



East Herts Cultural Strategy 2021-2025

Culture is for everyone!

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the Cultural Strategy for East Herts. As a member of East Herts Council's Executive since 2015 I have sampled at first hand many delightful events organised by a variety of organisations across the District. These may have been delivered in educational settings, or through activities arranged by our many enthusiastic community volunteers in our larger towns, as well as performances in the smallest of halls or open spaces in our villages.

Arts and culture is a very broad subject and I am not going to attempt to define or limit it here. That is all part of the challenge and the opportunity. I'm sure that many of those organisations involved in the arts and cultural sector in East Herts aspire to see it become part of the lives of all of our residents with many more participating and contributing.

Our Strategy seeks to share the gifts of our arts, culture, heritage and our creative industries with established and new audiences alike. We know the potential of arts, culture and creativity in enriching people's lives and we all have our part to play to ensure everyone can enjoy and be inspired by the exciting and unexpected cultural opportunities on offer.

This is just the beginning. The pandemic may have to make us think differently but it was always impressed upon me that with every difficulty comes an opportunity. The Strategy will evolve and grow over time, so let's support and encourage each other as we begin this journey of exploration and discovery. Above all, let's all have fun while doing it.



Cllr Eric Buckmaster
*Executive Member for
Wellbeing
East Herts Council*



We will make this Strategy a success

The East Herts Cultural Strategy 2021 – 2025 is a call to action for everyone involved in arts and culture in East Herts.

The following partners have contributed to the development of this Strategy and signed up to drive forward implementation the East Herts Cultural Strategy.

We are thrilled to be part of the 'we':

- Age UK Hertfordshire
- Active in the Community
- Active East Herts
- Bishop's Stortford Library
- Bishop's Stortford Town Council
- Community Development Action Hertfordshire
- Courtyard Arts Community Centre
- Clarion Futures Communities
- Dementia Friendly Action group
- East Herts Council
- Hertfordshire Festival of Music
- Hertford Library
- Hertford Theatre
- Hertford Town Council
- Herts Visual Arts
- Home Instead East Herts & Uttlesford
- Local Social
- Much Hadham Community Hub
- Paradance
- Southern Maltings
- Strategic Transport and Rail Team, Environment and Infrastructure
- Summer Arts In Buntingford
- Ware Town Council

And we're signing up new partners all the time

Let's be inspired

This Strategy marks the beginning of our new cultural journey that will involve identifying all of the great physical and human assets of the district, seeking out those who currently are not able to access the arts and exploring ways to increase the cultural engagement for all of our residents.



1. The Big Picture

Our vision

// East Herts will lead the way in demonstrating that when residents, community organisations and the creative industries come together extraordinary, surprising and delightful things can happen that enrich and enhance everyone's health, wellbeing and sense of inclusion. //

Our ambitions

Our ambitions are high. We want to make East Herts a place where:

- truly extraordinary things happen throughout the district, all year round
- strong partnerships result in a resilient cultural infrastructure that offers our diverse communities a wide range of cultural opportunities
- residents along with the public, private and voluntary sectors support each other to encourage entrepreneurial and innovative cultural practitioners to invest, live and work in East Herts
- investment in arts and culture contributes to tangible gains in health and wellbeing outcomes, economic resilience and environmental sustainability
- sustainability is at the heart of our cultural infrastructure and activities
- our achievements are recognised far beyond our district's boundaries.

This Strategy is everyone's blueprint

This Strategy is set within the wider policy context and economic growth ambitions of existing district-wide strategies and business plans of East Herts partner agencies. East Herts Council sees itself as part of the community, not apart from it. When we say 'we' or 'us' in this Strategy, it means everyone involved in culture in East Herts.

This Strategy takes the broadest of views of what culture in East Herts covers because inclusion is at its heart. So, arts and culture can be considered to include:

- the performing and visual arts
- festivals
- tourism and leisure
- heritage and historical buildings and resources

- sport and physical activities
- parks and open spaces
- children's play
- voluntary groups where individuals meet to pursue common interests.

We will use this Strategy to demonstrate to partners and funders alike, how the cultural sector is working together in East Herts. For example, some funding streams require evidence of joint working, while other funds are only available to community groups, rather than statutory bodies. This Strategy provides a means by which all partners can play to their strengths and support each other through the sharing of best practice, lending support to each other's funding bids or arranging joint initiatives and funding proposals.

The evidence based review of the Value of Arts & Culture to People & Society by Arts Council England (ACE) highlighted that culture and arts have a significant positive impact on people's lives. This Strategy recognises that the outcomes of cultural investment will be seen in local people's health and wellbeing, community safety, and local economic growth. No single organisation, interest group, or industry can deliver this alone; our strength is in our shared impetus to excel.

We recognise that culture can be a key driver for the prosperity of our area. The creative economy is one of the fastest growing sectors in the country and the digital and creative industries are highlighted by government as priorities for growth. Our combined track record of community engagement, high educational attainment and pride in local provision mean we can all contribute to these growing sectors.

Our ambitions haven't been dented by Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on the ability to hold the events and activities that maintain social engagement in our district. We cannot lose sight of the pleasure that participating in or simply watching a

2. Our new cultural journey starts here

cultural event can bring and must re-think ways to encourage and enable participation in arts and culture.

Before the pandemic, many of our residents found it difficult to access culture whether through living in relatively disadvantaged areas, owing to disabilities or having only limited access to transport. We will tackle existing and Covid-19 related barriers to enjoying culture in East Herts by working together across the district.

Culture brings people together to forge rewarding and stimulating lives, building our resilience and self-esteem in the process.

East Herts may be on London's doorstep but we are certainly not in London's shadow. Though just 30 miles from London's West End, we have a very long history of growing and providing our own cultural offer. Halifax Quality of Life Survey 2020 announced that East Herts is the best place to live in the UK, offering one of the highest qualities of life in the country; our cultural activities are central to this.

The district has a distinct cultural heritage reflecting its market towns and countryside, including its rural and agricultural landscape. The district is home to a number of cultural and creative industries, museums, heritage sites, arts centres, performance companies, sculpture and craft retail, individual craft makers and designers, giving residents a place to relax and enjoy a wonderful range of cultural activities. There are also over 120 parks and open spaces, providing valuable places for all people to play, exercise, meet one another, and hold public events and festivals.

East Herts' population is a vibrant patchwork of people from many different backgrounds and groups. The most recent census showed:

- population projections show the numbers in all age groups are growing in the district, in particular those aged 60+ years
- some 8,700 people are living with a disability
- around 3,200 people have a learning disability
- nearly 1,400 people have dementia
- an estimated 6% of our population are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning (LGBTQ)
- the white British population is the largest ethnic group in East Herts but the proportion of non-white British people in the district is steadily growing from the 10% recorded at the time of the 2011 Census.



3. Actions built on need

The Cultural Strategy has been built on a review of the evidence and horizon-scanning to better understand our communities, the gaps in the district's cultural offer, the opportunities for growth and the actions we thus need to take.

a) East Herts' population is changing and new neighbourhoods and garden villages are bringing new opportunities	The East Herts District Plan proposes significant new housing growth across the district up to 2033. This, together with an increasingly diverse population, brings new opportunities, new perspectives and new expectations. This is exactly what drives innovation in cultural activities and so cultural enrichment should be a key policy priority from the beginning of the development process. In a context of finite funding for public and community-based arts, new development offers the opportunity to create cultural facilities that can fund themselves in the long term and to establish stewardship structures to oversee the management of these facilities. Thoughtful planning and development can help co-ordinate the provision of new cultural facilities through unlocking developer contributions. An example of this is the new garden town, planned in Gilston, which provides an opportunity to expand culture through, for example, new public artworks, bringing art and design into everyday life.
Action	• Support development of a cultural offer in East Herts which takes on board the changing population profile and ensures a widening range of activities that meet the needs of all our residents • Embed arts and culture within new neighbourhoods and garden towns in the district, creating cultural opportunities residents • Provide affordable access to cultural opportunities for East Herts residents especially the over 50s and 12-24 year old young people • Ensure residents of all religious and black and minority ethnic backgrounds across East Herts are fully involved in the development of cultural opportunities in the district • Ensure residents with physical and/or learning disabilities participate in the planning and enjoyment of cultural opportunities in East Herts.
b) Relative deprivation can hamper access to arts and culture	Engagement in cultural activities is influenced by socio-economic background and by where people live. East Herts residents enjoy generally better levels of health and wellbeing than the England average, however, this tends to mask small pockets of deprivation. The Public Health England Local Authority profile 2017 confirms that five of the most deprived wards account for 16% of the population, representing around 23,000 individuals.
Action	• Provide opportunities, to be identified through community conversations and needs based research, for engagement in cultural activity that extend across our communities including our more deprived areas • Support the development of local, cultural opportunities, working with local community groups and village halls, to minimise the cost of and/or the need to travel to participate in cultural activities.

c) Arts and culture can alleviate loneliness and so have a positive impact on health and wellbeing	National Quality of Life data published in 2018 underlines that loneliness is a main challenge to individuals' quality of life. Triggers for loneliness vary throughout the different stages of life. Among younger adults, unemployment, financial challenges and raising a family alone have all been found to lead to feelings of isolation. Our older residents may be facing bereavement or disabilities which again can also trigger social isolation and loneliness.
Action	• Reach out to communities, going beyond the participants they already know by providing a sensitive approach to drawing in those who have lost their confidence or feel that the arts have little to offer them • Encourage cultural activities that foster physical activity 'by stealth', for example photography clubs that promote walking • Encourage communities to establish activities close to home, reducing the barriers to access and supporting residents in rural communities to participate in cultural opportunities.
d) Arts and culture can promote community safety and civic pride	Arts-related programmes can prove to be key ways of tackling anti-social behaviour and bringing different groups together to achieve a common, community-oriented goal. For example, interventions aimed at offenders can improve communication skills, teamwork and self-awareness which may reduce the later likelihood of reoffending.
Action	• Engage with residents and communities to safeguard people, property and individuals • Support initiatives to promote a high quality Night Time Economy in East Herts, for example, by supporting the use of the Police's Community Voice engagement tool • Support residents from all communities, circumstances and abilities to participate in cultural activities across East Herts.
e) Young people thrive when they are involved in arts and culture	The Arts Council England review suggests taking part in drama and library activities has been proven to improve attainment in literacy, while taking part in structured music activities improves attainment in maths, early language acquisition and early literacy for young people.
Action	• Work with young people and educational institutions in the district to encourage active participation in cultural activities to enhance confidence, build skills and improve employment opportunities • Work with cultural groups from all East Herts communities to ensure children of all abilities and circumstances have access to, and participate in, enriching cultural experiences • Work is underway to ascertain school needs and assess Hertford Theatre's potential offer in relation to those needs funded by Royal Opera House Bridge programme.



3. Actions built on need... *Continued*

f) Just getting to an arts venue can be a challenge	East Herts has high levels of car ownership reflecting many residents' relatively higher incomes. Car ownership rates may also result from the rural and somewhat dispersed nature of our district and this causes problems for residents without access to their own transport. Despite good rail links into and out of London from the district's major towns, many rural communities still have very limited transport options other than car use. While every ward is served with a bus service, there is great variation in frequency.
Action	• Support all partners to develop cultural opportunities in all corners of our district, allowing our residents to participate in a rich cultural life in their own communities, whether in the rural villages or the bustling town centres • Identify how the potential of the district's assets, such as village and community halls, can be maximised to achieve its cultural vision, bringing in the relevant partners to identify projects and deliver initiatives that benefit residents in East Herts.
g) COVID19 has made a big impact	The COVID19 pandemic has demonstrated the value and potential of digital and virtual methods for bringing people together and enabling shared experiences. Social distancing measures have resulted in a number of organisations reaching out through the adoption of digital platforms. Despite the loss of physical human connectivity, digital technology has kept the community alive in East Herts – all from the safety of people's homes.
Action	• Build on what we've all learnt from the COVID19 pandemic so that we can harness the potential of digital media to deliver both existing and new cultural activities and opportunities through an invigorating blend delivery of digital and physical platforms • Ensure digital delivery is accessible to all residents wishing to engage with culture through digital platforms • Produce an approach to communications that will enable all partners to publicise opportunities through both digital and traditional methods, such as leaflets, posters and word of mouth.



h) Cultural activities are not immune to the challenges of climate change	Climate change is one of the biggest threats to our planet. East Herts Council has set itself a challenging target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. Partners have come together as the East Herts Environmental and Climate Change Forum to work towards the district itself being carbon neutral by 2030 – an extremely challenging aspiration. The entire cultural sector must challenge itself to provide activities that minimise the carbon footprint, by bringing activities closer to where people live to minimise travel, by building reuse and recycling into business-as-usual or by staging events that influence people's thinking about the environment and encourage them to make for environmentally sustainable choices.
Action	• Enable the cultural sector to find ways to reduce its carbon footprint and encourage more environmentally sustainable actions across the entire cultural activity map from event design and production to engagement with audiences.

i) This strategy will be judged by the impact it has	Delivery of the Strategy will be secured through annual action plans devised by the East Herts Cultural Delivery group which will include actions and targets for the council and its partners, not just a few organisations. A wider, inclusive East Herts Cultural Strategic group will fulfil a 'critical friend' role to ensure the priorities of the strategy are fulfilled. We recognise that some actions, projects and funding bids will benefit from detailed evidence gained through gap analyses and empirical research. Such future work will be carried out by the partners coming together or by the partners' pooling financial re-sources to fund external expertise.
Action	We will design and implement different methodologies for collecting and evaluating information including capturing specific data and evidence throughout the life of the Strategy such as: • creative outputs and outcomes • local people's participation as board members of creative organisations • levels of investment in the arts and culture sector in the district • numbers of jobs, traineeships, apprenticeships, internships and opportunities for volunteering in the sector • levels of participation, audience reach and engagement • press coverage, marketing and publicity.

4. How we will work together

This Strategy has been shaped by East Herts' cultural sector. To fulfil our potential, all partners will need to pull together to strengthen our collective voice. The Strategy's ambitions can be met if partners adopt one or more the following roles.

Type of role	What this will do
Enabler role	An organisation working to support the growth of the East Herts cultural offer will: • enable and support the establishment of a cultural social infrastructure • build capacity throughout the sector and expand the tourism offer • facilitate the drafting of innovative, partnership bids for external funding • promote cultural festivals in the district, creating opportunities for everyone.
Innovator role	All partners acting as innovators will: • support digital activities that increase community engagement in culture • promote inter-generational engagement and digital inclusion • use social media and other marketing innovations to reach new audiences • Encourage creative use of enhancements in technology • Implement digital assistive technology to open up access to the arts.
Partner role	A proactive cultural partner will: • embed culture and the creative economy firmly within the various tiers of civic planning in the district • encourage closer working relationships between the private, public and community sectors • work with external agencies such as Hertfordshire Association of Cultural Officers and Arts Council England to share information, good practice and lever in external funding • link cultural objectives to other agendas, for example, health and wellbeing, and economic growth.
Provider role	In order to deliver the ambitions of this Strategy, each partner will strive to: • set an example as a provider of arts and culture that are accessible to a wide variety of service users • identify and channel financial resources and people power into cultural activities • be a provider of support, offer grants, advice, guidance, internships and/or other opportunities to develop the local cultural infrastructure • explore opportunities for wider cultural engagement • target increased opportunities for participation in areas of relative deprivation and/or among those most affected by disadvantage.



The council's privileged community leadership role

East Herts Council is just one participant in the district's rich and varied cultural sector. It is recognised that the council has a privileged community leadership role and so in addition to roles to be played by all partners, the council will:

- provide inspiring leadership to help generate new ideas and conversations
- work jointly with all partners to identify cultural champions, from whichever organisation or background, to maximise opportunities
- promote funding opportunities facilitated by East Herts Council, for example, East Herts Lottery
- help promote cultural activities taking place within East Herts
- work closely with organisations from all communities to promote volunteering opportunities
- explore opportunities to use the wide range of cultural assets in East Herts to enable increased local delivery of cultural activities
- marshal efforts to ensure the actions make a real difference.



5. Delivery and measurement of success

This Strategy has been adopted by East Herts Council and is supported by the East Herts Cultural Peer Support Group.

Each year the partners who have come together to deliver this Strategy will devise and agree an action plan for the coming year with clear goals, targets and named lead partners.

We will know the Strategy has been a success when:

- East Herts is recognised locally, regionally and farther afield as an ambitious and creative locality in the field of arts and culture and
- all East Herts residents are able to say they can access rich cultural experiences as part of their everyday lives.

The efforts and actions of all stakeholders, working together in support of our shared ambitions, are absolutely vital to the success of this Strategy so we will:

- gather and make use of evidence developed through partners' case studies and research
- together foster the continued support and engagement of stakeholders in the public, private and community sectors as key advocates for the cultural and creative industries
- clearly communicate our impact in delivering outcomes for our residents
- use our collective voice to influence decision-makers whoever and wherever they may be.
- identify cultural assets across East Herts that can enable the delivery of cultural activities closer to home
- work in partnership to secure funding to support delivery of cultural activities in East Herts.



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