



IPSWICH

CULTURE & HERITAGE STRATEGY 2026-36

AMBITION 4



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



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.

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 BASE

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

