



IPSWICH

CULTURE & HERITAGE STRATEGY 2026-36

DELIVERY PLAN



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



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.

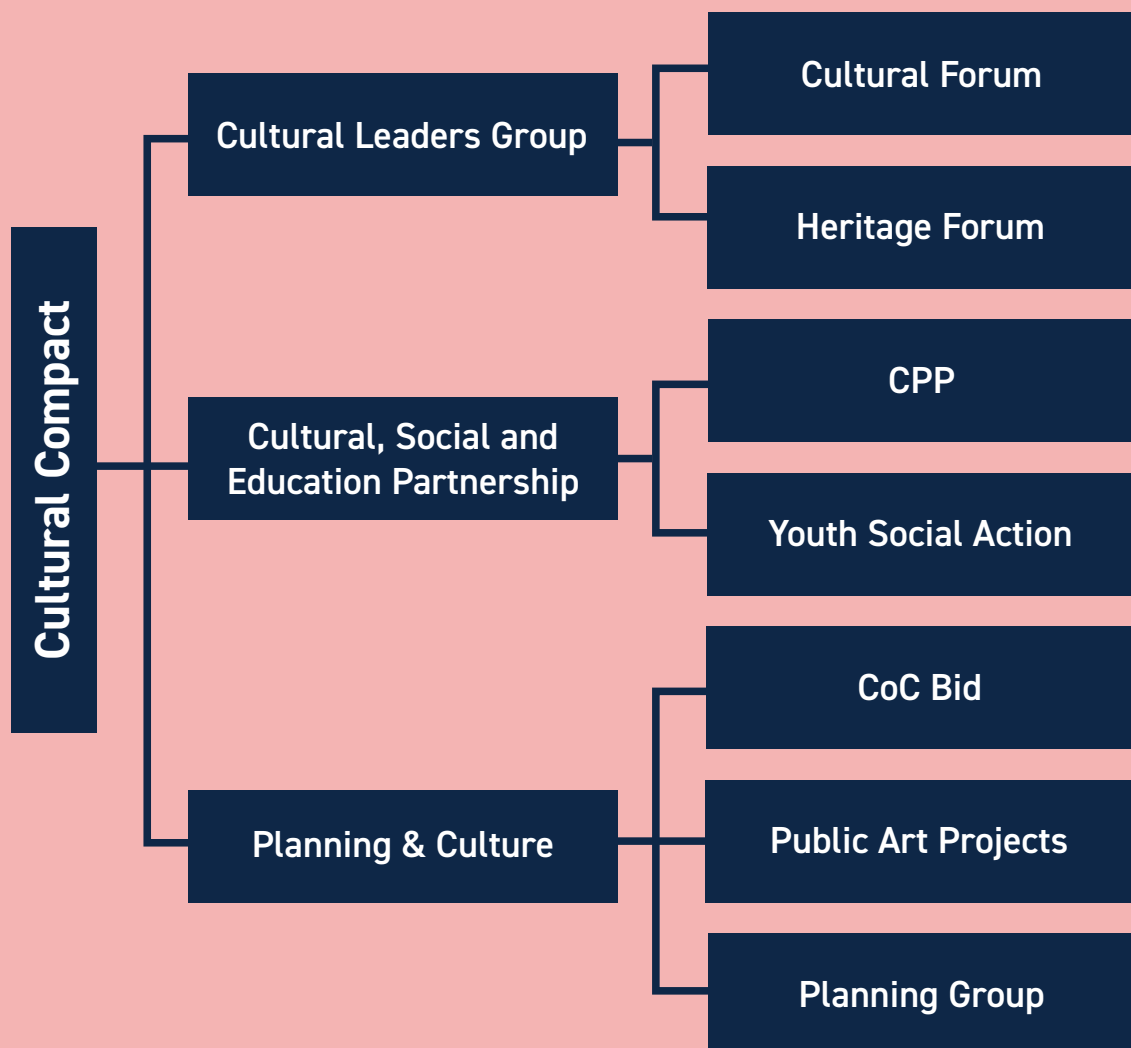
At its heart is Culture & Heritage and its mission is connecting that sector in its broadest sense with education, regeneration, business, health, community leadership and economic development. It provides the coordination, advocacy, evidence, partnership development and investment alignment required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

