metrics to inform future action for Solihull and its partners.

These steps were taken developing this strategy:

- Culture & Creativity in Solihull - Desktop Research
- A residents' survey which went out during Summer 2024; 303 responses were received from residents who shared with us how they engage with culture and their appetite and interests for further engagement.
- An online citizens panel of 16 who engaged in a weeklong process sharing their insights on the importance and impact of culture in their lives.
- Community and Stakeholder Consultations, gathering insights from a wide range of stakeholders including: Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations, the Creative Community, the Cultural Education Partnership Youth Board, and Businesses/ Local Economy representatives
- A consensus Building Workshop - a day bringing together stakeholders from across Solihull to explore and review the research phases, shaping the key pillars that should be included in a cultural strategy for the borough.



The consultation revealed a strong appetite across Solihull for expanding and strengthening its cultural landscape with recurring themes around inclusivity, infrastructure and sustainability.

This strategy is a roadmap that shows where the borough is at, what its ambitions are, and the steps that we need to take together to get there.

The benefits of culture are both tangible and intangible. They have an impact on individuals, the local, regional, and national economy, provide social value, can contribute to wellbeing and health, educational outcomes, increased tourism, and pride of place. **The strategy identifies the pillars that are key to taking a strategic approach to culture in Solihull.**

Vision and Ambition

Solihull's first cultural strategy will unite the borough to work together to build and embed culture in Solihull's future. As a place, Solihull will be ambitious for all its residents and creative community; it will unlock all the opportunities that culture and creativity can bring for people, organisations, and businesses in the borough.

The ambition and principles that underpin this strategy identify the opportunities that can be realised through Culture, linking to local and regional priorities:

Bold leadership together for creativity and culture:

- Together, the cultural ecology of Solihull will work to establish, own and lead the creative and cultural life of the borough.
- Working together across sectors we will build together the opportunities and ambitions for all through creativity.
- We will deliver future focussed strategic development activity, through collective ambition and activity.
- We will embrace risk taking to build an innovative approach to culture, heritage and creativity.
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion will be embedded within the leadership and delivery of the strategy.

A robust economy built for Culture:

- Through growing and developing cultural people and businesses.
- By increasing visitors to the borough.
- Through animating high streets and public spaces.
- Building and developing cultural infrastructure and workspaces.
- Attracting external funding and investment for culture.
- Maximise opportunities for cultural partnerships.



Happier, healthier people with equality of opportunity for all:

- Through a varied quality cultural offer for everyone that responds to the increasingly diverse communities of Solihull.
- We will celebrate culture to create a feeling of pride in the place and connection to our cultural heritage.
- We will create opportunity for all people in Solihull to develop and grow their creative skills, grow cultural and creative careers, and be/feel creative.
- We will embed the principles of environment and sustainability, working towards net zero ambitions.

Scope

This strategy will be the first Cultural strategy for Solihull and will span 2025-2035.

This will be a co-owned, collaborative strategy that is led by the council across all departments – culture, planning, economic growth (tourism, inward investment, business support), community, and education and skills. The strategy will be delivered in association with our partners and is reliant on building a shared vision and leadership for culture that spans the culture, business, and community sectors.



The strategy will be delivered through a co-created action plan, with responsibilities and actions shared with both the council and other partners who include:

- Private sector partners, covering businesses located in and around Solihull from a range of sectors.
- Voluntary and Community Sector partners.
- Arts and Cultural sector organisations and individuals.
- Education institutions and music hubs.

The strategy will be realised through focusing on four pillars, underpinned by a two-year action plan, reviewed annually.

A bold and connected leadership for Culture

Through Solihull's first cultural strategy, a bold, shared approach to leadership will create the conditions for culture to thrive across the borough. The key stakeholders and council will recognise the value of culture and prioritise its development by working in partnership.

We will establish a strategic cross-sector partnership group with the responsibility of driving the strategy priorities by enabling change and growth within the cultural sector, building relationships between organisations and developing effective strategic partnership working.



The partnership will:

- Develop and deliver an ambitious plan for culture, leverage funding and investment, to enhance the borough and revitalise town and local centres and maximise opportunities through culture.
- Support businesses, community groups, and stakeholders to engage with the cultural, creative and heritage sector, to grow and diversify their offer.
- Ensure Equity, Diversity and Inclusion are at the heart of the strategy and its leadership, enabling all residents to feel seen and valued as part of the borough's cultural identity.
- Model best practice in environmental sustainability and Net Zero, ensuring these are implemented through each pillar of strategy delivery.
- Ensure the cultural offer is accessible to all neighbourhoods and communities, breaking down barriers and ensuring equality of access is not dependent on geography.

Our first actions for 2025-2027 will be to:

1. Establish a formal cross-sector partnership, to facilitate and drive the cultural strategy.
2. Develop Cultural Champions across businesses and a range of community and private organisations, who will commit to supporting and developing culture across their organisations.
3. Work together to identify and maximise resources and leverage funding for existing and new cultural activity.
4. Curation and facilitation of flagship events – to drive forward and raise the profile and importance of cultural events and activity.
5. Build upon the evidence base established through the development of the strategy ensuring an understanding of changes and trends in participation, engagement, and the cultural life of the borough, working to address under representation of opportunity.

For the benefit of all people and places of Solihull

Culture will be recognised as a significant facilitator of community cohesion and wellbeing, removing barriers and increasing equity. Cultural activities in the borough will be accessible and inclusive, with opportunities for people to be creative, a relevant cultural offer to communities and opportunities for residents, making Solihull a vibrant and innovative place to live.

Through Culture, we will unearth and tell the story of Solihull's history and heritage and its unique people and places. We will celebrate the stories and cultures of the people of Solihull to create a sense of shared civic pride and a distinctive identity for all of Solihull.

- Culture will be embedded in borough-wide plans for wellbeing, cohesion, sustainability, and inequality. Working across sectors with our partners to embed culture in communities, sharing good practice and excellence, and strengthening ways that creativity can support people's journeys.
- We will co-create an innovative, ambitious cultural programme with a range of high-quality audience and participation experiences that is relevant and enjoyed by the people of Solihull.
- We will connect Solihull communities through culture programmes, bringing together communities, old and new, urban centres, villages, rural areas, north, and south geographies of the borough through activities that are rooted in the place that is Solihull.
- We will support communities of geography and interest to develop creative ideas and projects, responding to local need and developing opportunities for local people, ensuring culture and creativity is accessible for those who are less likely to take part.
- We will co-create a shared cultural identity in which we celebrate the heritage and stories of Solihull, past, present, and future.
- We will use culture as a vehicle for community cohesion, supporting new communities to successfully integrate into the borough through the sharing of arts, culture, and stories.
- Working with local businesses and stakeholders, make a significant contribution to local place-making through a co-created year-round programme of cultural events in the public realm cultural and activity in our high streets and local centres.
- To continue to develop The Core as a flagship venue for culture in the borough with further development of libraries as cultural hubs and spaces for cultural activity.
- Ensure a cultural offer for all young people through the cultural education partnership, supporting all our young people to be able to engage in creative and cultural lives.

Our first actions for 2025-2027 will be to:

1. Work with local history groups, libraries, and community, voluntary and faith organisations to identify and share the stories that matter to the people of Solihull.
2. Support the development of festivals and events that bring people together, developing the cultural landscape of Solihull.
3. Develop new projects which enable newly arrived communities and those who experience barriers to access to actively participate in the cultural life of the borough.
4. Re-open The Core's main auditorium, re-engage audiences, and develop new content and experiences for residents and visitors.
5. Develop a clear approach to the integration of public art across the borough.
6. Be a voice for the place of culture and heritage in new developments such as Mell Square, Chelmsley Wood and Kingshurst, ensuring culture is community led, embedded in the fabric of plans, as well as providing a draw for visitors.

Grow infrastructure to allow culture to flourish

Culture will be a key driver for economic growth in the borough. By building the creative and cultural economy and infrastructure, we will position Solihull as a place for cultural businesses to develop and grow, a place people visit for culture and where cultural activity revitalises high streets and neighbourhoods.



- We will grow the cultural infrastructure in Solihull, making the most of Solihull's spaces, businesses, and places indoor and outdoor for culture.
- Develop a co-created borough-wide approach to empty spaces/buildings for culture, including work with planners, developers, and the utilisation of council assets for meanwhile use and outdoor cultural experiences
- Develop the cultural and creative business ecosystem, through supportive and targeted growth programmes, networks of peer-to-peer learning and start up and early-stage support. This will be supported by dedicated creative career and employment pathways from local providers.
- Alignment of the cultural offer to the developing and emerging creative industries within the Borough, capitalising on local opportunities.
- Solihull will have an exciting and clear cultural tourism offer, aligned to existing strengths and developing new areas of opportunity within the visitor economy/night-time economy, working with strategic assets such as the NEC, venues, and green spaces.

Our first actions for 2025-2027 will be to:

1. Support the business case and attract the funding to deliver the economic activities identified.
2. Develop an investment proposition to attract cultural sector operators into the area.
3. Identify joint working and partnership opportunities to deliver cultural activations in local centres and high streets. Maximise the opportunities for 'meanwhile' uses within Mell Square and other high streets to pilot activity.
4. Invest in the public realm to support cultural activity and to create the right adaptable spaces for events and activations.
5. Support actions within the Visit Solihull Destination Management Plan & the regional actions & ambitions within the West Midlands Tourism Strategy.
6. Utilise the Visit Solihull brand to profile the borough and use the regional Culture and Tourism Connected Platform to push events and offers out to wider audiences.
7. Encourage the development of the creative and cultural ecosystem developing diversification and entrepreneurship by building on the work of Core Creatives, and linking it to other clusters of activity such as marketing agencies, innovation centres and other business sectors,
8. Major Cultural Events, work with significant assets (such as the NEC), event spaces and attractions in the bidding of regional and national cultural events and support the development of local cultural programmes into other major business and sporting events hosted in the region, for the benefit of local supply chains and town centres.
9. Business Support opportunities via Visit Britain/England and regional Destination Development Partnership status for regional funding and programmes to support the cultural and visitor economy sectors.

Valuing and investing in Creative People

Solihull will be a nurturing place for creatives at all stages, with skills and development opportunities and creative spaces to support the existing, potential, and future creators in the borough. The cultural strategy will seek to support the creative work force encouraging them to thrive and plan for growth and development.

We will support our freelance community to develop, CICs to flourish and businesses to grow. Making creative careers more viable regardless of economic background, enabling conversations to help cultural and creative businesses and freelancers to realise ideas and adapt to changing cultural and creative landscape.



- Work with Solihull Cultural Education Partnership (CEP), schools and colleges and youth providers to ensure young people across the borough experience the best possible cultural experiences.
- Working with Core Creatives, further education, schools, the CEP. Work with employers to develop clear pathways and signposting to employment opportunities within the creative and cultural industries including new and emerging sectors.
- Develop a programme to support, attract, and retain creative talent from school through to FE, HE, further training, and into employment and self-employment routes.
- Build on the success of the Core Creatives network to support local freelancers, and organisations to build, develop and sustain their practice by offering business support, training opportunities, and raising the profile of the creative and cultural industries in Solihull.

Our first actions for 2025-2027 will be to:

1. Strengthen the influence of the Cultural Education Partnership through advocacy and best practice with key stakeholders and work with the CEP, youth providers, voluntary sector, and Children's Services to develop more opportunities for children and young people to engage in meaningful cultural activity both within and outside of school.
2. Continue to develop the Core Creatives to support freelancers, micro-organisations, start-up enterprises, Community Interest Companies and developed businesses to strengthen networks and resilience in the sector and ensure a responsive offer which responds to need.
3. Work with colleges to develop an Employer Board to share sector intelligence, identify the future workforce skills gaps and develop pathways and frameworks for learn and work opportunities in the creative sector.
4. Support artists and creatives to develop a sustainable practice embedding sustainability principles firmly into their work and develop a deeper understanding of net zero.



Copyright and image credits below. The culture strategy document attributes the individual images to the photographers. With thanks to all.

Nicola Prestage; Mark Radford; Kirstie Ewer; Art at the Heart CIC; Romy What; Solihull Council Archives.