

FRESH HORIZONS

CASTLE POINT
CULTURAL STRATEGY



2026
2031

CURATED PLACE

CREATIVE ECONOMY PEOPLE & PLACE

INTRO LEADERS' FOREWORD



Cllr Dave Blackwell,
Leader of Castle Point Council

I am proud to present this strategy for growing the cultural sectors in Castle Point. This is the first Cultural Strategy for Castle Point, and represents our commitment to promoting our amazing borough, and supporting our local businesses and the local economy.

As a lifelong resident of Castle Point, I know our Borough is a place where stories, creativity, and community spirit shape our daily lives. From the vibrant murals along Canvey's seawall to the budding arts community at Hadleigh Old Fire Station, culture and creativity is woven into the fabric of our towns. It's in the music played at community halls, the art created in our homes and studios, and the memories we make walking along the estuary or enjoying community events.

Castle Point has a rich history, and this Cultural Strategy seeks to celebrate this. However, our culture is more than just our rich natural beauty and heritage. It is also about our people. We are a community of makers, storytellers, volunteers, and creative businesses, who all have something different to offer. The purpose of this strategy is to enable everyone to engage in cultural and creative activities whether you are a lifelong resident, a newcomer, a young creative, or someone rediscovering your passions later in life. Through this strategy we aim to support our cultural and creative sectors fulfil their potential.

Cllr. Dave Blackwell, Leader - Castle Point Borough Council
Angela Hutchings, Chief Executive Officer



Angela Hutchings,
Chief Executive Officer of
Castle Point Borough Council

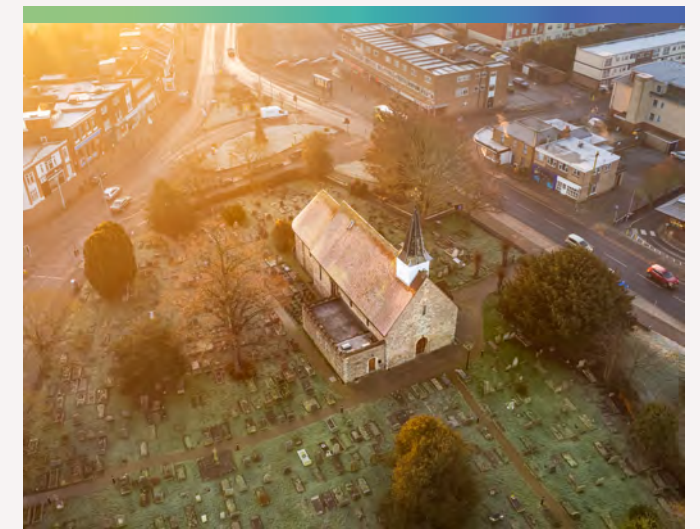
Nationally, creative industries are among the fastest growing sectors, contributing £124 billion to the UK economy, and employing nearly 2.5 million people (7% of all jobs in the UK).

Castle Point is well-positioned to be part of that growth and to use its creative energy to drive home-grown regeneration.

An improved, better coordinated cultural offer and identity will make Castle Point more attractive to visitors. This strategy focusses on putting in place the right conditions for our creative entrepreneurs to succeed.

This strategy will enable Castle Point to showcase the best we have to offer, and to enhance the size and value of the cultural sector for people across the Borough.

I am grateful to those residents, local businesses and community leaders who have taken the time to work with the Council and who have shaped the themes and actions of this strategy and I look forward to seeing the cultural offer in Castle Point flourish and grow.





1.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The strategic framework provides a 6 themed plan for driving the cultural sector of Castle Point acting as a guide for aligned action across diverse stakeholders.

2.

IMPLEMENTATION

Each of the 6 themes contains 5 actions to coordinate delivering the vision across:

Foundations: those things which the local authority can address and provide for the sector directly
Skills: the mechanisms for identifying and addressing skills, networks & capacity building needs.
Interventions: the programme of activity to be supported and driven by supporting both existing and new actors working in the culture sector

3.

FINDINGS & DATA

A non-exhaustive presentation of the findings used to guide the recommendations and to use as a baseline for addressing needs and measuring change.

CONTENT

1.1 EXEC SUMMARY & VISION 8

An overview of the strategy's findings, purpose, principles, and structure.

1.2. THE SIX THEMES 14

The core priorities for the new strategy providing Foundations, Interventions & Activation

1.3. THE FRAMEWORK 16

A Framework for positive change providing measurable, timeley actions driven by the local authority but owned by the people

2. IMPLEMENTATION 18

How the six themes will be activated to deliver new opportunities, drive ambition and fresh horizons.

2.1. ENABLING LEADERSHIP 20

2.2. NURTURING AUDIENCE 22

2.3. LIFELONG PATHWAYS 24

2.4. GREAT SPACES 26

2.5. LASTING PROGRAMME 28

2.6. MAKING WAY 30

3. DESTINATION PROFILES 32

4. EXEMPLAR CASE STUDIES 40



CREDITS

The Fresh Horizons Cultural Strategy was commissioned in spring 2025 and revised in 2026 by Castle Point Borough Council and undertaken by creative Curated Place experts in Creative Economy People & Place.

Engaging with organisations, artists, businesses and residents in and neighbouring Castle Point this document has been produced with the generous support of the Shared Prosperity Fund. Images provided by estuary festival, unsplash and istock.



FRESH HORIZONS

CASTLE POINT
CULTURAL STRATEGY



STRATEGIC
FRAMEWORK

**SECTION
1**

1.1 FRESH HORIZONS

Castle Point's towns and communities are on a bold journey to become the best place in Essex for lifelong creativity. Powered by nature, entrepreneurial spirit and intergenerational knowledge, the Fresh Horizons strategy draws on that energy to carry our voice, place, heritage and future forward as Castle Point comes together with Rochford and Southend to shape the future of South West Essex.

Fresh Horizons offers a Framework for Action, one that is measurable, timely, and people-powered. This strategy will guide cross-sector collaboration and empower a thriving cultural economy, aligned with national and regional partners such as Arts Council England, Active Essex, Estuary Festival, and We Rise. The strategy is intended as a ready-to-adopt foundation for the incoming unitary authority, and as a safeguard for Castle Point's distinct town identities through the transition.

The Six Themes driving Creativity and Place

The strategy is built on six agile, interdependent themes grouped across three implementation strands: Foundations, Interventions, and Activation. Envisaged as a framework for action these guide how Castle Point will grow capacity, attract investment, and celebrate its unique offer.

1. Enabling Leadership

- Form a renewed Cultural Leadership Team
- Drive a shared vision and clear mechanisms for support
- Empower creative professionals to multiply investment
- Build strategic alignment across sectors and boroughs
- Champion existing practitioners (e.g. HOFS, community archives, local artists) and grow collaborative leadership

2. Nurturing Audience

- Develop a place brand that reflects the borough's natural and cultural richness
- Establish consistent comms platforms and audience insight processes
- Create a network to celebrate success and drive coordinated action
- Promote Castle Point locally, regionally, and nationally
- Ensure brand and teams reflect the diversity of communities.

3. Lifelong Pathways

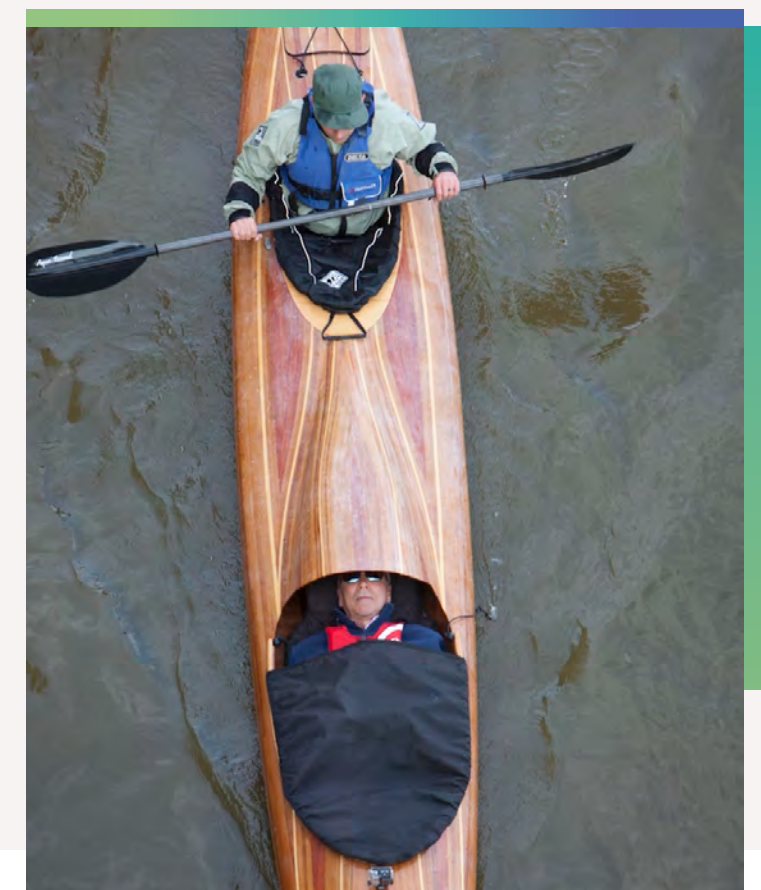
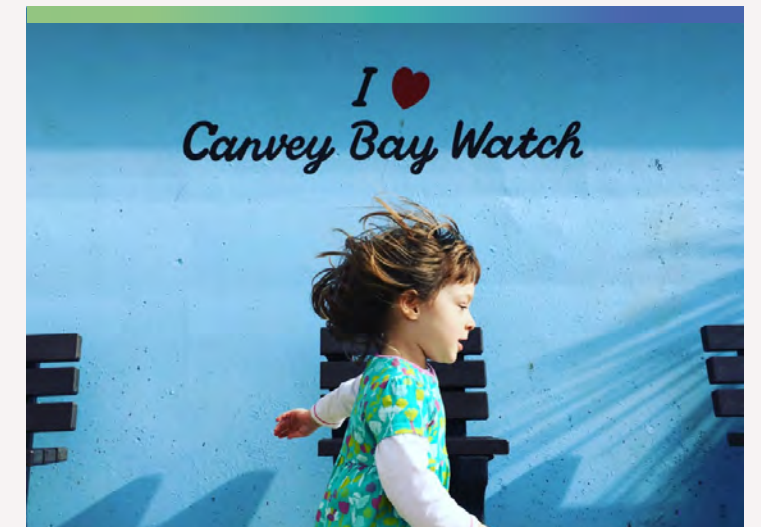
- Launch borough-wide professional skills programmes
- Bring best practice from national/international partners to local creatives
- Support resilient community-led creative projects
- Invest in career pathways with partners such as We Rise and Active Essex
- Link creative sector with wider destination and business ecosystems

4. Great Spaces

- Open public venues and remove barriers to cultural use
- Develop town-based creative hubs, building on models like HOFS
- Activate natural and urban assets as platforms for storytelling and celebration
- Improve journeys between spaces with better access and signage
- Embed accessibility and inclusivity from the outset of design

EXEC SUMMARY

*Powered by creativity,
inspired by nature.*



FRESH HORIZONS

5. Lasting Practice

- Connect cultural activity to low-impact destination development
- Join environmental networks and support creative climate action
- Promote sustainable production and touring practices
- Embed circular economy principles in event planning
- Support cross-sector storytelling on climate, care and community

6. Making Way

- Uncover and share diverse, intergenerational local stories
- Activate both formal and informal heritage through co-creation
- Coordinate borough-wide celebration and community programming
- Foster learning, reflection, and shared progress across the sector
- Support cultural exports, exchanges, and touring — growing visibility and confidence beyond the borough

Implementation & Ownership

Each theme includes five specific actions with measurable outcomes.

Delivery will be coordinated through Castle Point Borough Council in partnership with local creatives, organisations, and community stakeholders.

This is intended as an active document and a living strategy: adaptive, inclusive, and designed to evolve alongside the people and places of Castle Point. A shared guide and vision to help us create a place where everyone can explore Fresh Horizons.

Powered by
creativity,
inspired by
nature.



VISION

To make Castle Point
the best place in Essex
for lifelong creativity.

A launchpad, an accelerator,
a place to share wisdom.

Where everyone can explore
Fresh Horizons.



Powered by creativity,
inspired by nature.

FRESH HORIZONS

VALUES

Our towns are deeply connected
to nature and to one another...

adaptable
entrepreneurial
independent
intergenerational

VISION

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1.2 THE SIX THEMES

SIX THEMES OF CREATIVITY AND PLACE

To achieve this vision we have defined 6 adaptable, agile strategic themes driving action.

FOUNDATIONS will provide guiding and enabling leadership alongside audience development and comms to build a thriving sector.

INTERVENTIONS will invest in creating roads into and through the opportunities of culture & heritage by giving people the skills, pathways and places to make great things happen.

ACTIVATION will focus on ensuring we create a sustainable sector whilst supporting our creative & heritage community to experiment and learn together.

FOUNDATIONS

ENABLING LEADERSHIP

NURTURING AUDIENCE

INTERVENTIONS

LIFELONG PATHWAYS



GREAT SPACES

ACTIVATION

LASTING PRACTICE

MAKING WAY

ENABLING LEADERSHIP

Creating a new leadership role to breach information silos focused on guidance and advocacy.

This will strategically support the sector by attending and building effective networks, understanding and informing across and beyond our towns to empower our makers and doers.

NURTURING AUDIENCE

Addressing the gaps in comms & marketing and audience development.

This theme will support the sector to know their audiences, deliver consistency and clarity in messaging and provide information, identity and navigation through skills development and public programming.

LIFELONG PATHWAYS

This skills development, networking and signposting theme will targeting capacity building, connection, knowledge and community empowerment by supporting programmes in:

- New Careers
- Accelerating Careers
- Succession Planning
- Piloting new ideas

GREAT SPACES

Building on our existing culture, heritage and natural assets this theme will ensure our doors are open and the pathways to and through them are clear.

It will improve the experience of living in, working in and visiting our towns and environment connecting our constellations of creativity.

LASTING PRACTICE

This sustainability theme will ensure that positive environmental action is centred across the delivery of the strategy whilst simultaneously ensuring the cultural economy builds non-extractive models.

Creating a circular economy through elegant partnerships across the creative custodians of green, blue and urban spaces.

MAKING WAY

This theme is all about taking action making events happen, whether pushing boundaries through exploratory creative practice or productised for a year-round market.

Making a creative place and an attractive destination by giving agency to the makers and doers of arts, heritage and community.

1.3 THE FRAMEWORK

	THEME	ACTION 1	ACTION 2	ACTION 3	ACTION 4	ACTION 5	OUTCOMES	
FOUNDATIONS	ENABLING LEADERSHIP	CREATE A RENEWED CULTURAL LEADERSHIP TEAM	DRIVE A CLEAR VISION, VALUES AND GOALS WITH A CONSISTENT PROCESS FOR SUPPORT	SUPPORT DESTINATION & CREATIVE WORKERS TO MULTIPLY INVESTMENTS	CONVENE WITH AND ALIGN WITH LEADERS ACROSS SECTORS	EMPOWER ARTIST & BUSINESSES TO SUCCEED SHARING KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND NETWORKS	A CONNECTED, INFORMED AND EMPOWERED SECTOR	LEADERSHIP
	NURTURING AUDIENCE	CREATE A PLACE BRAND FOR COMMUNICATING THE CULTURE AND HERITAGE OFFER	FORMALISE STRUCTURES TO NURTURE, COMMUNICATE AND CONNECT EVERYONE	CREATE A NETWORK TO CELEBRATE SUCCESS SHARE LEARNING & DRIVE THE VISION	CONSISTENT OUTWARD MESSAGING LOCAL, REGIONAL, (INTER)NATIONAL	AUTHENTICALLY REFLECT COMMUNITIES IN VOICE AND TEAM	A SECTOR THAT IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS WITH A CLEAR DIRECTION OF TRAVEL	MESSAGING
INTERVENTIONS	LIFELONG PATHWAYS	DELIVER A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SKILLS PROGRAMME	WELCOME (INTER) NATIONAL BEST PRACTICE TO ROOT SKILLS LOCALLY	NURTURE SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS THAT EMPOWER CREATIVITY AT ALL AGES	INVEST IN CAREER PATHWAYS FOR ARTISTS AND CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS	CONNECT CREATIVE BUSINESS AND THE DESTINATION ECOLOGY BEYOND THE BOROUGH	AN EMPOWERED SECTOR READY TO MAXIMISE OPPORTUNITIES	SKILLS
	GREAT SPACES	OPEN DOORS & REMOVE BARRIERS	NURTURE A CREATIVE CONSTELLATION WITH NEW SATELLITE SPACES AT THE HEART OF TOWNS	SUPPORT AND AMPLIFY EXISTING GREEN, BLUE & URBAN SPACES TO DRIVE OPPORTUNITY	CREATE CLEAR JOURNEYS INTO & BETWEEN GREAT SPACES	MAKE SPACES ACCESSIBLE & SOCIAL	PLACES FOR ARTISTS AND AUDIENCES TO THRIVE	ASSETS
ACTIVATION	LASTING PRACTICE	CONNECT CULTURE AND HERITAGE TO THE DESTINATION OFFER	LEAD CULTURE INTO NETWORKS FOR COLLABORATION IN AND ON THE ENVIRONMENT	DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES	INVEST IN SUSTAINABLE EVENTS	SUPPORT CULTURE TO INSPIRE, INFORM & DRIVE POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION	A CIRCULAR, SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL ECONOMY	SUSTAINABILITY
	MAKING WAY	UNCOVER, EMPOWER & SHARE LOCAL STORIES	ACTIVATE THE COLLECTIONS & HERITAGE - FORMAL AND INFORMAL	COORDINATED COMMUNITY ACTIVATION & SECTOR CELEBRATION	CONTINUAL LEARNING AND SHARING	DRIVE LOCAL PRIDE THROUGH COLLABORATION, EXPORT & TOUR	A SHARED, ACTIVE & CHAMPIONED IDENTITY	ACTION

IMMEDIATE ACTION



MEDIUM TERM IMPLEMENTATION



LONG TERM GOAL

FRESH HORIZONS

CASTLE POINT
CULTURAL STRATEGY



IMPLEMENTATION

**SECTION
2**

2.1 ENABLING LEADERSHIP



ACTION 1: To maximise the opportunities and impact of its people and culture Castle Point will renew its cultural leadership and seize the opportunities of culture's role in allowing our places to thrive. The renewed leadership will be expert in programme, policy and funding to drive resource to the sector, as well as experienced in delivery to provide practical support to our creative and destination sector. Cast as a strategic support and enabling role rather than a delivery role they will maximise resources and facilitate the knowledge and networks for our cultural and heritage workers to act as an effective sector.

ACTION 2: The refreshed leadership will drive the strategic vision of this programme and place providing clarity in how ideas are prioritised, devised, developed and delivered across the borough setting our creative and destination communities up to be investment ready. Processes for accessing support and co-designing ideas with Castle Point Council will be regularly communicated with clear mechanisms.

ACTION 3: This is not a programming and event delivery role - it is one that enables others to develop their own leadership and networks to prevent a bottleneck within the local authority. Acting as a convener, connector and catalyst that drives the strategic vision the role will equip the sector with a strong partner who supports the growth of their capacity, amplify their messaging and open opportunities - particularly focused on enabling everyone in the culture and heritage sector to multiply their resources through cross-sector collaboration and clear value propositions.

**2.1.1 ACTION 1:
CREATE A RENEWED CULTURAL
LEADERSHIP TEAM**

**2.1.2 ACTION 2:
DRIVE A CLEAR VISION, VALUES AND GOALS**

**2.1.3 ACTION 3:
SUPPORT DESTINATION & CREATIVE
WORKERS TO MULTIPLY INVESTMENTS**

**ACTION 4:
CONVENE WITH AND ALIGN WITH
LEADERS ACROSS SECTORS** **2.1.4**

**ACTION 5:
EMPOWER ARTIST & BUSINESSES TO SUCCEED
SHARING KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND NETWORKS** **2.1.5**

ENABLING LEADERSHIP

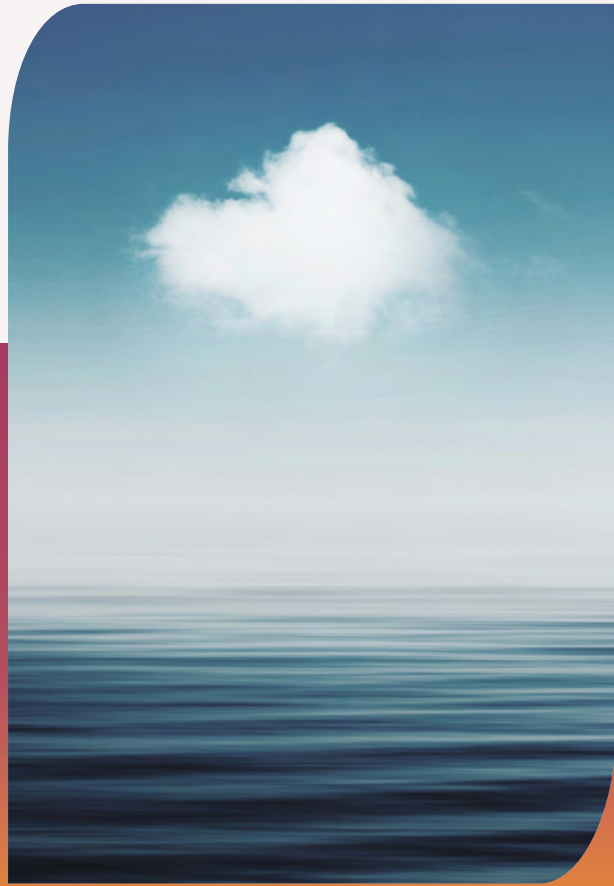
ACTION 4: We will embed culture at the heart of our towns by establishing a Cultural Advisory Group to advise on programming, spaces, and funding decisions. It will connect our creative sector into the big conversations, convening and aligning leadership across sectors and amplifying our offer to ensure those actors and organisations improving our places are receiving the support they need. By liaising in and beyond the sector the new role will build effective networks, connect to shared challenges and opportunities, drive asset-based community development, and equip our cultural economy with the tools and knowledge to work contribute to shared objectives - locally, regionally and nationally. A crucial role will be briefing and aligning with the shadow unitary authority so Castle Point's cultural assets and identity are carried into its new corporate priorities from day one.

ACTION 5: Castle Point is alive with culture and community – home to entrepreneurs, artists, archivists, performers, and educators. But much of this energy is volunteer-led and stretched thin. To unlock a lifetime of cultural opportunity, the new role will focus on securing resources and revitalised support, strengthening our creative landscape. Clarifying the big picture and aligning local offers with audiences, collaborators, and funders will be key to attracting investment and new talent. Building on what already exists, we'll shape clear focal points, set shared goals, and channel our collective energy. Connecting people, places, priorities and generations we will enable everyone to experience and explore Fresh Horizons – whatever their stage of life.

**A connected,
informed &
empowered
sector**



2.2 NURTURING AUDIENCE



ACTION 1: Castle Point is a rich mosaic, four towns deeply connected to nature and to one another. It is a place that is adaptable, entrepreneurial, independent and intergenerational. This strategy doesn't seek to erase the differences that give Castle Point such a rich personality, it aims to help everyone engage in the exploration and celebration of our home with independent personality but a collective meaning. A strong story lies at the heart of any place brand but the best stories leave room for curiosity, conversation and open up a space of possibility. Our aim is to provide our communities and visitors with the frame that allows them to explore Fresh Horizons however they encounter the Castle Point story – whether through a walk by the estuary, a local maker's event, a shared memory, or a bold new idea.

ACTION 2: To support the brand, we will formalise accessible communications, marketing, and data-sharing processes that help everyone engage with Fresh Horizons. This includes renewing tools and channels to reach both active and untapped cultural audiences by creating consistent platforms to promote local and Essex-wide cultural activity. Rooted in a natural and independent cultural ecology, our communications must be steady, inclusive, and long-term – not reliant on one-off flagship events.

ACTION 3: Building the network is not about the local authority delivering events or leading programmes – it's about creating the conditions for others to lead. Our role will be as a convener, connector, and catalyst, championing the strategic

**2.2.1 ACTION 1:
CREATE A PLACE BRAND FOR COMMUNICATING
THE CULTURE AND HERITAGE OFFER**

**2.2.2 ACTION 2:
FORMALISE STRUCTURES TO COMMUNICATE
AND CONNECT THE CREATIVE ECONOMY**

**2.2.3 ACTION 3:
CREATE A NETWORK TO CELEBRATE SUCCESS
SHARE LEARNING & DRIVE THE VISION**

**ACTION 4:
CONSISTENT OUTWARD MESSAGING
LOCAL, REGIONAL, (INTER)NATIONAL** **2.2.4**

**ACTION 5:
AUTHENTICALLY REFLECT COMMUNITIES
IN VOICE AND TEAM** **2.2.5**

NURTURING AUDIENCE

vision while supporting partners across the culture and heritage sector to grow their capacity, share learning, and unlock collaborative value. It will focus on enabling cross-sector collaboration, amplifying local voices, and opening new opportunities. To ensure momentum is sustained, we will establish practical, long-term mechanisms to support ongoing communication and coordination across the network to our audiences and our markets.

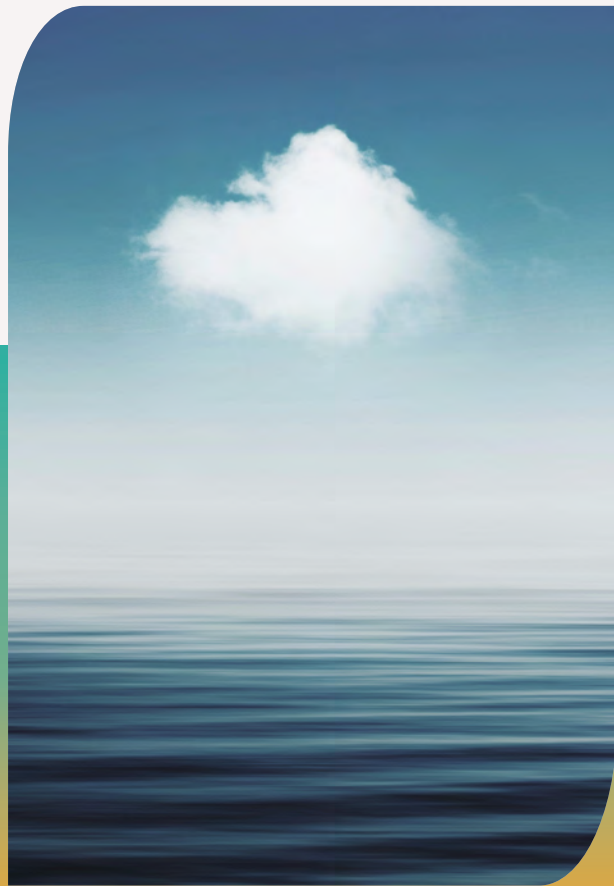
ACTION 4: To deliver an effective destination brand, we need to tell people about it – and work with our neighbours to activate our offer. With limited space to accommodate visitors, we recognise the need to focus on developing day visits before targeting longer stays. By creating new itineraries that reach beyond our borders, packaging offers across our cultural, natural, and entertainment assets, and structuring our storytelling around shared themes and place-based experiences, we can create a compelling and coordinated message. This approach will build visibility across local, regional, and national networks – supporting a joined-up offer that is ready for devolution and the future of Castle Point.

ACTION 5: To make the most of our opportunities and offer we know the richness of our communities needs to be reflected in our team and voice and we will ensure all of our communities have the opportunity to explore Fresh Horizons - through features, focused themes and celebratory events we want everyone in Castle Point to have the opportunity tell our story.

**A sector that is
open for business
with a clear
direction of travel**



2.3 LIFELONG PATHWAYS



ACTION 1: Foundational to growing the local creative economy is to support people developing the skills, confidence, and networks needed to deliver high-quality cultural activity. We will design a borough-wide skills programme for creative producers, artists, freelancers, and destination makers that connects to our existing offers from creative and destination professionals. This will include structured programmes, peer learning, and mentoring opportunities to support youth seeking routes into creative careers, those already active in the sector and those entering it for the first time growing a confident, connected local talent base.

ACTION 2: To ensure Castle Point thrives we will connect local practitioners to national and international expertise. Building on the legacy of the Estuary Festival, the momentum of Arts Council England Place Partnership investment, and the community leadership at HOFs, we will create a cultural constellation – a network of people, places and practices across all of our towns that allow ideas, experience and opportunity to flow in and out of the borough. Through visiting expert programmes, regional exchanges and embedded residencies, we will expose local practitioners to models of best practice and future-facing thinking – ensuring Castle Point doesn't just catch up with change but helps shape it.

ACTION 3: Castle Point's cultural and destination sector is driven by our community. However, many initiatives rely on short-term funding, leaving project leads to work in isolation and constantly search for continuation resources – limiting scale,

2.3.1 ACTION 1:
DELIVER A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
SKILLS PROGRAMME

2.3.2 ACTION 2:
WELCOME (INTER) NATIONAL BEST PRACTICE
TO ROOT SKILLS LOCALLY

2.3.3 ACTION 3:
NURTURE SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS THAT
EMPOWER CREATIVITY AT ALL AGES

ACTION 4:
INVEST IN CAREER PATHWAYS FOR ARTISTS
AND CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS **2.3.4**

ACTION 5:
CONNECT CREATIVE BUSINESS AND THE
DESTINATION ECOLOGY BEYOND THE BOROUGH **2.3.5**

LIFELONG PATHWAYS

ambition, and long-term impact. To stop creative activity from stalling at the end of a funding cycle, we will support projects to become more resilient and self-sustaining supporting income diversification and reducing dependency on overstretched individuals by clear succession planning. By supporting those involved to build their own teams and audiences we will empower people of all ages to lead, shape, and grow creative work that is rooted in place and inclusive.

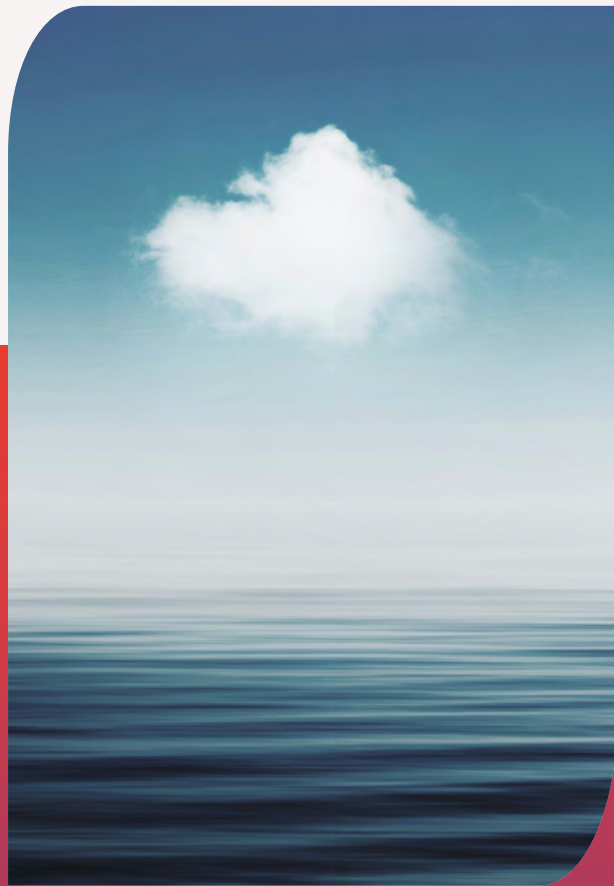
ACTION 4: Accessing the creative sector can be difficult particularly for those without existing networks, formal training, or role models. Working with existing needs-provision like We Rise, Earniversity, Active Essex as well as our education providers we will invest in making creative careers visible, viable, and inclusive. This includes apprenticeships, supporting freelance careers, export pathways and helping emerging artists and producers to navigate funding, production, and professional growth. We will directly monitor and address the gender pay gap, simplify both early access to and return-to-work routes into creative work and build a stronger, more diverse cultural workforce.

ACTION 5: Through cross-sector partnerships, regional advocacy, and joint promotion, we'll shape a cultural offer that supports day visits, events, and experiences that celebrate our unique estuarine identity. As part of our preparation for devolution and future models of place-based investment, we will position Castle Point as a connected, creative destination ready to host, share, and grow.

An empowered
sector ready
to maximise
opportunities



2.4 GREAT SPACES



ACTION 1: Castle Point's town centres face both challenge and opportunity. The decline of traditional retail has shifted how people connect, consume, and gather. The Towns Fund recognised this early, naming creative industries and accessible green and cultural infrastructure as key drivers for the future of town centres. Castle Point is rich in both cultural heritage and natural assets, but these are often operating in silos, rather than as part of a connected and empowered sector. To support greater connection we will identify and open up the venues and spaces in the control of the local authority for cultural use, ensuring they are accessible, supported, and welcoming. This means removing physical, bureaucratic, and financial barriers so that local creatives and communities can shape, not just use, the places around them.

ACTION 2: Culture cannot thrive in isolation. Building on the model emerging at Hadleigh Old Fire Station (HOF5), we will accelerate the development of independent creative spaces in each town – forming a cultural constellation across Castle Point. These satellites will anchor and target activity year-round, offering spaces to make, meet and share. Together, they will support the delivery of Place Partnership outcomes and foster long-term creative infrastructure that lives beyond individual projects or festivals.

ACTION 3: From beaches to woodlands, estuary views to urban parks, Castle Point's environmental assets are significant. But their potential as cultural and economic drivers and connectors remains underutilised. We will work with community groups, creatives, active travel and heritage

**2.4.1 ACTION 1:
OPEN DOORS
& REMOVE BARRIERS**

**2.4.2 ACTION 2:
NURTURE A CREATIVE CONSTELLATION WITH NEW
SATELLITE SPACES AT THE HEART OF TOWNS**

**2.4.3 ACTION 3:
SUPPORT AND AMPLIFY EXISTING GREEN, BLUE
& URBAN SPACES TO DRIVE OPPORTUNITY**

**ACTION 4:
CREATE CLEAR JOURNEYS INTO
& BETWEEN GREAT SPACES** **2.4.4**

**ACTION 5:
MAKE SPACES ACCESSIBLE
& SOCIAL** **2.4.5**

GREAT SPACES

partners to amplify activity in these spaces, ensuring they contribute to both wellbeing and economic opportunity. Nature and neighbourhoods will become platforms for performance, storytelling, skill-building and seasonal celebration, maximising existing assets like the Paddocks Community Centre for creative use alongside physical activity to connect the Cultural Strategy and the Active Wellbeing Strategy.

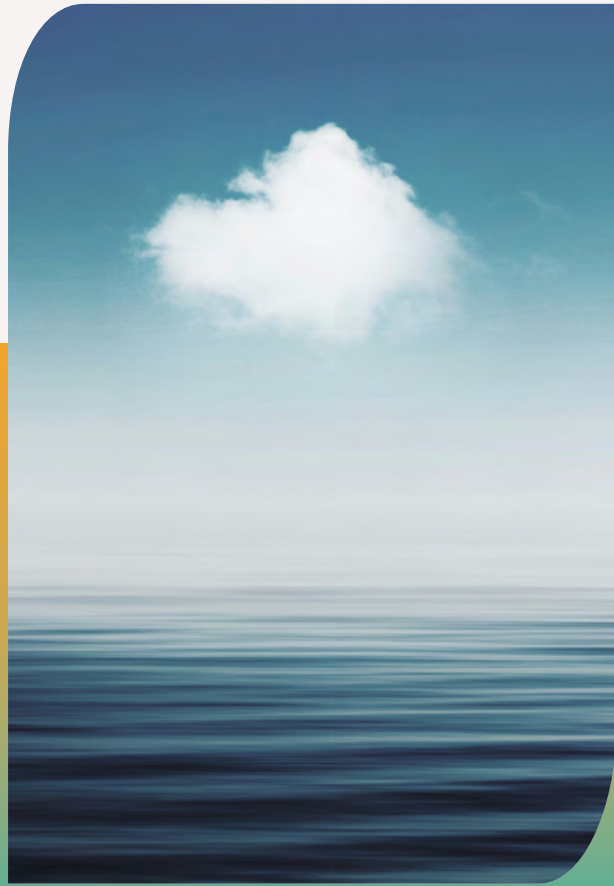
ACTION 4: Connectivity is essential – both physical and narrative. We will improve signposting and visibility of cultural spaces, supporting trails and thematic links between venues to ensure that the wider public can understand and access the borough's full creative offer. Whether walking from murals to markets or moving between library events and estuary experiences, people need to see the thread that ties it all together.

ACTION 5: Cultural infrastructure must be inclusive by design. From neurodiverse-friendly programming to physical access improvements and support for D/deaf and disabled artists and audiences, we will invest in making all creative spaces more welcoming. This includes both council-led spaces and those in the hands of independent operators. We will be guided by the social model of disability, recognising that it is not individual impairments that limit participation, but the physical, social, and structural barriers present in the environment. Access must be embedded from the outset of projects and programmes – not retrofitted. That means consulting with disabled people, funding inclusive design, and prioritising flexibility in how spaces are used and experienced.

**Places for
artists &
audiences
to thrive**



2.5 LASTING PRACTICE



ACTION 1: Culture has a vital role to play in addressing the climate crisis, fostering community wellbeing, and supporting the long-term resilience of Castle Point. This is recognised by major funders, local strategies, and the borough's own potential to lead in reimagining how culture and environment work together. Culture and heritage are key drivers for both economic growth and environmental awareness. We will better connect cultural activity with the destination offer – showcasing Castle Point's green and blue assets through storytelling, itineraries, and programming that celebrates landscape, heritage, and local identity. This includes aligning with the Active Wellbeing Strategy and supporting local events that highlight walking routes, estuary access, and place-based visitor experiences that promote stay local and a low-carbon destination economy.

ACTION 2: Castle Point's culture sector will be supported to take part in local, regional and national networks focused on environmental responsibility. We will strengthen links with partners across planning, conservation, transport, and sustainability – ensuring culture is recognised as a key collaborator in climate strategy. This includes activating more active travel infrastructure and rights of way to connect towns through creative programming, building nature-connectedness and community pride in local environments.

ACTION 3: Sustainable culture means reducing impact and increasing awareness – but also improving working conditions and resilience. We will promote sustainable practices across funding,

**2.5.1 ACTION 1:
CONNECT CULTURE AND HERITAGE
TO THE DESTINATION OFFER**

**2.5.2 ACTION 2:
LEAD CULTURE INTO NETWORKS FOR
COLLABORATION IN AND ON THE ENVIRONMENT**

**2.5.3 ACTION 3:
DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE
PRACTICES**

**ACTION 4:
INVEST IN
SUSTAINABLE EVENTS** 2.5.4

**ACTION 5:
SUPPORT CULTURE TO INSPIRE, INFORM
& DRIVE POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION** 2.5.5

LASTING PRACTICE

production, design and touring, ensuring environmental considerations are embedded into every stage of cultural work. This includes signposting to tools like Julie's Bicycle and the Theatre Green Book, sharing data on energy and material use, and aligning Castle Point's creative economy with funders' environmental standards and capital investment schemes (such as energy-efficient retrofits).

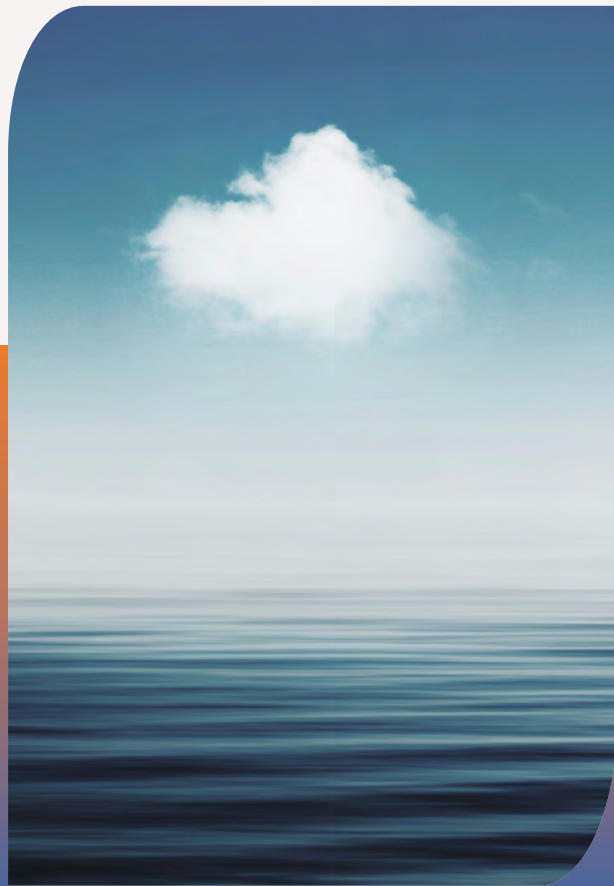
ACTION 4: We will develop a new approach to events that values quality over scale and sustainability over spectacle. That means designing events that are low-impact, locally rooted, and operationally realistic – while also being emotionally nourishing and financially viable. We will embed circular economy principles, low-carbon production values, and community involvement into the planning process. Events should leave a positive legacy, not just a footprint or a press pack.

ACTION 5: Culture changes hearts and minds and we will support artists and organisations to shape new narratives around climate, care, and community, actively cementing Castle Point's community voices and agency in the new unitary authority. Through accessible commissions, cross-sector collaboration and public programmes that reach beyond existing borders, we will empower culture to inspire new behaviours. This includes ensuring that creative voices and leadership reflect the borough's diversity, that the gender pay gap is addressed, that access is central, and that cross-sector collaboration shapes a Creative Wellbeing Charter aligned with neighbouring boroughs and services (public health, education, community, NHS). Our core goal will be to ensure culture contributes to shared objectives focused on inclusion, equity, sustainability, and care.

**A circular,
sustainable
cultural
economy**



2.6 MAKING WAY



ACTION 1: Castle Point is a borough of distinct towns, each with their own rich stories, strong community networks, and deep civic pride. As Castle Point moves through local government reorganisation, this sense of place will be a key asset in protecting each town's distinct identity, so it is not lost or homogenised within a larger new authority. While this pride is one of the borough's greatest assets, it remains fragmented. To unlock the full potential of our identity as a place – and to support long-term cultural development – we must invest in storytelling, connection, and community celebration that is rooted in the past but looking to the future. We will invest in platforms and partnerships that surface under-represented voices, bring hidden histories to light, and ensure local people are empowered to shape how the story of Castle Point is told. This means working across generations and neighbourhoods to support hospitality, artists, researchers, musicians, storytellers and residents to define their own narratives – creating new opportunities for pride, participation and understanding.

ACTION 2: Our heritage is housed in official archives, personal collections, local memories, and everyday places – but these remain disconnected. We will work with venues, archives, attractions and artists from the hyper-local to the international to bring together and animate Castle Point. This includes supporting new interpretation, co-curation with communities, and exploring the layers of meaning within our cultural and physical landscape helping more people access and feel ownership over the stories we share.

**2.6.1 ACTION 1:
UNCOVER, EMPOWER
& SHARE LOCAL STORIES**

**2.6.2 ACTION 2:
ACTIVATE THE COLLECTIONS
& HERITAGE - FORMAL AND INFORMAL**

**2.6.3 ACTION 3:
COORDINATED COMMUNITY ACTIVATION
& SECTOR CELEBRATION**

**ACTION 4:
CONTINUAL LEARNING
AND SHARING** **2.6.4**

**ACTION 5:
DRIVE LOCAL PRIDE THROUGH
COLLABORATION, EXPORT & TOUR** **2.6.5**

MAKING WAY

ACTION 3: To strengthen our cultural sector and sense of borough-wide identity, we will support joined-up cultural activity that enables towns to learn from each other, share audiences, and develop complementary offers. We will work with the Estuary Festival and Place Partnership investment in Hadleigh as a live sandbox – a chance to test ideas, gather learning, and grow confidence across the borough. Other towns will be invited into the process, with support to develop their own future investment cases informed by shared experience.

ACTION 4: A thriving place is one that learns – from success and from missteps, from within and beyond. We will embed a culture of continual learning, reflection and sharing across our cultural sector, supporting communities, practitioners and council teams to improve together. Whether through peer exchange, shared documentation, mentoring or participatory evaluation, we will ensure that everyone involved in shaping Castle Point's culture has the opportunity to grow, be recognised, and contribute to long-term progress.

ACTION 5: Pride in place grows when communities see their work recognised – not just locally, but regionally, nationally and internationally. We will support opportunities for Castle Point's culture to travel: through artist exchanges, touring projects, and partnerships that connect our makers and stories to wider audiences. This is not about exporting a single identity, but about collaborating across difference – sharing local culture outward while also bringing influence and inspiration in. Touring and showcasing Castle Point's creativity will drive visibility, unlock investment, and deepen the confidence of our communities.

**A shared,
active &
championed
identity**



FRESH HORIZONS

CASTLE POINT
CULTURAL STRATEGY



DESTINATION
PROFILES

**SECTION
3**



HADLEIGH & BENFLEET

Benfleet and Hadleigh form the two main gateway points into Castle Point's estuary landscape, each offering distinct access routes and experiences for visitors. Benfleet serves as the primary transport hub, particularly for those arriving by train. With its direct rail connections and proximity to walking and cycling routes, it functions as a natural arrival point for accessing the borough's wider offer.

Just a short distance away, Hadleigh provides a green, landscape-led introduction to the area. Anchored by key sites such as Hadleigh Castle, Hadleigh Park, and the Olympic mountain bike trail, it offers a mix of outdoor activity, heritage exploration, and opportunities for nature-based recreation. The area is also home to Salvation Army's Hadleigh Farm, adding a community and educational dimension to the visitor experience.

From here, people can explore Canvey Island's seafront, the marshes and wetlands of the estuary, and the borough's rich mix of cultural and environmental assets. As part of a strategic vision, both locations can be developed to support destination branding, improved signage, curated visitor trails, and seasonal events, helping to enhance the visibility and coherence of Castle Point as a cultural and environmental destination.

Key Features

- Benfleet Railway Station (c2c line) with direct links to London.
- Proximity to walking and cycling routes heading towards Hadleigh Castle, Hadleigh Park, and Canvey Island.
- Benfleet Creek and marshes - underutilised for water-based or environmental activities.
- Hadleigh Castle ruins with panoramic estuary views, tied to historical and artistic narratives (e.g. J.M.W. Turner).
- Hadleigh Park - a multifaceted landscape offering trails, adventure play, Olympic mountain biking, and a social enterprise farm.
- Natural gateways to RSPB West Canvey Marsh and Canvey Wick through interconnected trails and paths.
- Rich Anglo-Saxon, Viking, and medieval history, including ties to early Christian communities.

Current Audiences

- Commuters, day-trippers, and walkers accessing the coast and countryside.
- Visitors using Benfleet as a transit point or heading directly to Castle Point attractions.
- Families and outdoor leisure seekers entering through Hadleigh Park for active recreation.

Strategic Opportunities

- Establish Benfleet and Hadleigh as branded "Estuary Welcome Zones", offering curated journeys into Castle Point's cultural and natural environments.
- Consider a Visitor Hub or Estuary Pavilion at Benfleet, complemented by interpretive signage and storytelling nodes in Hadleigh.
- Activate both areas with seasonal events, public art, and Estuary Encounters pop-ups, particularly around the station forecourt and Hadleigh's arrival points.
- Emphasise nature and creative trails as a cultural asset, linking Benfleet Creek to Hadleigh Castle and into the estuary's protected wetlands.
- Use public realm and wayfinding improvements to reinforce identity and orientation between the two gateways and the wider destination landscape.

Challenges

- Benfleet currently lacks publicised identity as a visitor destination.
- Wayfinding and orientation to Castle Point's key assets remain inconsistent and underdeveloped.
- Hadleigh's arrival experience could benefit from more cohesive signage, welcoming infrastructure, and a stronger cultural presence.



HADLEIGH CASTLE

Hadleigh Castle & Park is one of Castle Point's most recognisable and visually striking heritage assets. Positioned on elevated ground overlooking the Thames Estuary, the castle offers a unique combination of historic significance, landscape value, and panoramic views. Built in the 13th century and later immortalised by the painter J.M.W. Turner, the castle now stands as a romantic ruin that continues to draw photographers, walkers, and history enthusiasts.

As a heritage site, it holds strong potential to be developed further as a focal point for as a cultural destination, acting as both a destination in its own right and a strategic orientation point within the wider estuary landscape. Its open setting and dramatic location provide an ideal platform for interpretation, outdoor events, and creative programming linked to local history, arts, and environmental themes.

While the site benefits from high visibility and natural appeal, visitor infrastructure remains limited and access for visitors can be challenging without private transport. Addressing these gaps - through improved signage, storytelling tools, and coordinated promotion with nearby assets - would strengthen the castle's role as a flagship heritage attraction for Castle Point and the wider Thames Estuary area.

Key Features

- **Hadleigh Castle:** A dramatic 13th-century ruin set high above the estuary, evoking Romantic imagery and long histories of defence, decay, and imagination. A visual icon, captured by J.M.W. Turner, and still resonant today as a symbol of impermanence and power.
- **Hadleigh Park:** A major green space with cycling and walking trails, play areas, wildflower meadows, and the **Olympic mountain bike track**—a continuing draw for active leisure and sport.
- **Salvation Army's Hadleigh Farm:** A working social enterprise offering local produce, café facilities, community services, and informal learning environments, supporting inclusion and sustainable land use.
- **Access to Thames Estuary Path:** Linking walkers and cyclists to Benfleet, Canvey, and beyond through low-impact travel and discovery routes.
- **Ecological richness:** As part of the upper estuarine landscape, Hadleigh hosts habitats and biodiversity that connect visitors to RSPB West Canvey Marsh, Canvey Wick, and wider wetland and grassland conservation efforts.

Current Audiences

- **Nature and heritage walkers,** cyclists, and families seeking open-air leisure with meaningful cultural backdrops.
- **Educational groups and school trips,** including primary, secondary, and special education providers making use of the site's layered history and natural assets.
- **Regional day-trippers** drawn by the visual appeal, history, and well-maintained park infrastructure.
- **Faith-based and socially engaged communities** connected through the Salvation Army's outreach and inclusion work.

Strategic Opportunities

- **Position Hadleigh Castle as Castle Point's hero image and narrative anchor** - a visual emblem used across marketing materials, branding, and digital engagement.
- Develop **immersive storytelling tools**, such as soundwalks, site-responsive music, and drone-assisted landscape experiences that narrate the human and ecological story of the estuary edge.
- **Host site-specific artist residencies**, community festivals, and cultural interventions that respond to landscape, memory, and identity - amplifying local voices and intergenerational knowledge.
- Integrate **Hadleigh Park's active zones** with wider cultural trails, creating a "Health & Heritage Loop" that links physical activity with mindful engagement and environmental learning.
- Enhance **wayfinding and orientation** to reinforce Hadleigh's dual role as a destination and connector—linking Benfleet, the Castle, the Park, and the estuary path network.
- Promote Hadleigh as a **model for landscape-based placemaking**, blending conservation, recreation, and cultural narrative in a single, accessible area.

Challenges

- **Limited public transport** access and minimal on-site visitor services at Hadleigh Castle.
- Fragmented storytelling and branding - Hadleigh's individual assets are often promoted in isolation rather than as a **cohesive visitor experience**.
- **Lack of coordinated signage and interpretive infrastructure**, which weakens its visibility as a major estuary gateway.



CANVEY SEAFRONT

Canvey Seafront and the surrounding area is one of Castle Point's most prominent public-facing destinations, offering a blend of traditional seaside amenities, estuary views, and community identity. Stretching along the island's southern edge, the seafront features a mix of family attractions - including amusement arcades, tidal pools, cafés, and a long promenade - that reflect its historic role as a leisure destination for visitors from Essex and East London. Nearby natural assets provide further green and blue spaces for relaxation, community events and wellbeing including Canvey Lake, RSPB West Canvey Marsh & Canvey Wick Nature Reserve.

The area retains strong appeal among local residents and day-trippers, offering accessible and affordable recreation close to home. Iconic landmarks like the Labworth Café, a rare example of Modernist seaside architecture, and the coastal murals along the seawall, add cultural depth and potential for place-based storytelling.

Canvey Seafront is well-positioned to support the borough's wider ambitions, particularly in relation to community engagement, intergenerational activity, and environmental education. Its proximity to key natural assets creates opportunities to connect coastal leisure with nature-based experiences, especially through improved trail infrastructure and signage. While the seafront is well-used, there is scope to enhance its offer by investing in public realm improvements, seasonal programming, and better integration with creative and environmental initiatives. Strengthening its identity as part of a wider estuary story - rather than a stand-alone leisure site - would support efforts to reposition Canvey as a distinctive cultural and ecological Estuary destination.

Key Features

- Historic amusements and arcades that reflect Canvey's popularity as a mid-20th-century working-class seaside destination, offering a nostalgic family day out along with accessible beach areas, with seasonal use for paddling, kite-flying, and events, appealing to families with children and older visitors seeking easy access and flat terrain.
- The Labworth Café, a Grade II-listed Modernist structure designed by Ove Arup, one of the only remaining examples of Modernist seaside architecture in the UK.
- Extensive promenade walks, tidal pools, and seawall murals that provide open access to the waterfront and support informal recreation, heritage interpretation, and community art and access to and long-distance walking routes such as the England Coast Path and Thames Estuary Trail.
- RSPB West Canvey Marsh & Canvey Wick Nature Reserve, nationally recognised Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), known for post-industrial biodiversity and rare invertebrate populations suitable for creative exploration and celebration.
- Thames Estuary views, offering a powerful visual and physical connection to the wider Estuary landscape
- Cultural and musical history, with connections to punk, reggae, ska, and DIY music scenes that are under-recognised but potentially rich sources for cultural programming in performance as new investment comes to The Paddocks.

Current Audiences

- Local residents along with families and intergenerational groups from South Essex and East London looking for low-cost, seaside leisure with activities for children and older adults alike.
- Casual visitors and day-trippers, often arriving by car, drawn by the mix of arcades, cafés, and accessible nature.
- Birdwatchers and wildlife enthusiasts, particularly at Canvey Wick and West Canvey Marsh.

- School groups and informal learning organisations engaging with local history and environmental education. Car clubs, bikers, and nostalgic leisure seekers attracted by the retro aesthetic and open parking areas along the promenade.

Strategic Opportunities

- Deliver micro-festivals, pop-up performances, and community events that reflect and celebrate the island's layered identity - including its working-class heritage, Caribbean and traveller communities, punk and music scenes, and intergenerational creativity, activating existing assets like The Paddocks.
- Leverage nature reserves and green spaces to build a sustainable eco-culture offer that links Canvey Wick, West Canvey Marsh, and Thames Estuary walking routes through trails, guided experiences, and environmental education.
- Improve wayfinding, branding, and digital infrastructure, making it easier for new audiences to understand and navigate the island's cultural and natural offer.
- Position Canvey as part of a broader Estuary-wide cultural network via thematic trails and joint promotion. Explore partnerships with the RSPB, Natural England, Arts Council England, and others to deliver cross-sectoral programming connecting art, climate awareness, and health and well-being.

Challenges

- Ongoing perception of Canvey as isolated which may deter first-time or more culturally inclined visitors with limited public transport options, and a lack of coordinated transport links between the seafront, nature reserves, and key cultural sites.
- A fragmented offer, with limited signage, inconsistent marketing, and limited physical infrastructure that requires investment to meet expectations of modern day visitors and support larger-scale events or increased footfall.
- Potential over-reliance on car-based access, which presents challenges for sustainability, inclusivity, and long-term planning.

FRESH HORIZONS

CASTLE POINT
CULTURAL STRATEGY



EXEMPLAR
CASE STUDIES

**SECTION
4**



FRESH HORIZONS

INSPIRATION



CASE STUDIES



To assist Castle Point in activating the Cultural Strategy these case studies are provided as examples of good practice from organisations nationally and internationally, with signposting to toolkits and organisations for peer learning and support.

1.

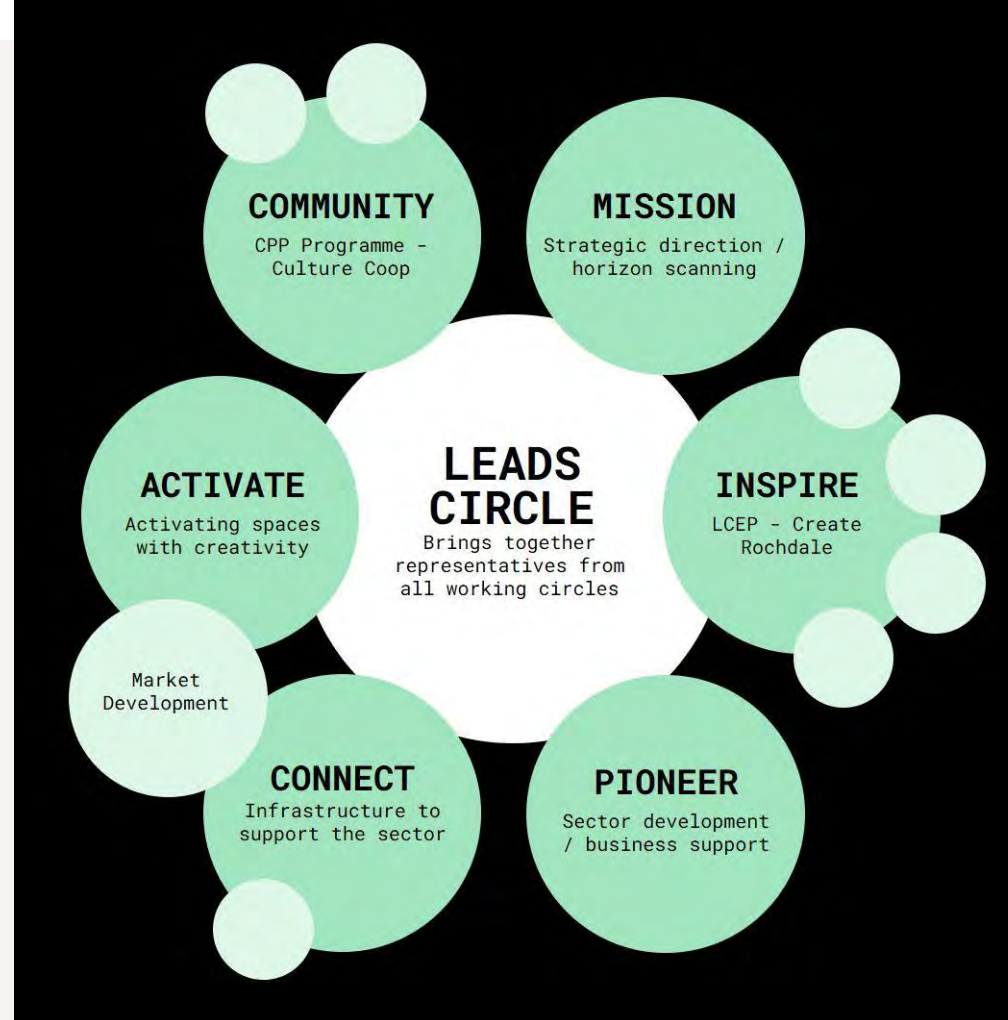
ROCHDALE CULTURAL COMPACT

Rochdale's Cultural Compact is an innovative initiative designed to strengthen and elevate the cultural sector across the borough. The Compact, which is currently administered by the RDA Culture & Placemaking team, brings together diverse stakeholders to harness the power of culture in driving local development.

Initially formed as part of the Cultural Development Fund 2 (CDF2) programme, our Compact is a key force in transforming Rochdale into a centre of cultural activity and creativity.

Background to Cultural Compacts

Cultural Compacts were launched in 2019 by the Arts Council and DCMS as a means to enhance the cultural assets of cities and towns across the UK. These partnerships aim to bridge the cultural sector with local authorities and other industries, encouraging cross-sector collaboration and fostering cultural and economic growth.



Rochdale's Cultural Compact is one of these vital partnerships, continually evolving to meet the dynamic needs of its community.

Key Principles

The Compact is rooted in inclusivity and sociocracy, ensuring that all voices are heard and that decision-making is collaborative. This structure allows the Compact to remain agile and responsive, adapting to the changing cultural landscape in Rochdale while keeping the community at its heart.

Working Circles

The Compact is organised into several working circles, each with a distinct focus on advancing cultural development in Rochdale:

- **Community Circle:** Engages with residents to ensure cultural activities are accessible, meaningful, and inclusive. The Culture
- **Mission Circle:** Guides the strategic direction of the Compact, drawing insights from the work of the other circles.
- **Coop leads on this activity.**
- **Activate Circle:** Focuses on energising public spaces through cutting-edge cultural programming and events.
- **Connect Circle:** Builds essential infrastructure to link the cultural sector with broader opportunities, fostering collaboration and growth.
- **Pioneer Circle:** Dedicated to cultivating skills and nurturing talent within Rochdale's creative and cultural sectors.
- **Inspire Circle** Champions engagement with children and young people, sparking early interest in culture and creativity. Create Rochdale leads on this activity.



2.

ROCHDALE CREATES PLACE BRAND

Background

Supported by Arts Council England's Cultural Development Fund, Rochdale Development Agency are working on a creative focused initiative to unlock local economic growth and productivity, enhance the attractiveness of Rochdale as a place to live, work, visit, and invest, and also strengthen local leadership, partnerships, and capability. To be truly transformational, they needed branding that paints a vision for the future; something distinctive and ambitious enough to challenge existing perceptions and inspire a sense of ownership among residents.

The Brief

Rochdale Borough Council engaged **Better** brand agency to help reposition Rochdale's story, placing culture and creativity at the heart of its place-making strategy. The goal was to create an ecosystem of collaboration and unity among organisations and individuals, with the brand serving as a rallying point — a collective movement that unites, inspires, and empowers. The brand needed to showcase the stories of Rochdale's creative and cultural communities, and demonstrate their value to help attract investment and create a better living environment.

“THE ONLY RULE IS THAT THEY ARE ALWAYS POSITIVE”

The Solution

Following a phase of on-the-ground immersion and stakeholder engagement, they shaped a Brand Strategy, Manifesto and distinct verbal identity that harnesses the energy, ambition and heritage of local communities.

By placing creativity at the heart of Rochdale visually they brought the story to life with a modern, ambitious and deliberately edgy typeface developed with Fatype and a directional monogram that unlocked a system built around angles and intersections.

Expressing opportunity and aspiration

Rochdale Creates boldly harnesses and proudly champions creativity as a catalyst for change. Whether it be as a borough, as a community or as individuals. Everything they do is done to shift perceptions; to transform; to grow.

Rochdale developed a Big Idea that's dynamic and flexible. It can be used on its own, as part of a campaign or as a central internal thought. As a two-part statement:

Rochdale Creates always remains, with the second element able to be switched and replaced.

They can be very top-level about Rochdale in general, or they can be very specific to an event or creative discipline.

The only rule is that they are always positive. They should play a key role in shifting perceptions about Rochdale and expressing an aspiration of what Rochdale can be.

3.

BRITISH COUNCIL CREATIVE PRODUCER TRAINING

Launched in 2019 the British Council worked in partnership with local arts organisations across multiple cities in its international network to devise and deliver Creative Producers, a creative industries capacity building and skills programme designed to equip new, mid-career and established cultural leaders with the tools, networks and confidence to realise ambitious, collaborative, cross-sector projects in their own places and across their regions by connecting and learning with peers to create new networks of supply chains, skills, and partnerships.

The programme was created in response to a growing recognition of the need for skilled cultural producers who could act as mediators between artists, institutions, civic bodies, and international partners. Critically the programme realised that creative economies are not built within the boundaries of place but by crossing and connecting them.



Strategic and Practical

The programme blends practical training with strategic development, rooted in a needs and place-based approach. It supports participants in developing their own projects while learning to navigate the complexities of international working, funding landscapes, creative risk, and sector leadership. Throughout, the emphasis remains on building capacity, supporting innovation, and fostering meaningful regional and UK connections. To date it has trained over 200 creative producers connecting them to new markets and peers, and helped establish new businesses that have raised over £4.2m in turnover.

Developing Skills Beyond the Arts

Participants explore key producer competencies across ten course modules:

- Project scoping, constraints and ideation
- Mapping local cultural sectors and supply chains
- Storytelling, stakeholder engagement, and value proposition design
- Fundraising, budgeting and financial narratives
- Environmental responsibility and safeguarding
- Project management, delivery, evaluation and reflection
- Risk assessment and RAMS as creative tools
- Creative team leadership and business development

4.

WALKING PUBLICS/ WALKING ARTISTS



Walking Publics/Walking Artists is a UK-wide programme led by the University of Glasgow, designed to explore how creative walking practices can support public wellbeing, social cohesion, and place-making. The project investigates how walking – combined with artistic interventions such as storytelling, sound art, and participatory mapping – can foster inclusive and meaningful connections between people and their environments.

The initiative engaged artists, researchers, and community groups to co-create walking-based cultural activities that responded to local heritage, environmental themes, and the everyday experiences of diverse participants. WalkCreate contributed to new research and creative models for using walking as a platform for cultural engagement and civic dialogue, with a strong focus on accessibility and community empowerment. This multi-faceted value proposition diversified funding streams and positive impacts.

Programme Development

Walking Publics/Walking Artists was structured as a collaborative model combining research, creative practice, and community engagement.

The programme worked with artists and cultural practitioners to develop walking projects ('recipes') which addressed barriers to walking.

These projects integrated creative elements such as sound design, oral history collection, and sensory mapping to engage participants in new ways of experiencing and connecting place.

The programme was supported by a series of workshops, artist residencies, and community labs, enabling both creative and practical skills development.

Walking Publics/Walking Artists produced toolkits and guidance to help communities, local authorities, and cultural organisations apply creative walking methods in placemaking/ wellbeing strategies.

Audience Engagement

The project prioritised partnerships with communities traditionally underrepresented in cultural and heritage activities, including older adults, young people, and migrant communities. Engagement was facilitated through a co-creation model, giving communities ownership of project design and delivery. WalkCreate's flexible format enabled activities to take place in both urban and rural settings.

Marketing

Walking Publics/Walking Artists' outputs and insights were promoted via academic networks, community platforms, and national arts and heritage bodies. Public-facing engagement included online exhibitions, community showcases, and social media campaigns sharing stories from participants and artists. The University of Glasgow and partner organisations leveraged the programme to position creative walking as a key tool in wellbeing, environmental, and cultural policy conversations.

<https://walkcreate.gla.ac.uk/the-walkbook>

5.

PROFORMA RESIDENCY TOOLKIT

In 2024, artist-led organisation PROFORMA set out to research artist residencies and develop an artist residency toolkit. The work developed insights and understanding of the connecting and activating power of residencies from the perspectives of both artists and organisations. A common thread was the need for residencies to be envisaged as reciprocal rather than transactional and the best experiences were when each party felt they were learning something new together - bringing communities from within a place and beyond it together around a shared purpose and new potential.

Since 2021 PROFORMA have led Longsight Community Art Space, a gallery and community venue initiated by the organisation that resides in a property rented from a housing association in inner-city Manchester. It is supported by Arts Council England through project grants along with a mixture of local neighbourhood and housing association funding.



Working to embed itself within the locale, the space initially took the form of a two-year programme that included co-creating events responding to local needs and interests, including initiatives such as urban greening. This took place alongside a period of research and development to establish an independent organisation that could explore participatory models for company structures.

By 2024, running of the venue had been handed over to local people and residents via the creation of a Community Interest Company, which continues to programme and facilitate workshops in the space.

Through this close work with artists and community, PROFORMA has become increasingly

aware of the barriers that prevent creative practitioners from accessing key opportunities like residencies. A range of factors, from disability to finances and caring duties, mean it's not always possible for artists to take a sustained period away from day-to-day life. Aiming to address these barriers PROFORMA produced the Residency Toolkit for both artists and organisations to deliver more equitable opportunities.

Providing information and guidance that is insightful, practical, and actionable the toolkit includes advice, tips, checklists and clickable links to important information and templates enabling small organisation and independent artists to ensure their offer is fit for purpose, equitable and sustainable.

<https://bit.ly/proformaresidency>



"My World, My City, My Neighbourhood" was a flagship participatory project within the Leeds 2023 cultural programme, aiming to decentralise cultural activity and empower Leeds' communities to take ownership of cultural production within their own neighbourhoods. The project was rooted in cultural democracy, enabling people across all 33 wards to shape, create, and deliver locally relevant cultural projects.

By embedding Community Curators into each ward, Leeds 2023 worked collaboratively with residents to co-produce activities that reflected hyperlocal identities, social histories, and creative ambitions. It provided mentoring, resources, and commissions to grassroots organisations and individuals, facilitating a programme that spanned everything from street art and festivals to oral history projects and outdoor performances.

The initiative sought to foster social cohesion, civic pride, and community resilience, while ensuring that those furthest from cultural participation were actively engaged and celebrated as cultural producers in their own right. Through this project, Leeds 2023 empowered neighbourhoods to reimagine cultural participation beyond traditional venues.

Programme development

Working with dedicated Community Curators embedded in each of Leeds' wards, the project provided mentoring and commissioning support to facilitate hyperlocal cultural projects. Leeds 2023 acted as both facilitator and funder, working collaboratively with residents to co-design activities tailored to local needs.

This model enabled highly responsive programming and promoted cultural democracy city-wide. Leeds 2023 provided training, mentoring, and commissioning support to empower communities to lead on creative delivery. This enabled a flexible commissioning model where hyperlocal projects responded directly to the character and aspirations of each neighbourhood.

6.

MY WORLD MY CITY MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

Alongside grassroots initiatives, the programme connected with city-wide cultural partners, ensuring that community-led activity was integrated into Leeds 2023's wider strategy and legacy goals.

Audience engagement

The project built trust through deep community engagement, prioritising relational working and long-term partnerships. Community Curators fostered relationships with residents, faith groups, and grassroots organisations, facilitating inclusive engagement strategies that reached new audiences across Leeds.

Marketing

The marketing approach blended city-wide brand campaigns for Leeds 2023 with hyperlocal promotion of each project via community radio, local newsletters, social media takeovers, and storytelling initiatives. The programme leveraged the Leeds 2023 platform to amplify the voice of local creatives and community leaders