

IPSWICH

CULTURE & HERITAGE STRATEGY 2026–36

PART 1. TRAVEL BLOG & VISION

IPSWICH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Suffolk County Council

IPSWICH CENTRAL

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

NEW WOLSEY THEATRE

IPSWICH 2036: A CULTURE & HERITAGE STRATEGY

What is a Culture and Heritage strategy?

Culture & Heritage relate to the places, spaces, stories and activities that make life in Ipswich feel like it belongs to you and you belong to it. A strategy is simply a shared plan that a wide range of people can sign up to. So, this Culture and Heritage Strategy is a plan that sets out what Ipswich wants and needs its cultural life to look like, how everyone will work together to get there, and what progress and success will look like.

Why does Ipswich need one?

Brilliant things are already happening in Ipswich. The problem is that much of this happens separately and often has an uneven impact across the town. A strategy connects it all up. When education providers, artists, cultural organisations, businesses, community groups, and local government all pull in the same direction, each of them gets further than they would alone.

Why now?

Ipswich is changing fast. Big decisions are coming about regeneration, investment and how the town approaches its future. If culture has a plan, it has a seat at the table when those decisions get made. Without one, culture gets left out of the conversation it should be shaping.

What difference will it make?

This strategy sets five ambitions for the next ten years. They are long-term goals because real change takes longer than any single project, funding round or person in charge. The ambitions give everyone the same destination to aim for even when they are travelling by different routes or at different speeds.

How does it help me?

However you connect to Ipswich, this strategy is intended as a tool you can use. If you run an organisation or public body, it helps you show how your work can intersect with culture and heritage, which makes partnerships and funding easier to secure. If you are an artist or a volunteer, it underpins what you are already doing and how you can be better supported. If you are a young person, it commits the town to building its future with you, and by you. You do not need permission to be part of this. Everyone is invited. If your ambition for Ipswich matches these ambitions, you are already part of the picture.

Imagine what we can achieve together...

A TRAVEL BLOGGER VISITS IPSWICH IN 2036...



If you cut through the geology of Ipswich, you'd find endless layers of characterful history. Rebellious, diverse, entrepreneurial. Histories formed from the bustling intersection between water and land, between urban and rural, from the Capital to the coast, every walk of life, and every age of human development, leaving its own mark on this unique location.

Long before England properly understood itself, people were arriving in Ipswich by river and by sea. Traders, pilgrims, migrants, merchants, dissenters and dreamers came here with hopes and intentions and left behind memories and stories. Tudor ambition flows through medieval lanes. Victorian industry rubs shoulders with fragments of Saxon street plans still visible beneath the modern town. Ipswich was a global port before Britain was a nation, an international crossing point before globalisation had a name.

A local tour guide joked that Ipswich, "fell out with Henry VIII 500 years ago and has been an outsider ever since." Like all good jokes, it contained more than a grain of truth. This was never a town entirely comfortable with polish or performance. Even at moments of extraordinary ambition, Ipswich struggled to tell its own story with confidence.

History has a habit of arriving unevenly in towns like this. Through the centuries, economic shocks, changing high streets, political fragmentation and underpowered storytelling left previous ambitions half-realised or hidden. By the early 2020s, Ipswich had become a place rich in assets but poor in connections. A place where some communities felt culture was happening around them, not with them. The waterfront, town centre and neighbourhoods seemed psychologically further apart than google maps showed. Empty shops were symbols of decline rather than possibility.

"Never underestimate the power of a community formed in the stratas of time. It may not yet be perfect, but they are well on the way to making this a reality."



It seemed Ipswich voluntarily stepped down from its own pedestal. It simply lost its mojo.

So, in 2025, when Ipswich announced its ambition to bid for City of Culture, you'd be forgiven for believing the town had lost its way. Online naysayers were out in force. They projected a picture of a physically disjointed and socially fractured town, plagued by divisions and silos across communities. Perhaps beneath the barbed comments, many did feel overlooked by the systems at play? After all, education and economic opportunities had been historically suppressed and aspiration in day-to-day life was generationally low.

But dig a little deeper and there were tantalising clues that Ipswich was capable of far more than it believed. Public investment in culture had remained strong over many decades, resulting in a foundational infrastructure that was ready to be activated when the conditions were right. Over time, parks and public institutions had been built with a confidence that suggested culture and wellbeing belonged to the whole town. Ipswich was fostering a fiercely independent creative spirit that would bring about a renaissance of some force. That force gathered momentum in 2026 when the town shook off its inhibitions, put on its dancing shoes, wrote a new strategy, applied to be City of Culture. And now, in 2036, Ipswich is a confident, creative and outward-looking place where culture and heritage are a celebrated and expected part of everyday life...

Walking through the medieval lanes and Victorian streets of the town, culture and creativity spill out of every corner contributing directly to how people experience life in Ipswich. Culture and Creativity shape the town's public spaces, celebrating communities, creating opportunities, and supporting wellbeing. Ipswich residents report a pride in living here. It can certainly be said with some confidence, that as a vibrant place to live, work and visit, it's now collectively punching well above its weight. There are pop up projects and creatives everywhere. Old shops are quickly reused as gallery spaces or community hubs. Wellbeing projects happen in theatre foyers, and young entrepreneurs are basing their creative businesses here. You can't miss the families in the museums and the parks, making the most of

these incredible free services on their doorstep.

As a tourist, you can feel the vibrancy and enjoy the spoils of this regeneration. But there's a powerful collective behind this movement and the change they set out to make was clear, rooted in data and driven by people who believe:

- Communities should have access to opportunity and culture on their terms
- A town's culture must be shaped with and by its young people
- Communities and institutions should be visibly connected and collaborative
- Culture and heritage should sit at the heart of placemaking and planning
- There must be a healthy ecosystem between creative individuals and organisations

Never underestimate the power of a community formed across the strata of time. Powered by youth voice and social action, an independent creative sector that has burst its banks, and a set of institutions willing to listen and enable, today, Ipswich is reborn as a cultural powerhouse.



You can definitely claim that Ipswich is a town that seriously got its mojo back.

1. THE STARTING POINT: IT'S 2026...

Ipswich is in the midst of a significant period of transition and opportunity. Major regeneration activity, renewed cultural investment, local government reorganisation, and the City of Culture process together create an opportunity to rethink the role culture and heritage play within the future identity, confidence and development of the town. The cultural infrastructure exceeds that of many places of comparable scale, and includes nationally recognised organisations, major heritage assets, community led activity, and a significant and visible grassroots, freelance and creative economy.

A momentum is visible across the town. The transformation of the waterfront has reshaped how residents and visitors experience it. DanceEast has built a national reputation whilst deepening its local roots. The University of Suffolk is one of the top 50 universities nationwide (Complete University Guide 2027). Investment is flowing into the town's museums. Heritage activity is thriving, and the story of Ipswich Town Football Club continues to celebrate the importance of culture and bind generations together. Alongside a national reputation for creating high-quality theatre, the New Wolsey Theatre is carving out new ways of intersecting with health & social care . Innovative youth initiatives such as the #iwill movement are opening routes into creativity and leadership. Brighten the Corners have exploded on to the scene with three new grass roots music venues and a plethora of youth-led creative learning opportunities. Gecko Theatre are on the national curriculum and tour the world, taking Ipswich's name with them. Spill Festival continues to bring innovative contemporary performance right into the heart of the town. Organisations such as Red Rose Chain, Eastern Angles and Suffolk Libraries are providing accessible, high quality locally informed work. And all of this is resulting in burgeoning connections, networks and projects across sectors that rarely used to share a table.

Working together these assets power a growing visitor economy, drawing people into the town for culture, heritage and events, and generating



spend that supports jobs and businesses well beyond the cultural sector itself.

The task now is to make sure everyone builds a shared momentum. Strategy consultation and data analysis show that the benefits of this activity are still felt unevenly, with persistent challenges around participation, aspiration, visibility, connectivity, retention and self-belief.

These challenges represent the gap between the cultural life Ipswich has built and the opportunity that a strong focus on culture and heritage could unlock for every resident. This strategy responds by connecting the town's considerable strengths to a more inclusive and ambitious cultural vision, so that what is already working can reach further. The work is already happening. This strategy will help Ipswich do more of it, and amplify it, together.

2. HEADLINE VISION

VISION

Ipswich will be a confident, creative and outward-looking town where culture and heritage help shape everyday life, opportunity, belonging and civic identity.

By 2036, culture and heritage in Ipswich will be embedded across the life of the town: in local neighbourhoods, public spaces, schools, high streets, workplaces and community hubs. Creativity will be recognised as a vital part of daily life, wellbeing, economic opportunity and belonging.

This strategy presents an Ipswich where communities access culture on their own terms, where young people help shape the decisions that affect them, and where the achievements of institutions and independent creatives are intertwined. It imagines a town where heritage is actively connected to contemporary identity, diversity and future ambition.



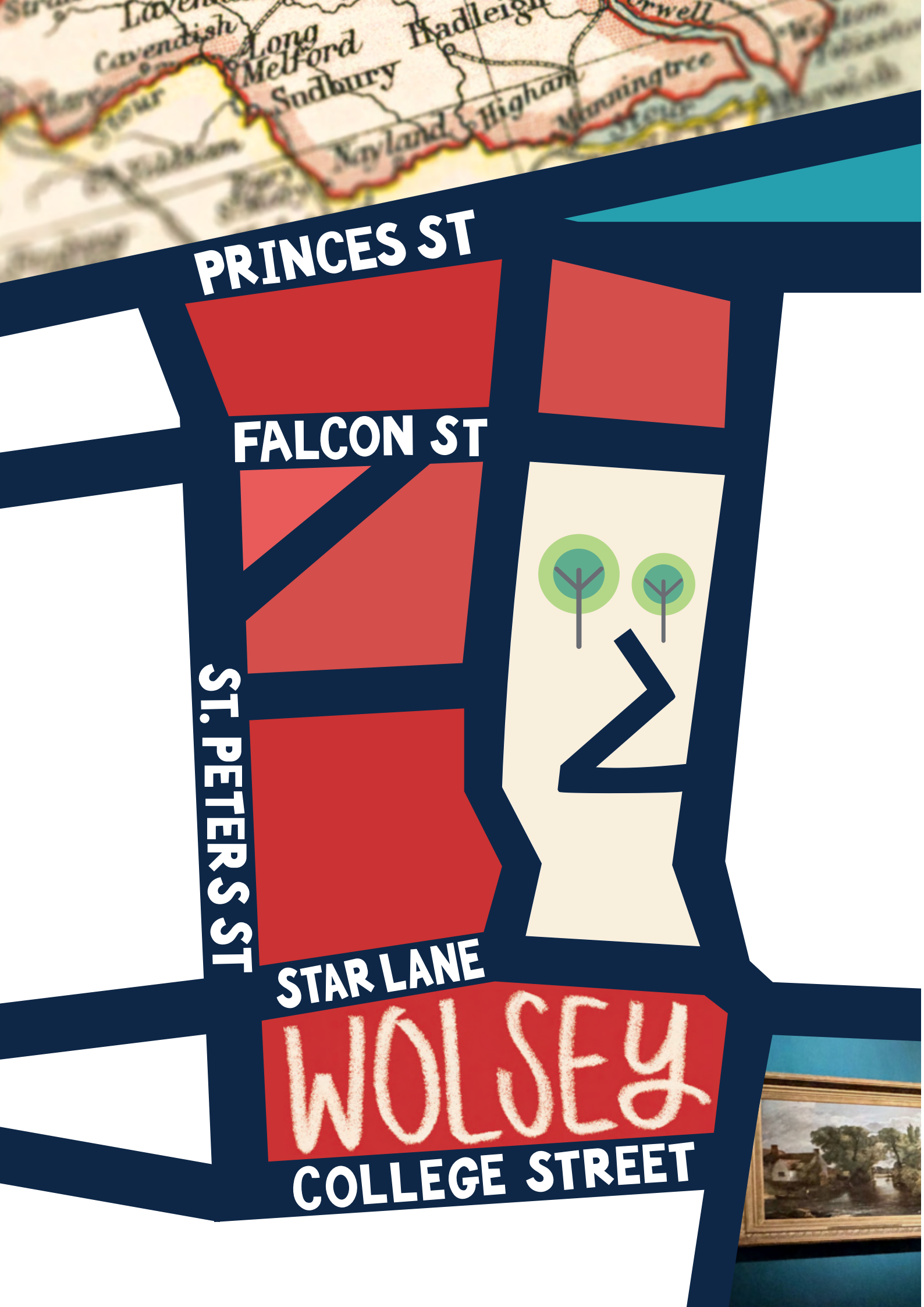


We believe Ipswich's greatest strength lies of course in its incredible cultural assets, but more so in its people: its young population, its independent spirit, its grassroots creativity, its diverse communities and its growing confidence in itself. The long-term success of the town will depend on strengthening the connections between all people, place, creativity and opportunity, ensuring culture contributes meaningfully to local pride, social cohesion and quality of life.

THIS STRATEGY IS BUILT ROUND FIVE AMBITIONS:

1. Communities have access to opportunity and culture on their own terms
2. The cultural future of the town is shaped with and by young people
3. Communities, institutions and decision-makers are connected and collaborative
4. Culture and heritage shape placemaking and planning
5. Creative individuals, freelancers and organisations thrive within a healthy ecology




Cavendish
Long Melford
Sudbury
Hadleigh
Nayland
Higham
Manningtree
PRINCES ST
FALCON ST
ST. PETERS ST
STAR LANE
WOLSEY
COLLEGE STREET



GROUNDED IN EVIDENCE

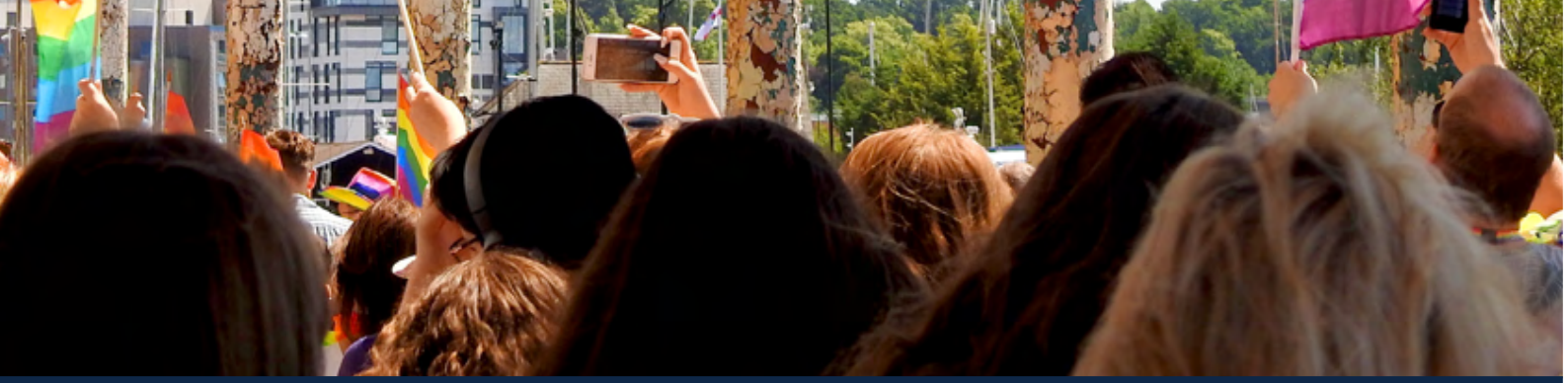
These ambitions are rooted in a consistent pattern emerging across consultation, demographic analysis, investment & participation data and asset mapping.

Ipswich benefits from significant cultural investment, with Arts Council England funding standing at £31.80 per head in 2025/26. That is well above the national average and driven mainly by National Portfolio investment (core funding into organisations) rather than National Lottery Project Grants awards (project cost funding for organisations and individuals).

Other regional hubs show a similar picture. Norwich receives roughly twice the cultural spend per head for a broadly comparable population, and Cambridge is comparable too. It's important to understand that NPO investment reflects organisations carrying responsibilities well beyond the town boundary, across Suffolk, the region and nationally. Add to that a decade of real terms reductions in core funding and we begin to see that those headline figures understate the scale of pressure on that infrastructure.

So, whilst in-person arts engagement is broadly in line with national levels, the wider evidence points to uneven patterns of access, ownership and visibility across different communities, neighbourhoods and forms of cultural participation.





WIDER SOCIETAL DATA SETS SHOW:

Ipswich has higher levels of deprivation than both the East of England and England overall

21.69% of residents aged 16+ have no qualifications, compared with 18.11% regionally and 18.08% nationally

Higher education participation is 30.23%, compared with 39.83% regionally and 42.23% nationally

31.62% of children aged 0–19 live in relative low-income families after housing costs

The creative and cultural economy has headroom for growth, with creative and cultural employment at 2.57% of all employment and creative/cultural GVA at 2.9% of total GVA

The five strategic ambitions therefore respond directly to this tension: Existing infrastructure is evidence that long term investment works, as without it, cultural engagement levels would likely be far lower, but the pressure of delivery needs to be shared across a wider stakeholder base in order to strengthen the relationship between culture, opportunity, belonging, aspiration and quality of life.



IPSWICH

CULTURE & HERITAGE STRATEGY 2026–36

PART 2. A THEORY OF CHANGE

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3. A THEORY OF CHANGE (TOC)

A Theory of Change sets out the strategic logic underpinning this strategy and aims to build a shared understanding of the conditions required to deliver long-term systemic change.

It identifies the relationship between the town's current opportunities & challenges, the evidence emerging through consultation and research, the strategic responses required, and the long-term social, cultural and economic outcomes the strategy seeks to effect.

The ToC should be understood as the "north star" for the strategy and any future delivery structures responsible for implementing it. Whilst specific programmes, partnerships and funding mechanisms may evolve over time, the Theory of Change establishes the core assumptions, intended direction of travel and evaluation logic that will guide decision-making across the ten-year period.

THE TOC IS ROOTED IN BOTH QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE. THIS INCLUDES:

- socio-economic and demographic data
- cultural participation and investment data
- health and wellbeing indicators
- consultation findings from residents, freelancers, organisations and stakeholders



The Strategic Ambitions outlined in Section 4 emerge directly from this evidence base and should be understood as the delivery framework through which the Theory of Change is realised.

Aligned with a Theory of Change methodology, each Strategic Ambition is structured across three developmental phases over the lifetime of the strategy.

- **Funded R&D: Designing Inputs & Delivering Short-Term Outputs**
- **Discovery: Delivering Medium-Term Outcomes**
- **Progression: Delivering Long-Term Outcomes**

Rather than fixed periods of time, these phases are stages of maturity which will be evidenced through evaluation and longitudinal learning.





“...focuses on deepening understanding, strengthening partnerships, testing approaches and designing the infrastructure required for long-term success.”



FUNDED R&D:

This phase focuses on deepening understanding, strengthening partnerships, testing approaches and designing the infrastructure required for long-term success. It recognises that some strategic challenges identified through the consultation require further experimentation, relationship-building and evidence gathering before sustainable delivery models can emerge.



DISCOVERY:

This phase sees programmes and partnerships becoming more established, delivery becoming more coordinated and evaluation data beginning to demonstrate measurable progress against strategic ambitions. During this stage, funding models, governance structures and delivery mechanisms become more stable and visible.



PROGRESSION:

This phase represents the point at which strategic ambitions are embedded within the civic, cultural and economic life of Ipswich. Longitudinal evidence and evaluation data demonstrate sustained impact, enabling increased confidence, investment and future ambition beyond the lifetime of the strategy itself.



AN IMPORTANT NOTE ON THEORY OF CHANGE

The Theory of Change presented within this strategy operates primarily at a systems level. It establishes the long-term conditions for change, the strategic outcomes sought and the evidence informing those ambitions. It is not intended at this stage to prescribe detailed programmes, staffing structures or operational activity across every ambition.

Instead, the early R&D phase attached to each Strategic Ambition will support the development of linked operational Theories of Change for specific programmes, partnerships and interventions.

THE PROCESS WILL ESTABLISH:

- baseline data and benchmarking
- delivery partnerships and governance
- resource and funding requirements
- detailed activities and outputs
- evaluation methodologies
- and measurable indicators linked to short, medium and long-term outcomes

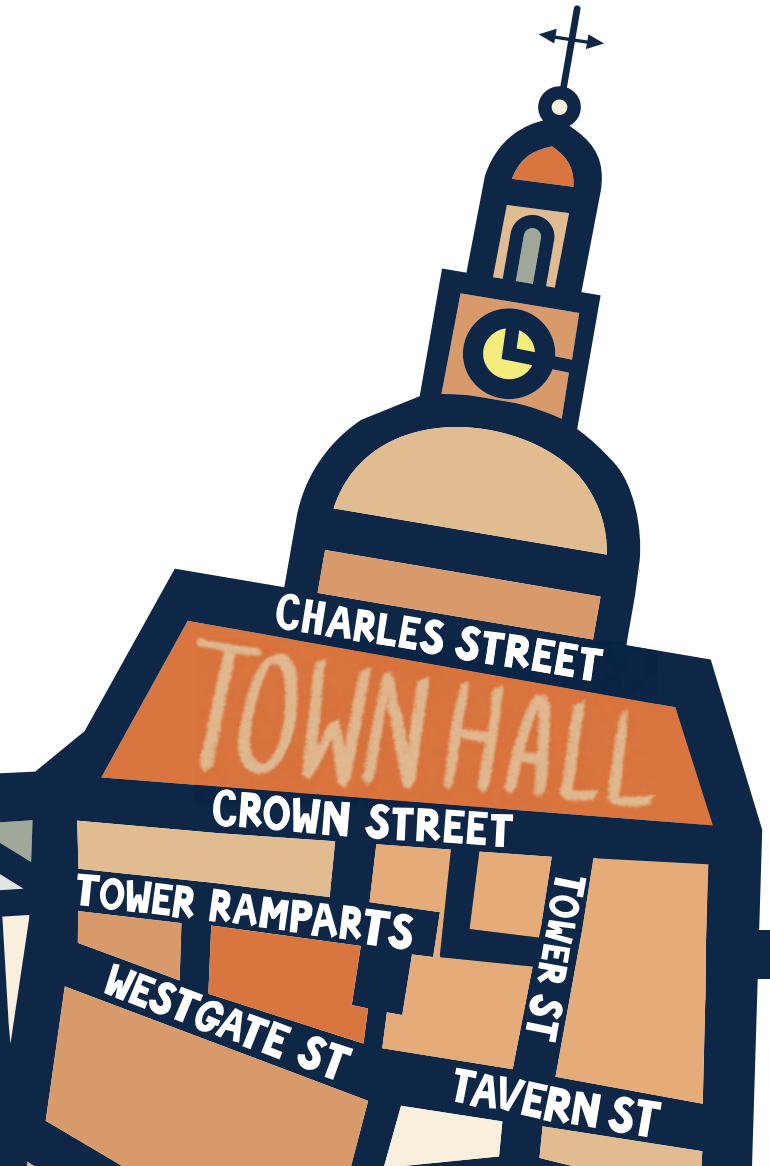


This recognises that some of the challenges identified through consultation require further testing, co-design and evidence gathering before sustainable delivery models can emerge.

SYSTEMS LEVEL THEORY OF CHANGE

As already noted, the ambition of this strategy directly draws on a strong evidence base including an open access online survey, baseline demographic and participation data, funding and investment data, existing strategic priorities across stakeholders, and conversations and listening activities with communities, cultural organisations, partners, funders and creative freelancers.

Together, this evidence base has enabled the design of a systems level theory of change for Ipswich.



CURRENT CHALLENGE 1

Socio-economic inequality and rising cost-of-living pressures are limiting access to opportunity, participation and wellbeing

EMERGING EVIDENCE

Higher deprivation levels than regional and national comparators, higher child poverty, lower household income after housing costs, increased cost-of-living vulnerability

LONG-TERM CHANGE SOUGHT

Culture and heritage become visible contributors to quality of life, affordability, wellbeing and opportunity across all communities

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Neighbourhood-based cultural infrastructure, free and low-cost participation models, embedded community partnerships and targeted investment approaches



CURRENT CHALLENGE 2

Lower educational attainment and a lack of progression pathways are limiting aspiration, retention and access to creative careers

EMERGING EVIDENCE

Higher proportion of residents with no qualifications, lower higher education participation, consultation identified low visibility of creative pathways and talent retention concerns

LONG-TERM CHANGE SOUGHT

More young people able to access, shape and sustain creative futures within Ipswich

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Joined-up youth pathways, creative skills development, progression routes, apprenticeships, talent retention and embedded youth leadership



CURRENT CHALLENGE 3

High levels of loneliness, anxiety and limited social connection contributing to fragmented communities and low belonging across generations

EMERGING EVIDENCE

Loneliness and anxiety indicators above national comparators, lower levels of neighbourhood belonging and civic participation, consultation identified disconnected communities despite strong grassroots activity

LONG-TERM CHANGE SOUGHT

Stronger social connection, community cohesion and locally-rooted cultural leadership

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Community-led cultural networks, trusted local connectors, participatory programming and hyper-local cultural activity



CURRENT CHALLENGE 4

Creative and cultural assets are not yet fully connected into wider economic growth, regeneration and placemaking

EMERGING EVIDENCE

Underused meanwhile spaces and heritage assets identified through consultation, low visibility of culture in the public realm, comparatively low creative business density and creative employment

LONG-TERM CHANGE SOUGHT

Culture and heritage embedded within regeneration, economic development and civic planning

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Creative placemaking, meanwhile activation, public realm commissioning, heritage activation and stronger cross-sector planning partnerships

CURRENT CHALLENGE 5

Ipswich has cultural infrastructure and investment, but lacks a consistently confident internal and external narrative about itself

EMERGING EVIDENCE

Recurring consultation themes around negative perceptions of Ipswich despite strong cultural infrastructure and participation, fragmented external identity, limited visibility of success stories

LONG-TERM CHANGE SOUGHT

A more confident, ambitious and connected civic identity for Ipswich

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Coordinated storytelling, civic cultural leadership, collaborative place narrative and stronger cultural ecology partnerships



CURRENT CHALLENGE 6

The creative and cultural economy is less developed relative to comparator places and lacks visible freelance infrastructure

EMERGING EVIDENCE

Lower levels of creative businesses, creative employment and creative GVA than Cambridge and Norwich, freelancers identified fragility, isolation and lack of infrastructure through consultation

LONG-TERM CHANGE SOUGHT

A stronger, more resilient and visible creative ecology capable of supporting long-term economic and cultural growth

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Freelance support infrastructure, sector development, networks, affordable workspace, commissioning opportunities and business support pathways



The strategy establishes a framework of research, discovery and progression through which Ipswich can coordinate long-term learning, investment, partnership and delivery over the next decade.

Each strategic area requires deeper evidence gathering and participation before designing and delivering programme activity. This comprehensive research programme needs to explore key thematics emerging from consultations including:

- **Defining best practice freelance and creative workforce conditions**
- **Understanding the current and potential retention rates of creative talent**
- **Future proofing and designing sustainable creative career pathways**
- **Exploring the barriers to cultural participation in hyper local contexts**
- **Understanding the perceptions of Ipswich among young people currently *not* connected to known programmes**
- **Gathering evidence on the relationship between culture, loneliness and community wellbeing**
- **Partnering with, adding value, and connecting to existing activity that is already addressing these themes**

Each **Strategic Ambition** is set out below with a proposed strategic intent, the context, existing and required evidence base, long term outcomes and existing delivery mechanisms that could be used for future programmes.



IPSWICH

CULTURE & HERITAGE STRATEGY 2026–36

PART 3. THE FIVE AMBITIONS

IPSWICH BOROUGH COUNCIL

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4. STRATEGIC AMBITIONS

AMBITION 1

IMPROVED ACCESS TO CULTURE, CREATIVITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Statement of Intent

There will be increased access to cultural opportunity across Ipswich as a result of reducing barriers to participation, strengthening pathways into creativity and enabling cultural activity across everyday life.

How this Ambition came about:

Ipswich has a robust cultural infrastructure and has experienced sustained public investment in culture and heritage. In-person arts engagement is broadly aligned with national levels, and the town possesses nationally recognised organisations, substantial heritage assets and a growing grassroots cultural ecology.

At the same time, in the strategy consultation people consistently raised uneven experiences of access, participation and visibility across different communities and neighbourhoods. Participants frequently described culture as something that can feel concentrated within formal spaces or disconnected from everyday life.

The wider socio-economic context also plays a role. Ipswich experiences higher levels of deprivation, lower household income and higher child poverty rates than regional and national comparators. Consultation repeatedly identified affordability, confidence, transport, visibility and relevance as barriers to participation.

Alongside this, stakeholders identified a strong relationship between participation, wellbeing, belonging and social connection. The emotional response generated during consultation when loneliness data was discussed alongside participation patterns suggests that culture could play a wider civic role within the town than is currently understood or measured.

The role of Ambition 1 is to stop access being about attendance at cultural activity and instead position access as the requirement to create the long-term conditions where culture and creativity are visible, achievable, and meaningful parts of everyday life.

CURRENT EVIDENCE BASE

CURRENT EVIDENCE INCLUDES:

- Arts Council England investment data
- Culture and Place participation data
- deprivation and child poverty indicators
- cost-of-living vulnerability data
- loneliness and wellbeing indicators
- consultation findings regarding barriers to participation
- existing grassroots and neighbourhood cultural activity
- IP-Switched Creative People and Places infrastructure

EVIDENCE GAPS AND EMERGING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

FURTHER EVIDENCE GATHERING IS REQUIRED IN RELATION TO:

- which communities experience the greatest barriers to participation
- the relationship between participation and wellbeing in Ipswich
- which forms of engagement generate repeat participation and habit formation
- the role of informal creativity within communities
- trusted spaces and existing informal cultural infrastructure
- affordability and transport barriers
- the relationship between neighbourhood-based activity and civic participation

LONG-TERM OUTCOME

More residents experience culture and creativity as visible, accessible and meaningful parts of everyday life regardless of geography, background, income or previous engagement.

AMBITION 1: THEORY OF CHANGE PATHWAY

FUNDED R&D PHASE
INPUTS + SHORT-TERM OUTPUTS

Focus areas:

- neighbourhood level cultural mapping
- community consultation and co-design
- identification of trusted community partners and spaces
- testing of hyper-local cultural models
- transport and affordability analysis
- participatory research around wellbeing and belonging

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES:

- improved understanding of participation barriers
- increased visibility of local cultural opportunities
- stronger relationships between institutions and communities
- increased confidence amongst first-time participants
- improved baseline data around participation and belonging

DISCOVERY PHASE
MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

Focus areas:

- stabilised neighbourhood delivery models
- embedded community partnerships
- increased informal and everyday cultural activity
- expanded use of libraries, schools and civic spaces
- cross-sector wellbeing partnerships

MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES:

- increased participation from underrepresented communities
- increased repeat participation
- increased neighbourhood-based activity
- stronger local visibility of cultural opportunities
- improved indicators relating to belonging and social connection



PROGRESSION PHASE
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Focus areas:

- embedded neighbourhood cultural infrastructure
- long-term civic participation pathways
- sustained cross-sector investment
- culture integrated into wider wellbeing and community strategies

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES:

- increased perceptions of access and belonging
- reduced barriers to participation
- stronger civic participation and neighbourhood connection
- culture recognised as part of Ipswich's social infrastructure

EMERGING INDICATORS OF CHANGE
POTENTIAL INDICATORS INCLUDE:

- participation rates across different communities and neighbourhoods
- repeat participation patterns
- participation amongst underrepresented groups
- use of community and civic spaces for cultural activity
- wellbeing and loneliness indicators
- perceptions of cultural accessibility and relevance
- number of neighbourhood-based cultural partnerships

AMBITION 2

A TOWN SHAPED WITH AND BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Statement of Intent

Young people will be influential within the cultural, social and economic future of Ipswich. They will be able to access meaningful pathways into creativity, leadership, employment, social action and decision-making.

To Note:

At the time of writing, the City of Culture bid was also in development. This bid had a strong Youth co-design element and therefore, to avoid overlap, it was agreed the two processes would complement and not duplicate each other. This strategy draws findings from stakeholders, data and surveys, but does not contain dedicated youth consultation. For that reason, the R&D phase is critical to meaningfully connect existing programmes, consultation outcomes, and youth-led insights before designing further interventions.

How this Ambition came about:

Ipswich is an unusually young town. Over a quarter of residents are under 19, sitting above the national average. At the same time, the town experiences lower higher education participation rates, lower qualification levels and persistent concerns around aspiration, progression and retention.

Throughout the consultation process, participants questioned whether young people could clearly see themselves reflected in the future story of Ipswich. Stakeholders identified a lack of visible pathways connecting participation in culture to employment, creative careers, leadership and long-term opportunity within the town.

The consultation identified a significant amount of existing work already happening across Ipswich through youth organisations, schools, libraries, social action networks, community groups and cultural organisations. But there was less recognition of contemporary cultural participation as it may be understood by younger people: gaming, digital culture and online creativity can be legitimate cultural engagement and offers routes in for young people the sector often does not see and nurture.

This ambition connects youth participation directly to wider questions of aspiration, belonging, retention, leadership, social action, skills development and creative economic growth.

CURRENT EVIDENCE BASE

CURRENT EVIDENCE INCLUDES:

- Ipswich demographic data
- educational attainment and progression data
- apprenticeship participation data
- consultation findings relating to aspiration, belonging and retention
- freelance ecology consultation findings
- existing youth and education infrastructure
- Youth Social Action and Town of Youth Social Action work
- Local Cultural Education Partnership development
- CPP / IP-Switched development work

EVIDENCE GAPS AND EMERGING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

FURTHER EVIDENCE GATHERING IS REQUIRED IN RELATION TO:

- why young people remain in or leave Ipswich
- awareness of creative career pathways
- barriers faced by underrepresented young people
- the relationship between culture, aspiration and belonging
- retention of freelance and creative talent
- youth representation within governance and civic leadership
- the role of trusted community spaces in cultural participation
- creative pathway mentoring and progression opportunities
- the scale and sustainability of the freelance creative ecology
- how culture connects to youth social action, wellbeing and community leadership

LONG-TERM OUTCOME

Young people play a visible and meaningful role in shaping Ipswich's cultural future and are able to access clear creative, cultural and professional pathways within the town, with stronger levels of belonging, representation, aspiration and long-term retention.

AMBITION 2: THEORY OF CHANGE PATHWAY

FUNDED R&D PHASE
INPUTS + SHORT-TERM OUTPUTS

Focus areas:

- youth consultation and co-design
- mapping of creative pathways and progression routes
- freelance and talent ecology research
- mentoring and careers activity
- creative skills partnerships
- mapping of trusted community infrastructure and youth spaces

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES:

- improved understanding of youth aspiration, belonging and retention
- increased visibility of creative pathways
- increased youth participation within governance and decision-making
- stronger connections between education and cultural infrastructure

DISCOVERY PHASE
MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

Focus areas:

- stabilised progression and mentoring models
- creative employment and apprenticeship pathways
- freelance development and peer networks
- talent retention initiatives
- youth social action partnerships
- neighbourhood-based creative leadership pilots

MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

- increased youth leadership and representation
- increased progression into creative education and employment
- increased awareness of creative opportunities
- stronger retention of young creatives and freelancers
- stronger youth participation within community life

PROGRESSION PHASE
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Focus areas:

- long-term talent retention
- creative economy growth
- sustainable progression infrastructure
- stronger civic participation and belonging
- long-term community leadership pipelines
- visible youth influence within civic decision-making

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES:

- increased retention of young people within the town
- measurable growth in creative employment pathways
- increased diversity within cultural leadership
- stronger representation of young voices within civic decision-making
- stronger sense of belonging and ownership amongst young people

EMERGING INDICATORS OF CHANGE
POTENTIAL INDICATORS INCLUDE:

- progression into creative education, training and employment
- apprenticeship positions and participation levels
- retention of young creatives and transition to becoming freelance/ small business owners
- participation in mentoring and leadership programmes
- perceptions of opportunity and belonging amongst young people
- participation in youth social action and community leadership activity
- diversity of young people participating within cultural governance and leadership structures.



AMBITION 3

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES AND CULTURAL BELONGING

Statement of Intent

There will be a strengthened belonging, trust and cohesion that emerges through community-rooted cultural activity, long-term relationship building and locally visible cultural leadership.

How this Ambition came about:

The consultation consistently highlighted the extent to which many communities across Ipswich already possess rich cultural lives, informal leadership structures and strong social networks. At the same time, many participants described feeling disconnected from formal cultural systems, decision-making and long-term societal change.

Stakeholders repeatedly emphasised the importance of trusted relationships, visible representation and familiar community environments in building participation and confidence. Consultation fatigue also emerged as a recurring theme, with communities often feeling asked to contribute views without seeing meaningful long-term ownership or change emerge from those conversations.

Alongside this, Ipswich demonstrates significantly higher loneliness and anxiety indicators than regional comparators, alongside lower levels of civic participation and neighbourhood belonging.

This ambition therefore positions cultural participation not simply as activity delivery, but as part of the social infrastructure required to strengthen belonging, local leadership and community connection across the town.

CURRENT EVIDENCE BASE

CURRENT EVIDENCE INCLUDES:

- loneliness and wellbeing indicators
- civic participation and neighbourhood belonging data
- consultation findings relating to trust and representation
- existing grassroots and neighbourhood leadership
- voluntary and faith sector infrastructure,
- emerging community connector proposals

EVIDENCE GAPS AND EMERGING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

FURTHER EVIDENCE GATHERING IS REQUIRED IN RELATION TO:

- the relationship between participation and loneliness reduction,
- existing informal leadership networks
- which communities currently feel excluded from cultural systems
- how trust and local ownership are built
- whether community connector models improve civic participation and wellbeing

LONG-TERM OUTCOME

Ipswich develops a distributed and connected network of community-rooted cultural leadership enabling more communities to shape and participate in the cultural future of the town.

AMBITION 3: THEORY OF CHANGE PATHWAY

FUNDED R&D PHASE
INPUTS + SHORT-TERM OUTPUTS

Focus areas:

- neighbourhood relationship-building
- mapping informal leadership and community infrastructure
- testing connector and champion models
- community co-design processes
- trusted space partnerships

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES:

- increased trust between institutions and communities
- increased visibility of local leadership
- stronger understanding of excluded communities and barriers
- improved community participation in planning and cultural activity



DISCOVERY PHASE
MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

Focus areas:

- stabilised community connector infrastructure
- embedded neighbourhood partnerships
- long-term community-led programming
- expanded hyper-local participation models

MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

- increased civic participation and neighbourhood belonging
- reduced isolation and disconnection
- stronger representation within cultural systems
- increased local ownership of cultural activity



PROGRESSION PHASE
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Focus areas:

- embedded community leadership infrastructure
- sustained neighbourhood participation
- culture integrated into wider community wellbeing approaches

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES:

- stronger community cohesion
- increased trust in civic and cultural systems
- measurable improvements in belonging and participation
- more communities shaping local cultural priorities

EMERGING INDICATORS OF CHANGE
POTENTIAL INDICATORS INCLUDE:

- loneliness and wellbeing indicators
- neighbourhood belonging measures
- civic participation indicators
- number of community-led projects and partnerships
- participation in co-design and governance activity
- representation of different communities within cultural activity

AMBITION 4

A TOWN CONNECTED THROUGH CULTURE, HERITAGE & PLACE

Statement of Intent

Culture, heritage and creativity will strengthen Ipswich's sense of identity, animate and reconnect places and spaces, and build stronger relationships between people, neighbourhoods and the town itself.

How this Ambition came about

Ipswich possesses a significant concentration of cultural, heritage and civic assets, including museums, archives, theatres, parks, the waterfront, historic buildings and a growing independent creative sector. Recent investment in heritage, culture and regeneration has created renewed momentum and opportunity across the town.

Consultation suggested that these assets feel disconnected from one another, both physically and narratively. Participants described a town with a rich and layered history but without a visible, shared or confident story about itself. Concerns were also repeatedly raised about underused and empty spaces, poor connectivity between the town centre and waterfront, inconsistent wayfinding and a lack of animation across key routes and public spaces.

It was repeatedly raised that many residents do not currently see themselves reflected within dominant cultural and heritage narratives. Across the consultation there is strong recognition that culture and heritage plays an important role in building confidence and strengthening belonging within the town. Ipswich was frequently described as a place that has historically "apologised for itself" despite possessing significant cultural assets, a distinctive identity and strategic importance within the wider region.

Happily, across stakeholders, a range of opportunities were identified to align cultural strategy with public realm improvements, local plan development, conservation work, meanwhile space activation, active travel, town centre regeneration and waterfront connectivity. The potential for culture and heritage led regeneration is evidently high.

The visitor economy is central to this opportunity. Ipswich's heritage assets, waterfront, museums and arts programme are economic assets as well as cultural ones.

CURRENT EVIDENCE BASE

They attract day visitors and overnight stays, extend dwell time in the town centre, and support hospitality, retail and the evening economy. Ipswich also sits within a wider regional visitor journey that takes in the Suffolk coast, Constable Country and historic East Anglia, and there is significant headroom to convert passing visitors into people who stop, stay and spend. Cultural tourism represents one of the clearest bridges between this strategy and the town's wider conversations about business growth, inward investment and economic development.

This ambition positions culture, heritage and creativity as tools for connection: connecting communities to place, connecting neighbourhoods to each other, connecting heritage to contemporary life and connecting cultural investment to wider civic and regeneration priorities.

CURRENT EVIDENCE INCLUDES:

- existing heritage and cultural asset mapping
- public realm and regeneration plans
- conservation area appraisals and heritage strategy development work
- local planning and town centre masterplan development work
- waterfront regeneration and connectivity planning
- heritage investment across museums, archives and historic assets
- evidence relating to neighbourhood identity and hyper-local community activity
- archives, storytelling and community heritage work
- evidence relating to public perception and civic pride
- Historic England and local heritage partnership activity



EVIDENCE GAPS AND EMERGING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

FURTHER EVIDENCE GATHERING IS REQUIRED IN RELATION TO:

- how different communities currently experience and perceive Ipswich
- barriers to participation in heritage and cultural activity
- perceptions of safety, belonging and connectivity across the town
- awareness of Ipswich's cultural and heritage assets
- the role of culture and heritage in strengthening civic pride and belonging
- opportunities for meanwhile use and creative activation of vacant spaces
- how neighbourhood identity and local storytelling can be better supported
- the relationship between public realm, wayfinding and cultural participation
- how underrepresented histories and contemporary stories can be more visible within the town's cultural narrative
- opportunities to connect cultural strategy more directly into planning, regeneration and local growth agendas



LONG-TERM OUTCOME

Ipswich is recognised as a culturally confident and connected town where heritage, creativity and public space strengthen civic identity, animate neighbourhoods, reconnect communities and support a stronger sense of belonging, visibility and pride across the town.

AMBITION 4: THEORY OF CHANGE PATHWAY

FUNDED R&D PHASE
INPUTS + SHORT-TERM OUTPUTS

Focus areas:

- mapping of underused assets and spaces
- artist and community consultation
- meanwhile use pilots
- mentoring and careers activity
- public realm testing and activation
- heritage storytelling development

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES:

- increased visibility of culture in public space
- stronger cross-sector planning relationships
- improved understanding of barriers and opportunities
- increased use of underutilised spaces

DISCOVERY PHASE
MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

Focus areas:

- embedded cultural activation programmes
- integrated planning, regeneration and cultural partnerships
- artist-led public realm and meanwhile-space interventions
- neighbourhood-based cultural and heritage activity

MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

- improved perceptions of the town centre and waterfront
- increased use of public and civic spaces
- stronger connections between neighbourhoods and cultural assets
- increased visibility of heritage within everyday life



PROGRESSION PHASE
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Focus areas:

- culture embedded within planning and regeneration systems
- sustained cultural visibility within public life
- long-term community stewardship and participation
- connected cultural and heritage infrastructure across neighbourhoods

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES:

- improved civic pride and place perception
- increased public use of cultural and heritage assets
- stronger place identity and external profile
- culture recognised as a core component of regeneration and placemaking



EMERGING INDICATORS OF CHANGE
POTENTIAL INDICATORS INCLUDE:

- use of meanwhile and civic spaces
- public perception indicators
- footfall and participation in activated areas
- number of artist-led regeneration partnerships
- public realm and heritage activation projects
- visibility of culture within planning and regeneration policy

AMBITION 5

A CONFIDENT AND CONNECTED CULTURAL ECOLOGY

Statement of Intent

Ipswich's cultural ecology will be strengthened through greater collaboration, connected leadership, improved visibility of opportunity and a more confident public narrative about the town's creative identity and future.

How this Ambition came about:

Ipswich possesses far greater cultural strength than its public narrative has often allowed it to recognise. The town benefits from nationally significant cultural organisations, increasing levels of investment, strong grassroots activity and a growing independent creative sector.

At the same time, consultation repeatedly identified a disconnect between this cultural strength and the wider perception of Ipswich as a place. Participants described a town rich in activity and creative potential, but often fragmented in visibility, coordination and confidence.

The evidence also suggests that Ipswich's wider creative economy remains comparatively less mature than nearby comparator places. While the town demonstrates strong institutional infrastructure and emerging freelance potential, the broader ecology of creative businesses, independent practitioners and smaller-scale organisations appears less mature and less connected than places such as Norwich and Cambridge.

National Lottery Project Grants analysis further suggests that Ipswich's funding ecology remains comparatively narrow and reliant on a smaller number of organisations and larger-scale projects. Compared with Norwich particularly, Ipswich demonstrates fewer smaller-scale applications and less distributed project funding activity across the wider ecology.

Alongside this, consultation identified strong appetite for collaboration, sector coordination, freelance support and shared civic storytelling.

This ambition therefore recognises the cultural ecology itself as part of Ipswich's civic infrastructure: not only delivering activity, but shaping confidence, aspiration and economic opportunity across the town.

CURRENT EVIDENCE BASE

CURRENT EVIDENCE INCLUDES:

- Arts Council England investment data
- National Lottery Project Grants analysis
- Culture and Place creative economy data
- consultation findings relating to civic confidence and fragmentation
- emerging freelance ecology mapping
- existing sector partnerships and networks

EVIDENCE GAPS AND EMERGING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

FURTHER EVIDENCE GATHERING IS REQUIRED IN RELATION TO:

- the scale and economic contribution of Ipswich's freelance creative workforce
- retention patterns amongst creative professionals
- barriers to creative business growth
- access to affordable workspace and commissioning opportunities
- perceptions of Ipswich internally and externally
- gaps in collaboration and shared infrastructure





LONG-TERM OUTCOME

Ipswich develops a confident, collaborative and economically sustainable cultural ecology where institutions, freelancers, grassroots organisations and creative businesses contribute visibly to civic pride, opportunity, regeneration and quality of life.



AMBITION 5: THEORY OF CHANGE PATHWAY

FUNDED R&D PHASE
INPUTS + SHORT-TERM OUTPUTS

Focus areas:

- freelance and creative economy mapping
- sector coordination infrastructure
- NLPG development support for grassroots organisations and independent creatives
- networking, mentoring and peer support structures
- creative workspace exploration
- coordinated advocacy and communications approaches

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES:

- increased collaboration across the sector
- improved visibility of opportunities and funding pathways
- increased confidence amongst grassroots and independent creatives
- clearer understanding of the scale and needs of the creative ecology

DISCOVERY PHASE
MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

Focus areas:

- stabilised sector networks and partnerships
- increased grassroots project funding activity
- creative business support and development
- coordinated civic storytelling and external profile development
- freelance retention pathways

MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

- increased successful National Lottery Project Grants applications from smaller organisations and first-time applicants
- increased total project funding secured by grassroots organisations and independent creatives
- growth in independent creative activity and creative businesses
- stronger collaboration across institutions and communities
- increased visibility of Ipswich's cultural identity externally

ST. PETER'S DOCK

PROGRESSION PHASE
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Focus areas:

- sustained creative economy growth
- embedded civic-cultural leadership
- long-term talent retention
- nationally recognised cultural ecology and place identity

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES:

- measurable growth in creative employment and creative businesses
- increased creative and cultural GVA
- stronger retention of freelancers and young creatives
- improved civic confidence and pride indicators
- increased inward investment connected to culture and creativity



EMERGING INDICATORS OF CHANGE
POTENTIAL INDICATORS INCLUDE:

- increase in successful NLPG applications from grassroots and first-time applicants
- increase in total NLPG investment secured by smaller organisations and independent creatives
- growth in creative employment and creative business density
- freelance retention rates
- number of collaborative partnerships and commissions
- availability of affordable creative workspace
- inward investment linked to culture and creativity
- civic pride and perception indicators



"...shaping confidence, aspiration and economic opportunity across the town."



IPSWICH

CULTURE & HERITAGE STRATEGY 2026–36

PART 4. DELIVERY & FUNDING PLAN

IPSWICH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Suffolk County Council

IPSWICH CENTRAL

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

NEW WOLSEY THEATRE

5. MEASURING CHANGE & SHARED LEARNING

Acknowledging how many key partners are involved in multiple projects and subsequent evaluations across the town, the strategy will not seek to build its own stand-alone evaluation programme. Rather it will adopt a shared impact and learning framework that speaks to the theory of change in this strategy and partners with other core programmes across the town.

ACROSS MULTIPLE PROGRAMMES, THIS FRAMEWORK WILL COMBINE:

- quantitative baseline data
- qualitative community insight
- longitudinal participation tracking
- visitor economy data
- and place-based indicators relating to pride, belonging, opportunity and visibility

The strategy recognises that many of the outcomes sought are long-term and systemic in nature and can only be achieved when approaching evaluation holistically and the acknowledging the range and scale of interventions happening in the town.

These include the Creative People and Places programme, the potential City of Culture bid, Local Education Partnership work and adjacent projects such as the Youth Social Justice movement, and Pride of Place investment.

ACROSS THESE PROGRAMMES, THE FRAMEWORK WILL AIM TO UNDERSTANDING SHIFTS IN:

- participation
- confidence
- aspiration
- relationships
- pride in place
- retention
- and belonging over time

INDICATIVE AREAS OF MEASUREMENT ACROSS PROGRAMMES MAY INCLUDE:

- cultural participation and engagement levels
- youth retention across education and employment providers
- perceptions of Ipswich as a place to live and build a future
- creative career progression and retention
- freelance creative workforce sustainability
- community participation and volunteering
- use of cultural and meanwhile spaces
- public perceptions of pride and belonging

The framework will be built during Year 1 of the strategy, informed by the R&D phases happening across the 5 ambitions. The framework will be built in partnership with the Creative People and Places team and University of Suffolk.

Ultimately, the resulting shared evidence framework will support the Cultural Compact to build a coordinated fundraising, advocacy and future investment strategy.



6. DELIVERY, INVESTMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE

THE NEED FOR A NEW DELIVERY MODEL

Cultural investment in Ipswich is a strategic asset and part of the town's infrastructure, to be connected, leveraged and built on. Yet throughout the consultation process, a consistent narrative emerged of an historic struggle with fragmentation, disconnected delivery structures, inconsistent partnership working and short-term strategic funding cycles that make sustained change difficult to achieve.

Organisations often work in isolation from one another, consultation activity is repeated, and opportunities for collaboration, shared learning and coordinated investment are missed. At the same time, significant social, cultural and heritage assets already exist across Ipswich, alongside growing momentum around regeneration, youth social action, heritage investment, creative industries and community leadership.

The challenge identified through the strategy process is one of infrastructure: how Ipswich develops the connective systems, partnerships, leadership structures and investment models capable of supporting long-term cultural development over the next decade. The delivery model set out below therefore, is focused on building the conditions required for long-term systems change.

THE CULTURAL COMPACT INFRASTRUCTURE

At the centre of this approach is the Cultural Compact.

The Cultural Compact won't look like a traditional steering group or representative body. Rather it will provide a multi layered infrastructure through which the strategy can be coordinated, distributed, stewarded and iterated over time.

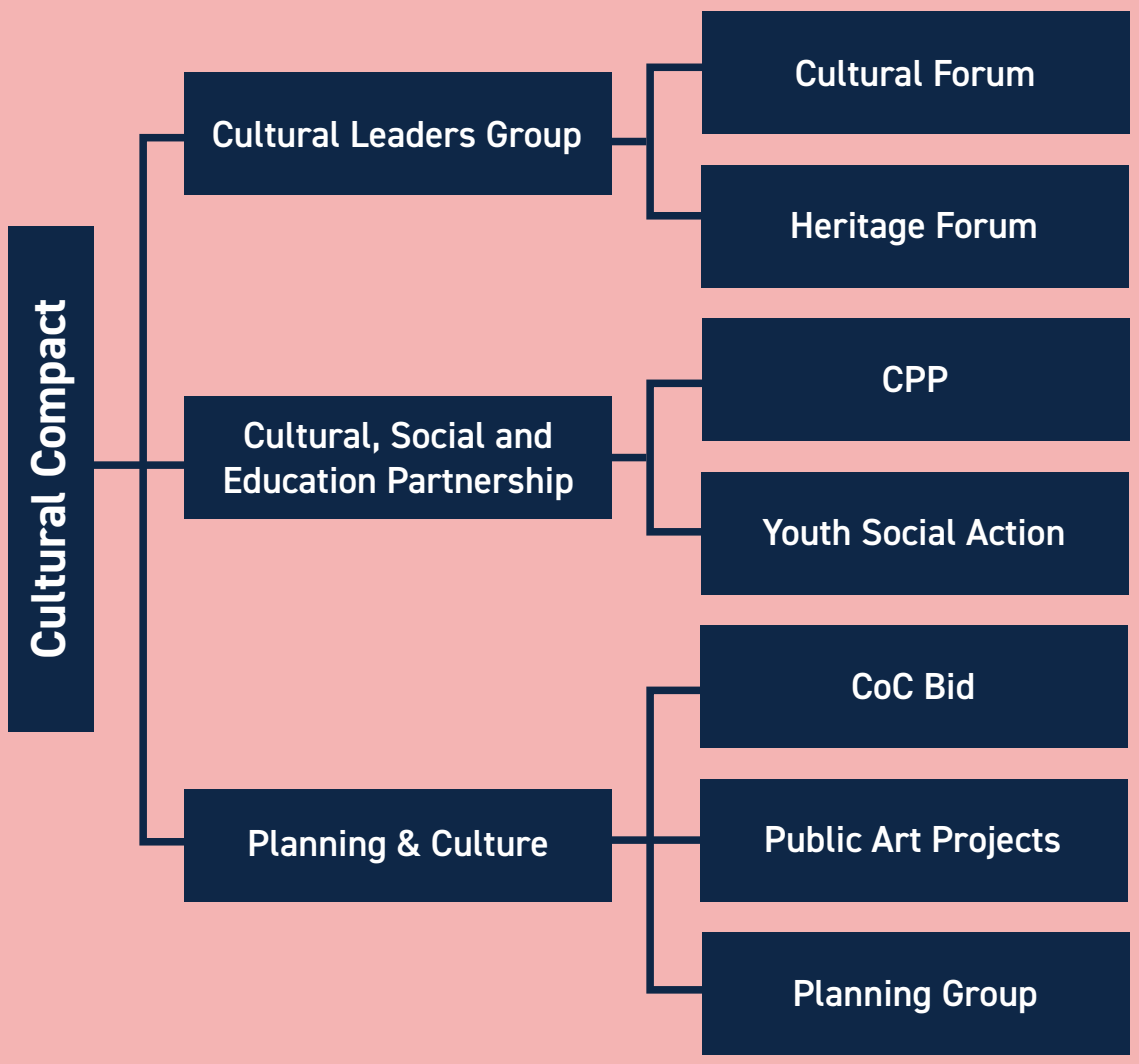
At its heart is Culture & Heritage and its mission is connecting that sector in its broadest sense with education, regeneration, business, health, community leadership and economic development. It provides the coordination, advocacy, evidence, partnership development and investment alignment required to deliver the ambition in this strategy.

THE COMPACT WILL HOLD:

- delivery accountability for the strategy
- oversight of the a coordinating mechanisms
- evidence, evaluation and research framework
- future investment vehicles and partnerships

Across this strategy, culture is positioned as a way for Ipswich to approach identity, belonging, youth opportunity, regeneration, wellbeing, skills, public realm and community cohesion. This is not possible without a robust but porous system which supports and enhances existing mechanisms delivering aligned value, and creates new infrastructure only where it is best placed and resourced to do so.

AN EXAMPLE MODEL FOR THE COMPACT CAN BE ILLUSTRATED AS FOLLOWS:



The Compact is led by a multi agency, cross sector board who hold accountability for its mission delivery.

It has three delivery groups, representatives of which have a seat on the board:

CULTURAL LEADERS GROUP:

- delivery lead for Ambition 1 and 5
- contains separate forums for information sharing and exchange
- is a group focused on collaboration, programming, excellence and ecology
- is the key knowledge exchange for all other work relating to the strategy

CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP:

- delivery lead for Ambition 2 & 3
- comprises of representatives from major social action, community education and cultural projects with direct impacts on young people and local communities
- is the core link between the Compact and the CPP programme
- holds the development of the community connectors network
- has a manifesto for delivery co-designed with and by young people

PLANNING & CULTURE:

- delivery lead for Ambition 4
- comprises representatives across the town Centre, local planning, regeneration and major development initiatives
- will hold major project task and finish groups
- will have a key remit to support the development of public art and lend support public realm programming where required

KEY DELIVERY PARTNERS ARE YET TO BE DEFINED BUT ACROSS THE THREE GROUPS ARE LIKELY TO INCLUDE:

- Culture & Heritage representatives - both organisational and individuals
- IP-Switched creative people and places
- local cultural education partnership (in development)
- local authority planning and regeneration teams
- universities and education providers
- community organisations and individual connectors
- youth social action networks
- business and local authority leaders

These groups are intended to be porous, share information and use the Compact Board as a hub through which all information flows. Roles will be clearly defined and where required, task and finish groups may sit across all three.

The Compact will be designed to be joined, not observed. The 2026 consultation was the beginning of a relationship, and everyone who contributed to this strategy should be able to see a route from having a say to being heard. Not everyone can be in the room, but everyone should feel represented and have a visible route to that representation.

During the first year of delivery, the Compact Board will be established and each of the three delivery groups will hold open recruitment for members, with places specifically held for freelancers, independent practitioners and grassroots and community organisations alongside larger institutions.

From year one onwards, each delivery group will also host open forums at least twice a year, so that involvement never depends on holding a formal seat. Timelines, membership routes and terms of reference will be published as the Compact takes shape, and the commitment is fixed even where the detail is still evolving: if anyone wants to be part of delivering this strategy, there will be a visible way in and a named door to knock on.

The strategy also recognises that some partnerships may evolve significantly over the life of the strategy as local government structures, funding systems and civic priorities change over time.

Whilst a model can look practical on paper, the reality of constructing and delivering such a concept is very different. Two non-negotiables for success are set out below, followed by the section of funding, which of course is the ultimate determiner of how successful and deliverable this strategy can be.



THE R&D PHASE

The 5 Ambitions all have a shared period of funded research, testing and infrastructure development during the first 18–24 months of delivery.

This reflects both the compressed timeframe under which the strategy has been developed and the repeated feedback received throughout consultation that Ipswich requires deeper, more sustained and more connected forms of engagement.

This early phase of delivery will focus on building stronger evidence, testing ideas, piloting new approaches and developing the infrastructure set out above for longer-term delivery. It should be approached as Action Research and a core part of delivery. The intention is to create a culture of continuous learning, adaptation and shared ownership that will underpin and future proof the continued delivery of the strategic ambitions.

A COMMITMENT TO DISTRIBUTED COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

A recurring theme throughout the consultation process was the importance of trusted local relationships and hyper-local community infrastructure.

Many participants highlighted that cultural participation often happens first through familiar and trusted environments such as libraries, youth groups, faith settings, sports organisations, cafés, schools and community centres rather than formal cultural venues.

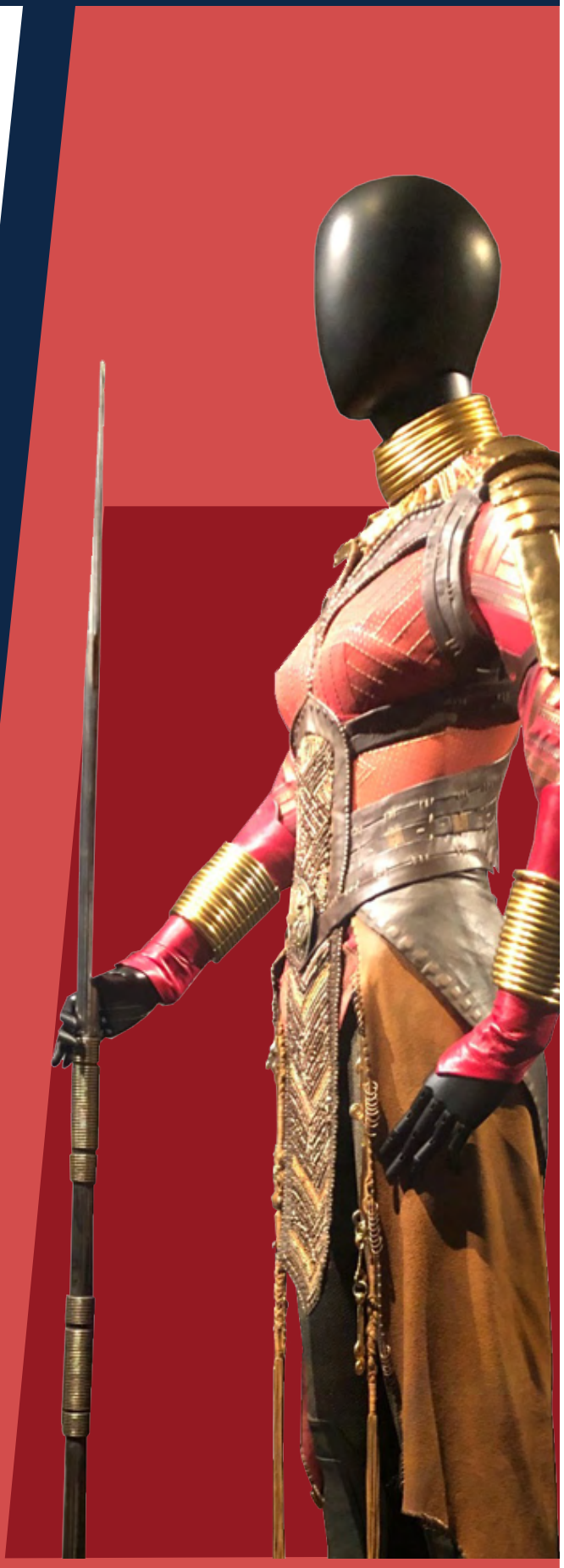
The strategy therefore proposes a more distributed approach to cultural leadership and engagement. This may include developing networks of community connectors, neighbourhood champions and grassroots leaders capable of supporting ongoing dialogue between organisations, communities and civic systems. Rather than relying solely on formal consultation structures, this model seeks to build long-term relationships and locally embedded intelligence over time. It also reflects the recognition that communities themselves already hold significant knowledge, leadership capacity and creative infrastructure which is not always visible within traditional cultural systems.

This approach is particularly important in relation to young people, underrepresented communities, neighbourhood identity and the future development of place-based cultural activity across Ipswich.

SUSTAINING MOMENTUM BEYOND INDIVIDUALS

Much of the momentum in Ipswich today is being driven by a generation of committed and well-connected leaders working across organisations and sectors. That energy is one of the town's greatest current assets. It is also, by definition, temporary. People move on, restructures happen and political landscapes shift, and a ten-year strategy must outlive this.

The strategy therefore treats succession as a design principle rather than an afterthought. Across the delivery structures set out above, this means investing in leadership development and talent pipelines so the next generation of cultural leaders is already emerging inside the system. It means workforce development that spreads skills and relationships across many people rather than concentrating them in a few. It needs deliberate succession planning within the Compact and its delivery groups, and building institutional memory, so that evidence, learning and relationships are held by the infrastructure itself and are not lost when an individual leaves the room. The measure of success is a cultural ecosystem that keeps its momentum through every change of personnel.



7. INVESTMENT & FUNDING FRAMEWORK

CONTEXT

The strategy recognises that traditional grant funding alone is unlikely to support the scale of long-term cultural transformation envisioned across Ipswich.

While public investment, Arts Council funding, heritage funding and local authority support will remain important, it's critical to develop more blended and collaborative approaches to cultural investment capable of supporting long-term cultural infrastructure and place development.



OVER THE LIFE OF THE STRATEGY, OPPORTUNITIES MAY EMERGE THROUGH:

- Arts Council place partnership programmes
- heritage and regeneration funding
- university and skills partnerships
- business and philanthropic investment
- public realm and infrastructure programmes
- youth and social action investment
- meanwhile-use and town centre activation initiatives
- social impact and blended investment approaches
- and cross-sector partnerships connected to health, wellbeing, skills and economic development

The strategy also recognises the importance of developing stronger relationships between cultural planning and wider regeneration systems, including planning policy, destination management, public realm, town centre development and future local government structures.

DEVELOPING AN INVESTABLE CULTURAL PIPELINE

Alongside traditional project funding, Ipswich has the opportunity over time to explore more sustainable models of civic cultural investment and stewardship. This could include approaches that connect public, private, philanthropic and social investment into longer-term place-based cultural infrastructure rather than isolated short-term programmes.

There is growing interest in place based social investment models and Ipswich holds several characteristics that could make it a realisable possibility for the town. The strategy does not prescribe this as a single model. However, it does intentionally create the conditions for Ipswich to become a place capable of testing ambitious and innovative approaches to cultural investment and long-term cultural civic value creation.

The visitor economy further strengthens this case. Cultural and heritage assets generate measurable economic returns through tourism, hospitality and town centre footfall, which broadens the argument for investment beyond cultural value alone and opens the door to partners in business, tourism and inward investment.

Currently there is an absence of a coordinated pipeline of "investment ready" cultural and heritage projects within Ipswich.

This process has identified that opportunities for external funding often emerge quickly and favour places able to demonstrate aligned partnerships, strategic clarity, strong evidence and deliverable projects.

The strategy therefore proposes the development of a more coordinated cultural pipeline, held by the Culture and Planning Group under the Compact. This includes identifying and supporting projects, partnerships and initiatives capable of contributing to wider strategic priorities around youth opportunity, heritage activation, public realm, community cohesion, creative industries and regeneration.



THIS PIPELINE MAY INCLUDE:

- heritage and interpretation projects
- meanwhile-space activation
- youth infrastructure and creative pathways
- public realm and artist-led interventions
- neighbourhood-based cultural activity
- freelance and creative industry development
- and strategic cultural capital and regeneration opportunities

The role of the Compact is not to directly own all activity, but to help create stronger alignment, visibility and readiness across the wider ecosystem.

TOWARDS LONG-TERM SHARED STEWARDSHIP

Underlying the strategy is a fundamental shift in thinking about culture within Ipswich. Rather than viewing culture primarily through the lens of individual events, projects or funding rounds, we must treat it as part of the long-term civic infrastructure of the town.

This means understanding culture and heritage collectively as core to how Ipswich develops identity, belonging, opportunity and quality of life, viewing investment opportunities through the same lens.

Over time, this creates the potential for Ipswich to deliver more joined up cultural activity, and build a more connected, confident and investable civic ecosystem capable of sustaining cultural development over the long term.



