



HEREFORDSHIRE CULTURAL PARTNERSHIP

HEREFORDSHIRE CULTURAL STRATEGY 2025-30



Herefordshire Cultural Strategy 2025-30

Overview

“Successful counties are not just those that are economically sustainable. Their success is grounded in their high quality of life, their distinctive cultural identity, and their creative and entrepreneurial vibrancy.”

The updated Herefordshire Cultural Strategy 2025-2030, builds on the first edition (2019) to reflect new cultural developments and inward investment; new national and regional government policy; and a stronger understanding of what culture means in Herefordshire.

Cultural Vision

For Herefordshire to be a culturally vibrant, prosperous and sought-after county in which to live, work and visit.

Hallmarks of the county are its glorious landscape, built & natural heritage, diverse creative and cultural offer and its sense of ambition.

Pro Herefordshire Mindset

Our overarching philosophy

- celebrates Herefordshire’s distinctive rural character, while addressing its unique challenges, creating an approach to cultural development that is authentic, sustainable, and deeply rooted in place.
- recognises Herefordshire’s cultural identity is inseparable from its landscape, border history, agricultural heritage, and the independent spirit of its communities. Rather than attempting to replicate urban cultural models, we embrace bespoke approaches that work with our rural geography and demographics.

5 Strategic Priorities



Children and Young People:

Listening to children and young people and connecting them to culture and creativity



Cultural Tourism:

Positioning Herefordshire as a distinctive rural cultural destination



Cultural Democracy:

The arts, culture and heritage are for everyone



Creative Health:

Pioneering culturally led approaches to wellbeing



Creative Economy:

Building and supporting thriving artists, creative businesses and enterprise

Partnership Model

Partnership Model Success relies on a partnership model, where cross-sector stakeholders come together to take responsibility for, and ownership of, our goals. Partners include Herefordshire Council, Herefordshire Chamber of Commerce, Herefordshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP), Hereford College of Arts, multiple cultural & heritage organisations, individual practitioners and public health sector.

Read on to learn more, understand the outcomes of each priority, and support our work to put creativity and culture at the heart of Herefordshire.

Welcome

Culture is the key to what makes Herefordshire such a wonderful county.

Successful counties are not just those that are economically sustainable. Their success is grounded in their high quality of life, their distinctive cultural identity, and their creative and entrepreneurial vibrancy.

Herefordshire is the fourth most sparsely populated county in England and yet remarkably compact with five historic market towns equidistant from Hereford, creating not only virtual but physical 'hub and spoke' opportunities. Together with its varied and dramatic natural landscape, its historic buildings and significant heritage, the county boasts a real sense of place.

Culture is the key to what makes Herefordshire such a wonderful county, reflecting and communicating its distinctiveness and uniqueness. Engagement in cultural activity is a vital ingredient in the life of our community and the region as a whole and plays an important part in enhancing the civic pride of our county.

Today Herefordshire stands at a pivotal moment in its cultural development. It has a rapidly growing variety of arts and cultural activity, a vibrant music and festival scene, a thriving community of artists and craftspeople, a distinctive and unique food and drink culture, rich built and natural heritage and outstanding landscape.

Building on five years of significant progress led by the Herefordshire Cultural Partnership (HCP), this update to the Cultural Strategy sets out an ambitious yet practical vision for how culture can drive economic growth, enhance wellbeing, and strengthen communities across our distinctive rural county over the next five years.

We know that our vision and delivery plan must stay flexible to shifting conditions and challenges as we move forward into the future. But what has always remained a constant is the powerful role creativity and culture can play in enhancing people's lives in Herefordshire, and we rely on partners across the county to come together to help us achieve this simple goal.

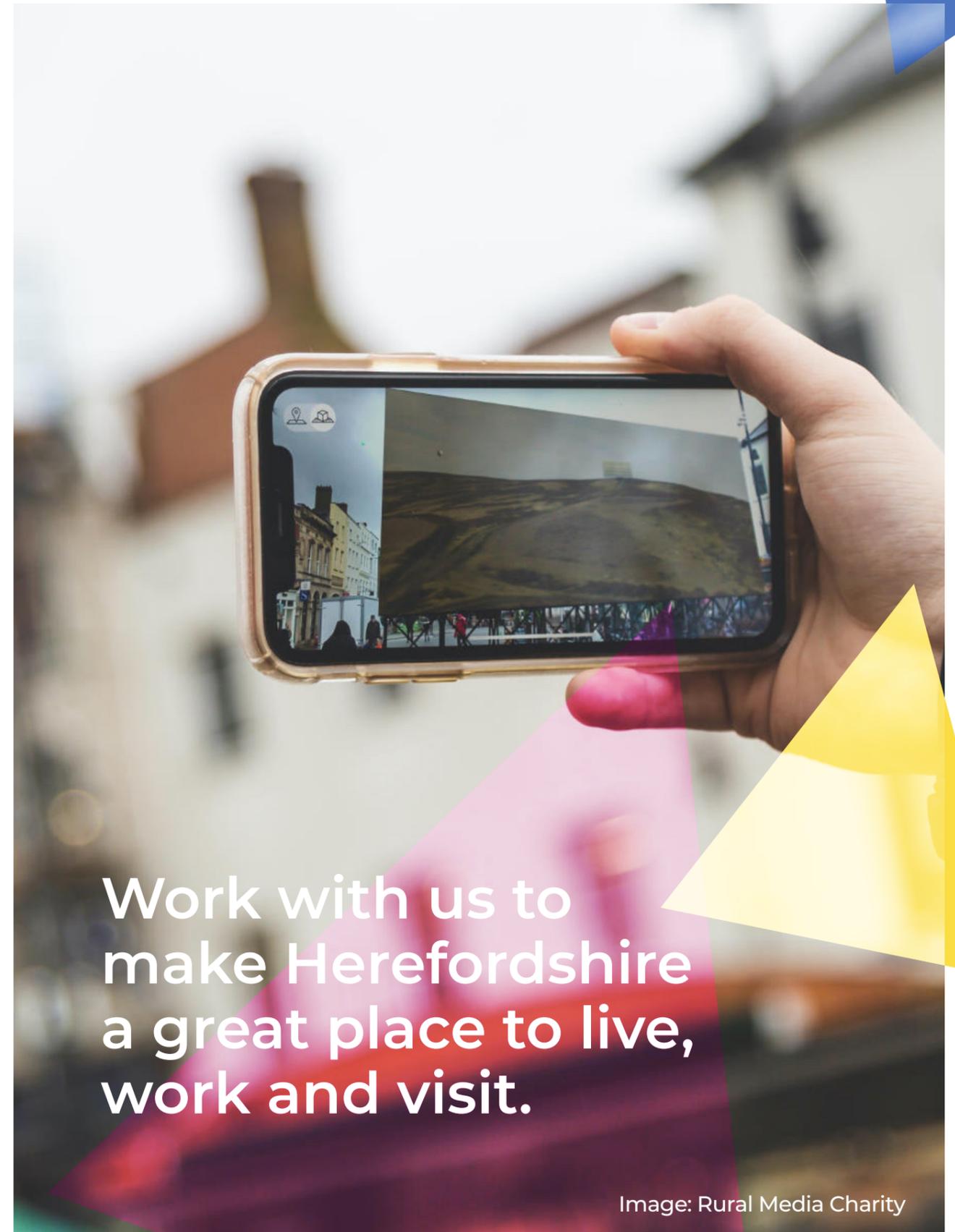


Image: Rural Media Charity

Introduction

What do we mean by culture?

“Recognition of the part that creativity and culture can play in supporting local economies and talent, health and wellbeing, and children and young people, has flourished over recent years, strengthening our partnerships with local and national government, opening up new avenues for all who work in museums, libraries and arts organisations, and improving the lives of people everywhere.”

Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair, Arts Council England, Let’s Create 2020-30

Successful places are recognised by their quality of life, by strong communities, their creative vibrancy, and cultural identity, all of which underpins an area’s economic performance and national and international standing.

Image: Rural Media Charity



Image: Meadow Arts. Photographer: Tegen Kimbley

Arts Council England’s *Let’s Create 2020-30* strategy highlights two core priorities: to enable all people **to be creative**, and for them **to experience high-quality culture**: “Taken together, they can help us make sense of ourselves and of each other: they provoke and uplift us; they unite communities; and they bring us joy.”

This vision acknowledges culture as a broad framework that defines how people live and that which gives their lives value and meaning. It encompasses creativity, imagination, ambition, joy and wonder, and is normally though not necessarily expressed through creative activities and institutions.

The Cultural Strategy focuses on a wide range of activity related to arts and heritage: performing arts, literature, music, crafts, visual and digital arts, photography, design, architecture,

and fashion along with our creative businesses, and the buildings and facilities where we access culture – museums, arts centres, theatres, churches, village halls, cinemas, libraries, archives, and galleries. We include too our wonderful natural environment, gastronomy, and the creative activities that take place in our open spaces.

It also seeks to identify, expand and make more accessible the range of opportunities for residents and visitors to Herefordshire to experience and enjoy the arts and heritage that surround them. This includes working collaboratively in innovative cross-sector partnerships with a wide range of partners – individuals, organisations, businesses and institutions – to improve the lives and prospects of our communities and enhance a sense of place and identity.



The foundations are laid.

There is undoubtedly much to celebrate and build on from the past five years. Significant progress has been made in all areas of the Cultural Strategy, despite unprecedented external challenges that have faced the sector since 2019.

The Herefordshire Cultural Partnership is now the lead cultural development body for the county and recognised nationally as an exemplar rural 'cultural compact'. Membership is diverse and attracts relevant expertise in economic development, tourism, health and education. In 2024, the Partnership was awarded £730,000 to lead the Our Place creative health programme across the county demonstrating innovative rural approaches and strong delivery capability with its member partners.

Health and wellbeing initiatives have opened up cultural programming to new audiences across Herefordshire and shown the power of creativity to support social and health issues unique to our rural setting. These huge leaps forward have been recognised by our peers across the country and the National Centre for Creative Health.

Herefordshire boasts six Arts Council England-funded National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), the celebrated Hereford College of Arts and New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering (NMITE), international events, internationally renowned theatre and performing arts companies, festivals and craft production and strong regional

partnerships that bring global artists and experiences to our doors.

Major inward capital investment for cultural assets through the Stronger Hereford project has started to transform and regenerate Hereford. This investment plan will see the Hereford Museum and Art Gallery and Hereford Library transformed into modern facilities, the creation of a new Storypoint digital hub, improved creative education facilities, and expanded tourism venues across the city.

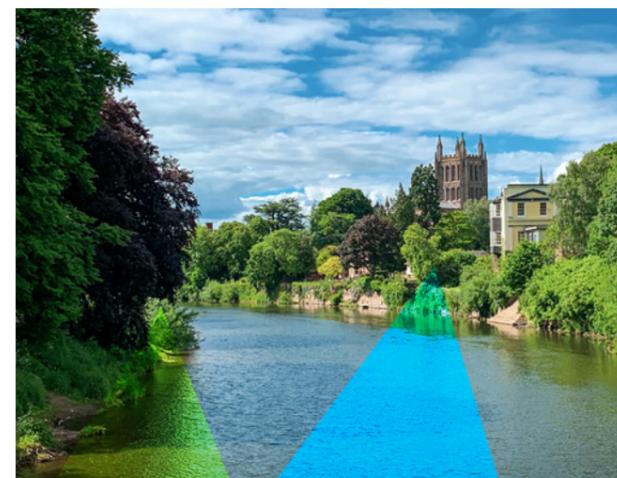
The commissioning of critical sector reports has also helped us to understand the challenges and opportunities the sector faces today. These reports demonstrate a strong cohort of 800 creative businesses and 4,100 creative workers across Herefordshire, far greater than previously understood. It is calculated that the creative industries in Herefordshire contribute £230 million GVA, a per capita sector GVA nearly double the county average and a 38% increase in sector GVA between 2020-2022, far outpacing countywide growth. New business growth programmes and networks have also been established to nurture and develop our creative workers and practitioners to strengthen the sector even further.



£1.3m revenue funding has been invested in the cultural sector as part of Herefordshire's UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation between 2022 and 2025, supporting local cultural organisations and individuals to grow and more creative activities to take place. Our public realm has started to blossom with new public art, cultural programming and innovative use of underused spaces, reigniting our high streets and celebrating our shared local heritage in place-based schemes.

But there is still a journey to go on.

Herefordshire's rurality presents unique challenges. As one of England's most sparsely populated counties, communities are separated by considerable distances and limited public transport. Environmental factors regularly impact cultural participation and delivery. Yet these rural characteristics also create opportunities: outstanding landscape and heritage provides inspiration and settings for distinctive cultural experiences that cannot be replicated elsewhere.



Our conversations and research highlighted a wide variety of issues that still need to be addressed. The need to:

- work in a coordinated way to raise the profile of Herefordshire as a great place to live, work and visit
- more effectively use creative digital content to raise the county's profile
- advocate for the value of culture and attract investment and resources to drive growth
- support and nurture talent development pipelines working across all genres and art forms
- build a stronger and more visible creative economy
- provide new infrastructure to help existing businesses and companies to grow, retain and attract new talent and share resources
- overcome barriers, increase participation and promote inclusion in cultural and creative activity
- engage more effectively with children and young people
- support those working in creative education and encourage teachers to participate in creative networks
- recognise the growth in creative health and the value creativity can bring to community health and wellbeing, and pride in place
- articulate and disseminate the priorities of the Cultural Strategy across the county in terms everyone will understand

Now it's time to create impact.

This update enables us to better align culture with new national and local authority policy, to maximise our impact further, shape local planning and infrastructure projects, and collaborate on ambitious actions to bring about change. Moreover, it will allow the Cultural Strategy to:

- deliver on the Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-28 and its priorities: People, Place, Transformation and Growth
- align with Herefordshire's Big Economic Plan 2050.
- complement the priorities of the Destination Management Plan and County Marketing Plan launched (2025) by Herefordshire County BID.
- align with Arts Council England's Let's Create 2020-30 strategy.
- deliver on the priorities of Herefordshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-33 and Physical Activity Strategy 2020-26.
- incorporate recommendations from the Festivals and Events Strategic Framework 2025.
- address the continuing uncertainty over the forthcoming Devolution settlement and potential for wider regional collaboration.
- respond to research and data emerging from 'state of the sector' cultural reports commissioned by Herefordshire Council.



Image: 2Faced Dance - Fish Boy
Photographer: Kie Cummings



Image: Meadow Arts - Pershore Youthy
Photographer: Tegen Kimbley

A new cultural chapter

Herefordshire has many strengths that place it on an international platform of excellence despite its rurality.

The Cultural Strategy 2025-30 serves as a starting point from which a carefully managed set of interventions and investments into arts, heritage and culture can be developed. It proposes actions that have the potential to bring about real change for Herefordshire communities.

Consultation has told us that widening participation in the arts and heritage, including for children and young people, is essential for a healthy and productive society. So too is the planning and investment in creative skills, leadership and management necessary to sustain our cultural institutions.

We recognise the huge commercial opportunities that have opened up over the last few years, and the access to new cultural experiences that digital technologies now offer almost everyone. We know that together we must do

more in key areas such as tourism and creative enterprise – visitors to the county bring important revenue streams as do the establishment of new creative businesses and practitioners. New models of delivery and co-operation could breathe life and generate innovative uses for our cultural and civic buildings.

We recognise that we have proposed a wide range of ambitious actions to deliver the vision and outcomes, and not all of them can be achieved at once or by one organisation. However, through collaboration and cross-sector partnerships we are confident that over the coming years delivering against these priorities will be transformational, inspiring and enriching for the people who live and work in Herefordshire, and those who visit or seek to settle in the county.



Vision and Key Principles

Vision

For Herefordshire to be a culturally vibrant, prosperous and sought-after county in which to live, work and visit. Hallmarks of the county are its glorious landscape, built & natural heritage, diverse creative and cultural offer and its sense of ambition.



The Pro-Herefordshire Mindset

The Pro-Herefordshire Mindset represents our overarching philosophy to celebrate Herefordshire's distinctive rural character while addressing its unique challenges, creating an approach to cultural development that is authentic, sustainable, and deeply rooted in place. This mindset recognises that Herefordshire's cultural identity is inseparable from its landscape, border history, agricultural heritage, and the independent spirit of its creatives and communities. Rather than attempting to replicate urban cultural models, we embrace bespoke approaches that work with our rural geography and demographics.

Key Principles

- **Place-based Identity:** Herefordshire's identity is shaped by its distinctive landscape and heritage. Cultural development must enhance rather than dilute this distinctive identity.
- **Rural Innovation:** Rather than replicating urban models, we embrace approaches that work with our rural geography: distributed networks across market towns, seasonal programming, digital connectivity solutions, mobile delivery, and adaptive reuse of community spaces.
- **Local Economic Resilience:** Prioritising cultural spending within the county; choosing local suppliers, artists, partners, services and products.
- **Environmental Responsibility:** Contributing to Herefordshire Council's net-zero by 2030 commitment through sustainable production practices, green travel approaches, nature connection experiences, and environmental advocacy.
- **Community Ownership:** Sustainable cultural development owned and driven by communities themselves, moving beyond consultation to genuine co-creation where communities have agency in shaping the cultural life and identity of their places.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Cultural provision reflecting and serving Herefordshire's full diversity, with targeted initiatives to address barriers faced by underrepresented groups or those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or in geographical isolation.
- **Partnership Working:** Effective collaborative working, co-development approaches and information sharing across all county partners, communities and sectors.
- **Strategic Integration:** Ensuring a cultural thread runs through all local strategies, plans and policies, whether economic, infrastructure and planning, public health, tourism or education.

Five Strategic Priorities

Each priority embodies the Pro-Herefordshire Mindset while addressing specific aspects of cultural development:



Children and Young People:

Listening to children and young people and connecting them to culture and creativity



Cultural Democracy:

The arts, culture and heritage are for everyone



Creative Economy:

Building and supporting thriving creative businesses, artistic companies and enterprise



Cultural Tourism:

Positioning Herefordshire as a distinctive rural cultural destination



Creative Health:

Pioneering culturally led approaches to wellbeing

Measures for Success

The Herefordshire Cultural Strategy 2025–30 lays out how we can maximise the county’s cultural assets. This strategy places investment in culture at the heart of civic pride, place, health and wellbeing, and economic growth. For it to achieve its vision it is important that the delivery plan remains flexible and consultative to stay fresh and embrace new ideas, people and technologies.

By 2030 we will have worked with our partners to deliver the following six outcomes:

- 1 Herefordshire will have a connected and sustainable cultural infrastructure underpinned by a creative workforce offering high-quality arts and heritage activity and experiences available to all residents and visitors.
- 2 All children and young people in Herefordshire will have access to an excellent cultural education and creative industries career development opportunities.
- 3 Herefordshire’s communities will have the opportunity to be fully engaged and proactive in shaping places where they live, participating in and growing the county’s cultural offer.
- 4 The creative industries will play an important role in contributing to the economic success of the county and region.
- 5 Herefordshire will be positioned as a distinctive rural cultural destination, attracting national and international audiences, creatives, visitors and new businesses.
- 6 Creative health programmes will have helped to improve the lives and wellbeing of Herefordshire communities addressing mental and physical health, rural isolation, loneliness and socio-economic problems.

PRIORITY 1: Children and Young People

Listening to children and young people and connecting them to culture and creativity

Cultural and creative learning is a vital part of education. It gives children and young people the confidence, creativity, skills and imagination that they need for life, and is a fundamental building block for the future lifeblood of our society and economy.



Image: Rural Media Charity

However, the Cultural Learning Alliance's CLA Report 2024 shows creative arts subjects are being severely cut back in many secondary schools in England. There has been an overall decline of 42% in the number of Arts GCSE entries since 2010 – Arts subjects make up only 7% of GCSE entries and some schools offer no Arts subjects at all. The primary Arts picture also remains inconsistent, often reliant on the availability of Arts expertise on the teaching staff. Schools reported that the increased emphasis on core academic subjects, together with funding pressures, were the most common reasons for cutting back on resources for creative subjects.

However, Herefordshire is bucking the trend in creative education. Hereford College of Arts celebrated its' 170th anniversary in 2024 and remains independent. It is recognised as one of the UK's leading specialist art colleges and the New Model Institute of Technology and Engineering (NMITE) is taking a bold approach to design and engineering education, preparing students for practical real-world challenges and the modern workforce. With a strong voice in Westminster, Herefordshire has a platform to lead the way in creative education excellence nationally.

Other factors can impact on young people failing to engage or be excited by culture or the acquisition of new creative skills, including socio-economic background, mental health, or caring responsibilities. In Herefordshire rural isolation can also be a major inhibitor to participation.

This priority aims to increase opportunities for children and young people within formal and informal education settings to take part in a wide range of accessible arts and heritage activities, and to find their creative voice. We want to make a real difference for those who face barriers or have fewer opportunities to experience the richness of the county's diverse arts and cultural resources. We want to drive young peoples' creative ambition and help broaden horizons by bringing inspirational projects and performances to the county.

We want to listen to young people, connect them with cultural opportunities that address the specific needs and opportunities of our rural county, and equip them with the diverse skills, training, work experience, and connections that can set them up for life.

We will:

- Give children and young people the **best start in life** regardless of background, location or circumstances, by providing access to high-quality cultural experiences and supporting creativity in early childhood development.
- Maximise children and young people’s **engagement and participation in culture**, addressing rural barriers and promoting a strong cultural identity deeply rooted in place.
- Champion the **importance of exceptional creative education** and strengthen alignment with national Arts programmes and policy.
- **Spark imaginations and broaden creative horizons** by offering children and young people the chance to visit, experience and participate in inspirational arts and heritage activity.
- Provide creative spaces, resources and expert support for children and young people to **explore their creative voice and develop their talent**.
- Equip children and young people with **vital creative skills and experiences** that can be applied to a rural creative economy or any future career.
- Give young people agency to act as **cultural leaders and creators** valuing individual perspectives and contributions and celebrating entrepreneurial spirit.
- Support **art teachers and creative practitioners** by creating more opportunities for creative conversations and networking to take place.

With a strong voice in Westminster, Herefordshire has a platform to lead the way in creative education excellence nationally.

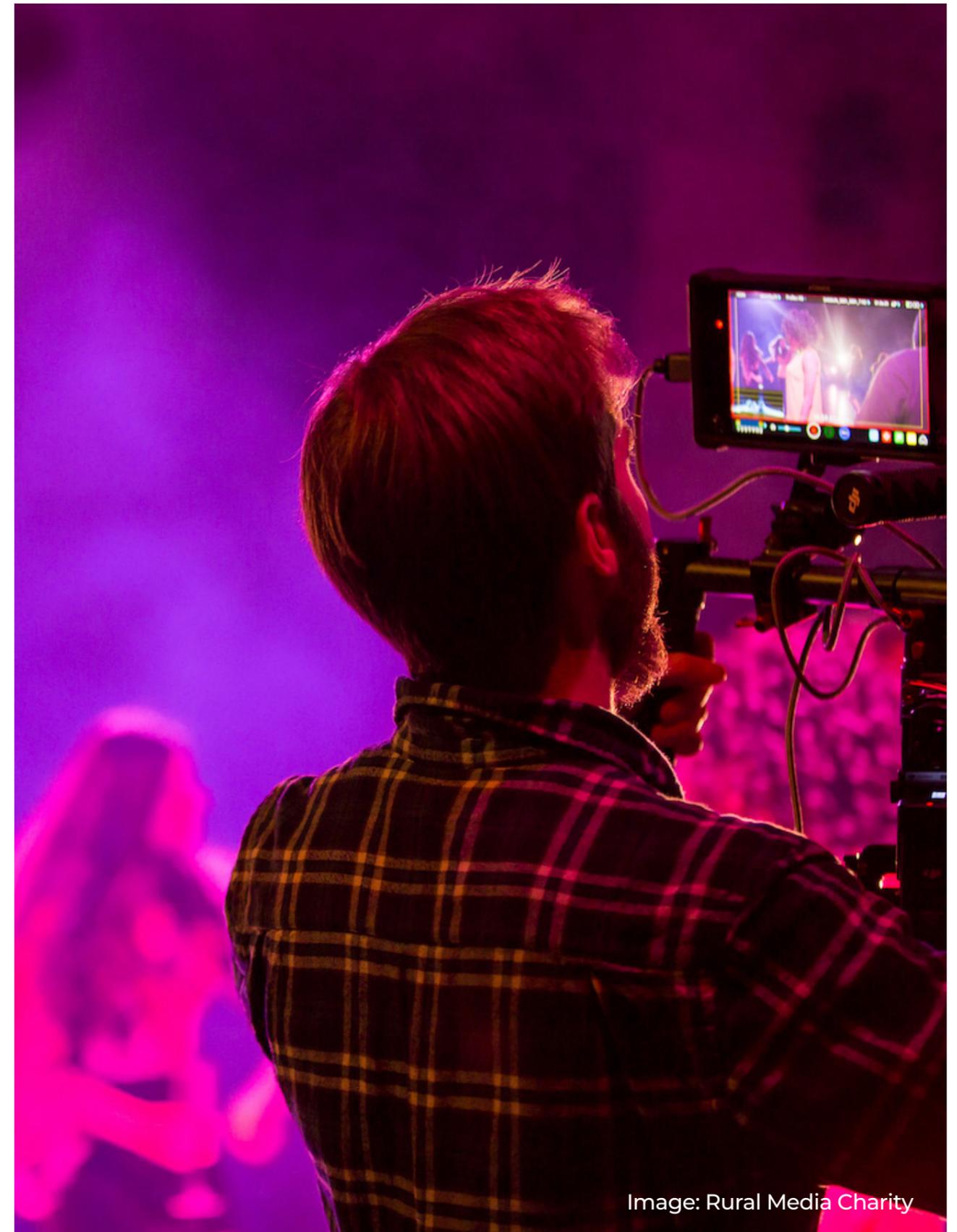


Image: Rural Media Charity

PRIORITY 2: Cultural Democracy

The arts and heritage are for everyone

Cultural democracy ensures that all communities can shape and access cultural opportunities across Herefordshire. It recognises that true cultural vibrancy comes not just from providing access to culture, but from enabling communities to define what culture means to them and actively participate in its creation.



Image: Rural Media Charity

In a rural county like Herefordshire, with a dispersed population and distinct local identities, cultural democracy takes on particular importance as a mechanism for ensuring inclusive, representative, and responsive cultural development. Culture gives people a sense of belonging to a place.

The term Cultural Democracy describes an approach to arts and culture that actively engages everyone to decide, where it happens, who makes, and who experiences it. It values lived experience, ensures all people are represented in decision-making and promotes a co-developed and collaborative approach.

This strategy will encourage people in Herefordshire to participate in creative activity as a regular part of their lives. It recognises the vital importance of publicly supported artists, heritage and cultural activity, but understands well that everyday creative activity in communities is often overlooked – a broad range of human creativity takes place outside the professional arts or creative industries in village halls and community centres across the county. To strengthen cultural programming these groups require places to meet, new skills creative connections and funding. Through new engagement initiatives, training, networks and digital tools we will increase participation and promote inclusion in cultural and creative activity.

We will:

- Take proactive steps to **address barriers to participation and improve access** to creative and cultural activities.
 - Embrace the diversity of our communities, **ensuring all voices are heard** in cultural governance, programming and participation.
 - Shift to **culture created with and by communities** and **pilot new collaborative approaches** emphasising genuine co-creation processes from planning through to delivery and evaluation.
 - Ensure **fair distribution of resources** across Herefordshire's diverse communities and geographies,
- addressing historical concentration of cultural investment in urban centres.
 - Respond to the **specific needs, assets, and identities of individual communities**, supporting cultural development at village, neighbourhood, or community level.
 - Empower creatives to **stimulate conversation and debate on local and world issues that matter to them**.
 - Provide **improved access to information, creative networks and resources** for use by local organisations, practitioners and creatives.

PRIORITY 3: Creative Economy

Building and supporting thriving creative businesses and enterprise

The UK has one of the largest and fastest growing creative industries sectors in the world, based on a long tradition of cultural expression. Creative businesses are well suited to playing a key role in growing Herefordshire's economy and social vibrancy.

This priority focuses on supporting Herefordshire's creative businesses and workers to grow sustainably through targeted business support, collaborative approaches to skills development, and innovative network and support solutions. It acknowledges that creative skills and expertise are important to every single job sector. No business

could operate without marketing, design, publishing, production and digital support, or devoid of invention, creativity and original thought. We will work with Herefordshire Council, Herefordshire Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to help inform local economic policy so that a cultural thread runs through everything.



Image: Rural Media Charity

A recent sector report has demonstrated that Herefordshire's creative economy operates differently from urban models, with distinctive, distributed forms of creative activity across a rural setting and a significant reliance on highly skilled freelance and self-employed workers who drive innovation and productivity.

Herefordshire's creative and cultural sector comprises 800 registered businesses, alongside a substantial creative workforce of 4,100, some 2.5 times that reported in official employment statistics, reflecting the prevalence of freelance working and sole traders. Research suggests GVA per capita in Herefordshire is twice the

average for the sector compared to national data.

New creative business networking, 121 support, and group training opportunities are helping to bring creative workers together in a more consistent way to share learning, develop skills and strengthen their business operation. We will support the development of flexible co-working spaces, creative hub spaces and innovative working models that suit our rural dispersal and revitalise High Streets. Outcomes will be a stronger and a more visible creative economy supported by the development and retention of creative and entrepreneurial talent.

We will:

- Increase the **scale and diversity of the creative workforce** in Herefordshire.
- Ensure the development of the creative industries **informs local economic policy and priorities**.
- Create mechanisms for creative businesses and practitioners to work together, supporting the **development and promotion of and creative spaces and digital platforms** for creative businesses and individuals to access shared resources and facilities.
- Support the **regeneration of underused buildings** to provide modern offices, studios, exhibition and meeting spaces for cultural entrepreneurs, cultural production and fabrication.
- Provide more **pathways into training, networks, business support, and continuing professional development** tailored to rural creative businesses.
- **Support business models appropriate to rural contexts**, including home-based businesses, micro-enterprises, solo-practitioners and portfolio careers combining multiple creative activities.



Image: Open Sky - Cold
Photographer: Kie Cummings

PRIORITY 4: Cultural Tourism

Positioning Herefordshire as a distinctive rural cultural destination

Herefordshire has a unique sense of place. Its outstanding natural beauty, picturesque market towns and villages, rural and agricultural heritage, location and easy access from major urban hubs of Birmingham, Bristol and Cardiff all create the potential for the county to become a prime visitor destination.



Image: 2Faced Dance - Fish Boy. Photographer: Kai Cummings

Culture is a key driver of Herefordshire's £736 million visitor economy, which supports 8,014 FTE jobs (16% of all jobs in the county), and ensures tourism development enhances rather than dilutes the county's distinctive character.

The cultural assets Herefordshire has to offer are rich and abundant – but still largely untapped. We have incredible natural and built heritage across the county: evocative medieval castles, landscaped stately homes and gardens, the ancient Arthur's Stone, black and white villages, churches and historic houses, and miles of scenic walking trails. The largest medieval map of the known world, the Hereford Mappa Mundi, is sited at Hereford Cathedral and attracts visitors from across the globe and the recent acquisition of the Herefordshire Hoard is a star highlight of the public museum collection. Our renowned agricultural produce attracts food tourists from all over the country keen to sample our Herefordshire beef, apples, cider and other high-quality fare.

Herefordshire also boasts an international year-round events and festival programme with Hay Festival, Three Choirs Festival, Ledbury Poetry Festival, Borderlines Film Festival, Nozstock and Lakefest leading the way. Our renowned creative organisations and practitioners frequently collaborate with national artists, performers, and designers to bring cutting edge culture to our doors. It is by development of these high-profile events performances and festivals, and the improved promotion of our cultural assets, that Herefordshire will find its rightful place on the national and international map.

In 2024 Herefordshire secured national recognition and official status as a Visit England Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP), a major step in transforming Herefordshire's visitor economy through a unified vision, strategic planning, and collaborative partnerships. The new Destination Management Plan 2025-35 (DMP) will now serve as the primary tool for achieving this transformation and fully acknowledges the role of arts, culture and heritage in driving tourism growth.

Culture is a key driver of Herefordshire's £736 million visitor economy, which supports 8,014 FTE jobs (16% of all jobs in the county)

We will:

- **Work in partnership with the LVEP Board, Herefordshire County BID, Hereford BID and other tourism agencies** to align strategic cultural priorities, help deliver on the relevant actions of the Destination Management Plan and develop Herefordshire’s cultural attractions.
- **Coordinate cultural marketing with the Destination Management Plan and County Marketing Plan** to create consistent messaging about Herefordshire’s visitor offer and take advantage of innovative digital platforms and content.
- **Celebrate Herefordshire’s rich heritage sites**, highlight investment potential and support visitor experiences that powerfully reveal Herefordshire’s deep rural tangible and intangible heritage.
- Leverage Herefordshire’s unique rural character, border history, heritage, cultural offer and outstanding landscape **to create compelling cultural tourism experiences** that cannot be replicated elsewhere.
- Build on **Herefordshire’s strong performing arts, festivals and events sector** to create a year-round cultural programme that attracts visitors while serving local communities.
- Work with local councils and business districts to **develop public realm programming and reduce red tape** to enable the use of public spaces and buildings to activate a vibrant place-based cultural programme.
- Identify and **attract inward investment to support international co-commissions, touring and residencies** with high profile artists.

Herefordshire boasts an international year-round events and festival programme with Hay Festival, Three Choirs Festival, Ledbury Poetry Festival, Borderlines Film Festival, Nozstock and Lakefest leading the way.



Image: Meadow Arts - Borderlands. Photographer: Suzie Jones

PRIORITY 5: Creative Health

Pioneering culturally led approaches to wellbeing

Creative Health represents a distinctive approach to improving wellbeing through cultural engagement. Unlike clinical pathways that use creativity as treatment, Herefordshire’s cultural-led approach strengthens community connection, co-creation and empowerment.



Image: Meadow Arts - Faye Claridge. Photographer: Mark Wright



Image: Meadow Arts - Yinka Shonibare RA CBE. Photographer: Stefan Handy

Herefordshire’s Our Place programme (2024-27) has demonstrated how cultural organisations can work alongside health partners to address local needs and deliver meaningful interventions in a rural context. The significant £730,000 Arts Council England and Herefordshire Council investment has been a catalyst for growth in creative health practice across the county, enabling consistent programming delivery and genuine community relationship-building to take place. Even more so, this crucial funding has given our creative practitioners the opportunity to test new ways of working, seeing what works and more importantly learning from what does not.

This priority recognises that there is ‘no one size fits all’ approach to creative health. It should be responsive to community and individual needs and cultural assets and developed in partnership with those working on the ground and communities themselves. It relies on a new and innovative way of working with health partners, care networks, social prescription services and community partners – often leading the way where others may not have gone before.

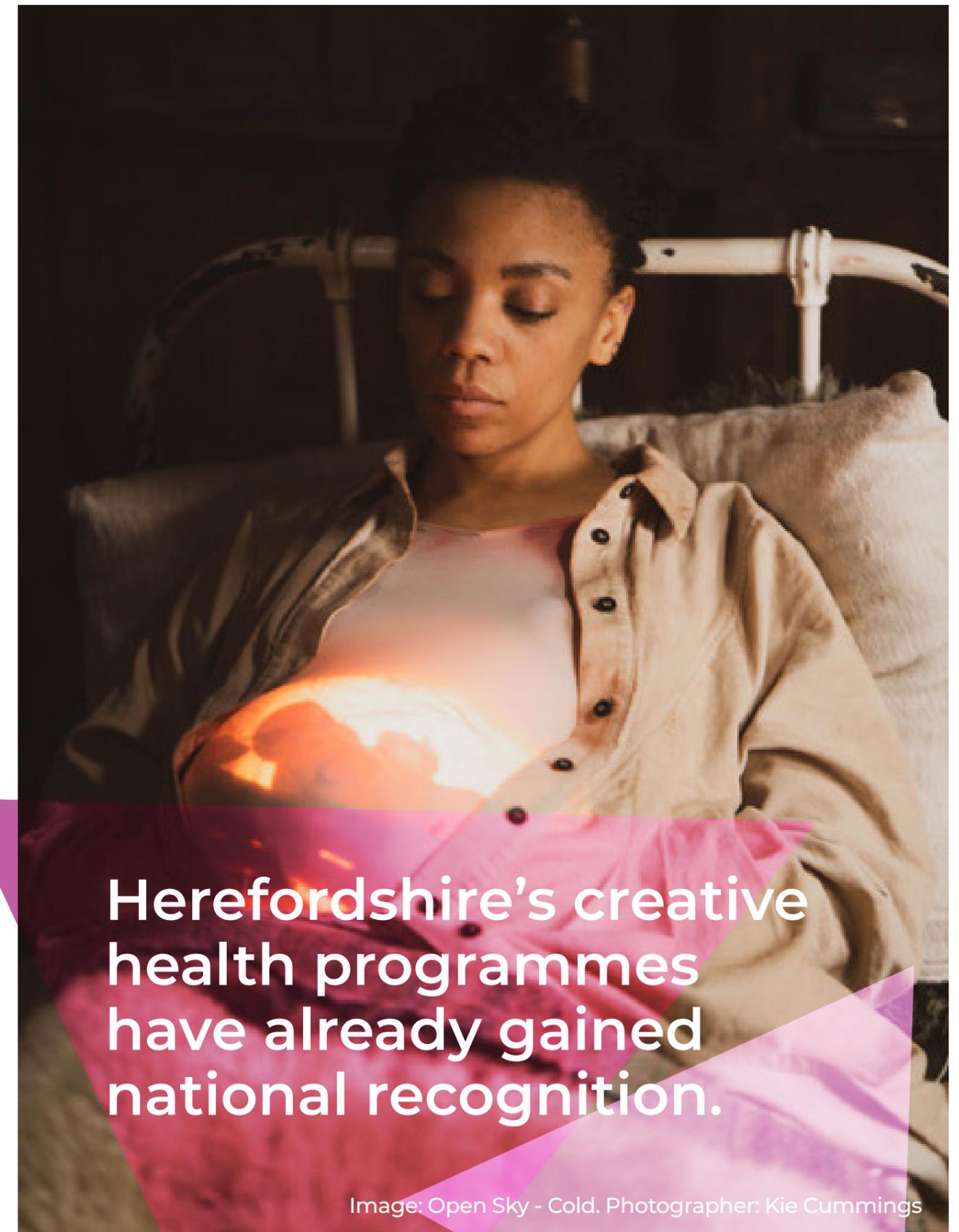
Cultural programming can take a more formal role in ill-health prevention, tackling mental and physical health problems, loneliness and isolation, confidence building and self-worth, and social cohesion. We acknowledge the role that evaluation has in supporting that progress, ensuring that outcomes and outputs meet the necessary metrics required by public health and include social return on investment (SROI) data that can attract future funding and enable sustainable service integration. Creative Health also has a role in wider health awareness & promotion and in working with minority communities.

Herefordshire’s creative health programmes have already gained national recognition. Our ambition is to grow creative health practice even further working in close collaboration with the National Centre for Creative Health, the Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance and the national Creative Health Champions network, sharing knowledge and findings openly with others. By 2030 we aim to be an exemplar for creative health practice in rural communities.

We will:

- **Bring distinctive cultural skills and approaches to wellbeing challenges** in Herefordshire, particularly in deprived and marginalised communities, and **create the conditions for investment** in creative health programmes.
- **Work openly with others to develop joined-up approaches** that respond to the needs of communities and individuals via community connection, co-creation and empowerment.
- **Lead pioneering new approaches to Creative Health**, sharing knowledge, methodologies and practice locally and nationally – an exemplar for creative health practice in a rural county.
- Enable **sustainable pathways for creative practitioners to develop specialised skills** needed for creative health work, recognising this relational practice requires different approaches than traditional artistic production.
- Support and **promote the value of intergenerational initiatives** that connect young people with the knowledge, contacts and resources of older residents, particularly to reduce loneliness and isolation.
- Devise **robust evaluation frameworks** that demonstrate impact on individual wellbeing and community resilience, using appropriate metrics from both cultural and health sectors.
- Work towards a **positive long-term legacy for creative health practice** fully integrated within wider community structures and local healthcare systems and approaches.

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Herefordshire's creative health programmes have already gained national recognition.

Image: Open Sky - Cold. Photographer: Kie Cummings

How will we deliver the strategy

The Herefordshire Cultural Strategy 2025-30 has been developed by the Herefordshire Cultural Partnership in collaboration with Herefordshire Council.

Herefordshire Cultural Partnership is an independent consortium of arts practitioners, culture and heritage organisations, local government, businesses and education specialists formed in 2018 with a shared vision to celebrate and grow Herefordshire's creative and cultural sector. We exist to drive forward Herefordshire's Cultural Strategy, create connections and spread the word that arts, culture and creative engagement plays an essential role for all people and places in Herefordshire.

The Partnership is formally recognised by Arts Council England as one of 40 cultural compacts nationally. Representing the cultural sector across Herefordshire in its broadest sense, we champion the county's creative and entrepreneurial spirit and work to strengthen the role of culture as a driver of economic success, placemaking, community cohesion and wellbeing. Members contribute on a voluntary basis and meet quarterly. Our dedicated website, The Shire (www.the-shire.co.uk), showcases our work, shares sector news and highlights funded programmes and opportunities.

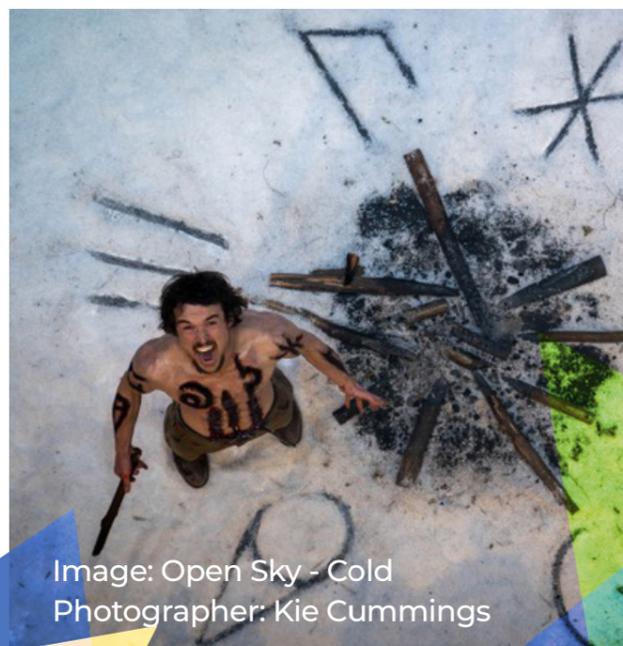


Image: Open Sky - Cold
Photographer: Kie Cummings

Partnership Model

The strategy will be delivered through a collaborative approach recognising roles and responsibilities of strategic partners, including:

- **Herefordshire Cultural Partnership:** Providing strategic leadership, facilitating collaboration, and advocating for the sector. Leading strategy implementation, coordinating cross-sector working, and securing external funding.
- **Herefordshire Council:** Supporting cultural development through partnership building and administrative coordination. Bringing diverse networks together, facilitating conversations, and helping to create a stronger, more connected cultural network, identifying where there is potential alignment with Council policy
- **Cultural Organisations and Creative Practitioners:** Delivering high-quality cultural experiences, engaging diverse communities, and developing talent. Implementing priority actions, serving communities, and maintaining artistic excellence.
- **LVEP Board, Herefordshire County BID and Hereford BID:** Providing tourism leadership, directing the delivery of the Destination Management Plan and County Marketing Plan, and supporting cultural programming.
- **Hereford College of Arts + other creative education partners:** A creative education partnership improving opportunities for children and young people in Herefordshire, advocating for the sector, and building collaborative partnerships with education providers.
- **Herefordshire Chamber of Commerce:** Supporting cultural businesses in Herefordshire to increase local economic growth.
- **City Council, Town Councils, Parish Councils, Community Partners:** Ensuring cultural provision responds to local needs and opportunities. Participating in co-creation, providing local knowledge, and supporting community-led initiatives.
- **NHS, Taurus Healthcare and Health Partners:** Collaborative health service providing high-quality care to over 190,000 people across Herefordshire, supporting cross-sector partnerships and creative health initiatives.

Implementation Capacity

Success requires dedicated coordination capacity including:

- **Core HCP Support:** Enhanced administrative and strategic capacity for partnership coordination
- **Herefordshire Council Cultural Development lead:** Specialist role providing advice, support and alignment
- **Community Engagement Coordinators:** Ensuring rural and diverse community participation
- **Evaluation and Research Capacity:** Monitoring progress and demonstrating impact

Funding Strategy

Diversified approach combining:

- **Public Investment:** Public Investment: Strategic funding and match funding where opportunities align
- **External Grants:** Council support for bids to arm's-length bodies including Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, UKSPF, and other targeted funding
- **Private Sector Partnership:** BID contributions, business sponsorship, and collaborative procurement
- **Earned Income:** Fee-for-service delivery, social enterprise models, and commercial partnerships

This partnership approach ensures sustainable delivery while maximising resources and expertise across sectors, creating a resilient foundation for Herefordshire's cultural development over the next decade.

Appendix

HEREFORDSHIRE CULTURAL PARTNERSHIP

Herefordshire Cultural Partnership (HCP), comprises members of the county's creative & cultural organisations, Herefordshire Council and business community, who have produced the updated Cultural Strategy on behalf of the whole county, and will be responsible for driving it forward. HCP's role is to:

- Champion Herefordshire's cultural sector and ambition
- Oversee the development and delivery of the cultural strategy, in line with the Delivery Plan, which has specific objectives and targets
- Support strategic programmes and identify key initiatives to drive inwards investment for creativity and culture.
- Take collective responsibility for ensuring that cultural funding is allocated properly and against agreed priorities
- Develop a shared framework for monitoring performance and progress against targets
- Examine and respond to local, regional, and national policy developments to ensure our shared cultural vision remains relevant and ambitious.

Resources & References

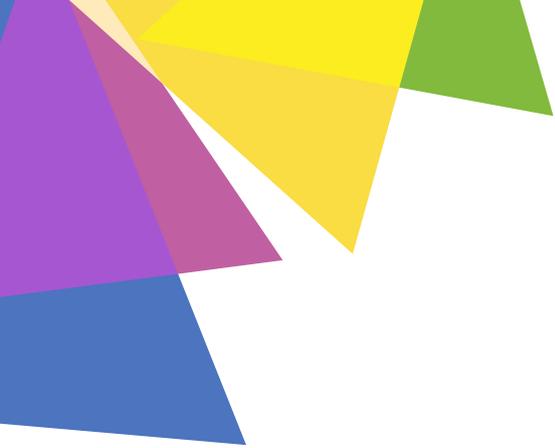
- [Herefordshire Economic Plan 2025-50](#)
- [Herefordshire Destination Management Plan 2025-35](#)
- [Herefordshire Joint Local Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2033](#)
- [HM Govt. Post-16 Education and Skills 2025](#)
- [Culture Central: A Creative West Midlands 2025](#)
- [ACE Let's Create 2020-2030](#)
- [ACE Cultural Compacts Report 2025](#)
- [HM Govt. Creative Industries Sector Plan 2025](#)
- [National Centre for Creative Health: Creative Health Review 2025](#)
- [NICRE: Understanding England's rural creative micro-clusters 2022](#)

Read more at www.the-shire.co.uk

Report Authors

Sarah Lee, Nic Millington and Clare Purcell.

We extend thanks to Herefordshire Cultural Partnership board members, and sector colleagues who have inputted to the document, and The Fifth Sector.



HEREFORDSHIRE CULTURAL PARTNERSHIP

HEREFORDSHIRE CULTURAL STRATEGY 2025-30

