

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture and Creativity

A Cultural
Action Plan for
Waltham Forest
2025 – 2030



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Foreword

In Waltham Forest, culture is central to our identity. It is the glue that binds us and brings our communities together. Culture and creativity is on every corner of the borough: in our libraries, in grassroots venues and pubs, in creative workspaces and studios, in places of worship, in community centres, in green and open spaces and in our homes.

Waltham Forest has an astonishing track record in supporting culture, always punching above its weight. The William Morris Gallery was the first winner of the Art Fund Museum of the Year. We were the first London Borough of Culture in 2019, a year which saw 500,000 visits to events across our corner of London, and where every school participated in cultural activities. This enabled significant investment into the Grade-II listed former Granada Cinema, soon to reopen as Soho Theatre Walthamstow. Blackhorse Lane was announced as a Creative Enterprise Zone by the Mayor of London in 2021, a designation which aims to future-proof its creative community.

In Waltham Forest, we recognise the power of culture and creativity to celebrate communities, create vibrant places, and positively impact health and wellbeing. We know that learning through arts and culture develops skills and behaviours that lead children to do better in school, and that engaging in creative activities, such as music, dance, crafts, theatre, and much more, can be life changing.

Not everyone who lives in Waltham Forest has an equal chance in life. All our efforts are focused on addressing inequality, and

we know culture has a central role to play. Residents have told us that culture should be a priority for the Council. They value how culture and creativity foster a sense of community and celebrate our diversity. However, we recognise that it is an incredibly challenging time for local authorities' finances, and that the cultural sector continues to be squeezed by rising costs and diminishing arts funding. This is why we have been speaking extensively with our communities, our cultural sector and our strategic partners to shape a Cultural Action Plan which will deliver on our promise to tackle inequalities and create a vibrant borough for all.



Councillor Grace Williams
Leader of Waltham Forest Council



Councillor Rosalind Doré,
*Cabinet Member for Libraries,
Culture, Sports and Leisure*

Executive Summary

Waltham Forest is a borough rooted in culture with a unique history of making, innovation and creativity and an incredible diversity of people that make up our neighbourhoods.

This Cultural Action Plan will enable Waltham Forest to develop stronger communities through culture and creativity, harnessing the power of culture to increase community resilience and cohesion. This is part of a cross-council approach to prevention, central to delivering Mission Waltham Forest, the Council's plan for a more equal borough by 2030.

Culture and creativity will play a key part in tackling the fundamental challenges facing residents by increasing equitable participation, supporting health and wellbeing and building skills and professional opportunities so that a new generation can access a growing creative sector.

This Cultural Action Plan gives an overview of the borough's unique context, and has been informed by extensive desk research and public engagement. It outlines key actions, outcomes and measures, structured around 6 action areas:



Our Vision

A vibrant corner of London where culture, creativity and community converge. Whether for a day or a lifetime, we welcome everyone to Waltham Forest.

We will deliver the best conditions for equitable cultural opportunities and inclusive growth in the creative sector, whilst attracting visitors and creating impact for the borough.

ACTION AREA	1. Community-powered Culture	2. Creative Health and Wellbeing	3. Creative Education, Skills and Jobs	4. Cultural Infrastructure and the Creative Economy	5. Creative Neighbourhoods	6. Culture and Climate
STRONGER COMMUNITIES AIM	Our community has a central role in cultural participation and making decisions about culture.	Residents' health and wellbeing is improved through cultural participation, fostering greater health equity.	Residents, particularly those who face added barriers, have the skills and experience they need to access good jobs in the creative sector.	Creatives and creative businesses have the space and support they need for inclusive growth.	Our neighbourhoods are enriched through culture and creativity, nurturing a sense of belonging and togetherness.	Our creative communities play a key role in collective climate action in Waltham Forest.
THE CHANGE WE WANT TO MAKE	• More people participate in culture and this participation is fully representative of the borough. • The community's role in making decisions about culture grows resulting in more agency and power. • Increased collaboration between groups through cultural activity strengthens community cohesion.	• Culture supports greater health equity and better health outcomes, especially for cohorts with the greatest need. • Culture is harnessed as a preventative driver for better health. New evidence and creative health mapping drives future funding opportunities.	• Learning and careers opportunities are coordinated from early years to adulthood to give residents the best route into creative jobs. • More diverse young people access creative jobs and take an active role in local cultural programming, fostering an inclusive creative sector.	• Cultural infrastructure is protected and grown. Existing spaces are better used and generate income, re-invested in communities. • Waltham Forest is recognised as a place to make and experience exceptional culture. • Increased investment and business opportunities for creative enterprises result in sector growth.	• A thriving creative community in each neighbourhood delivers cultural activities and supports culture on every corner. • Improved community safety and social cohesion through culture, creating a sense of belonging and togetherness. • Creative activities increase footfall for businesses, build social capital and support vibrant town centres.	• Our communities draw on creativity, and creatives, to support local climate action. • Our creative enterprises and cultural organisations are equipped to respond to climate and ecological emergency. • Net zero cultural infrastructure and events in the borough.

I do not want art for a few any more than I want education for a few or freedom for a few.

— William Morris



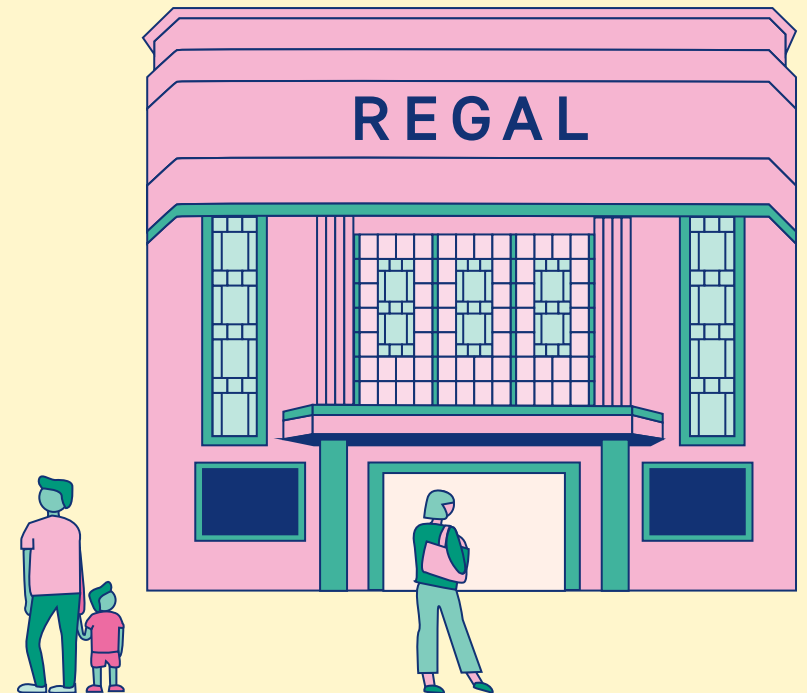
Survival at Harrow 1950 Through the Smelter at Labrador
 by John Buxton (1917-1980)
 ISBN
 Waterstones on paper

Buxton's childhood was spent from 1927 to Harrow 1946. South Labrador Buxton first came to international attention through his celebrated novel *My Atlantic of 1946*. From what his publisher is Modern Postcard he brought back his private view of the area in *Trade in Ice* (1947). From 1948, Buxton investigated the fish, fur, and minerals, also, along with a young William Morris, each being influenced by the time, especially concerning the importance of the natural world to us.

The Buxton-Morris Connection

Introduction

The Regal Cinema, Highams Park.

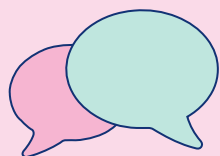


Introduction

Waltham Forest is a borough rooted in culture with an incredible diversity of people that make up our neighbourhoods. We have a unique history of making, innovation and creativity, spanning from the Arts and Crafts movement through to our significant contribution to grime, rave and pirate radio.

Over the last decade, Waltham Forest has built extensive cultural capacity and expertise. From being one of the host boroughs of the Olympics in 2012, to being awarded the first London Borough of Culture in 2019, this has been a transformational time for culture.

This Cultural Action Plan sets out how culture and creativity have a central role to play in building stronger communities, and how engagement in arts and culture is a driver of community resilience, social impact and inclusive growth.



88%

of residents surveyed agree that culture should be a priority.¹

278,400

Residents

30%

Residents under 30

94%

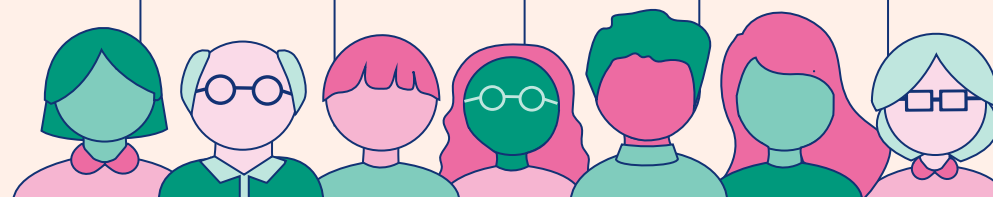
Micro-businesses
(under 10 employees)

47%

Global Majority
residents

12th

Out of 32 London
boroughs for
deprivation
(6th in 2014)



Definitions

Culture



The customs and beliefs, art, way of life, and social organisation of a particular group.² For example, Islamic culture, Youth culture. This can include food, traditions and heritage.

The arts in a broad sense, fueled by human creativity: visual arts, crafts, music, dance, literature, exhibitions, theatre and more. This can be amateur or professional, and can take place anywhere, from galleries and festivals to pubs and community centres.

Creativity



Arts Council England describes creativity as the process through which people apply their knowledge, skill and intuition to conceive something that wasn't there before.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) defines the creative industries as those originating from individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property: film and TV, IT services, advertising, music and performing arts, fashion, design and architecture, amongst others.

In this action plan, we adopt a broad and inclusive definition of culture, informed by conversations and engagement with our communities. We recognise and value that culture means different things to different people.

The transformative power of culture and creativity

Today, the UK creative industries' economic contribution is bigger than the life sciences, aerospace and automotive sectors combined.³ Culture and creativity are a key driver of the economic dynamism of places: creating areas where people want to live, work and play.

Culture plays an important role beyond its economic contribution. It shapes and defines us as individuals and communities, strengthening community resilience and nurturing pride in place.



1 in 5

jobs in London are in the creative sector.⁴



£1.23

For every £1 generated by arts and culture, an additional £1.23 is generated for the local economy.⁵



3x

Students from low-income families who take part in arts at school are 3 times more likely to get a degree.⁶

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

Culture and creativity can support us at all stages of life. Learning through arts and culture develops skills and behaviours that help children do better in school.⁷

They are also crucial to a proactive, preventative approach to health and wellbeing. Participation in creative activities can delay emerging needs from appearing and can help people manage health issues from Parkinson's disease to dementia.⁸

The Role of the Council

The Council's role is to optimise the benefits of culture for residents by:

- providing strategic vision and oversight
- being a connector, enabler and facilitator
- building capacity in the local cultural and creative sector
- advocating at the local, regional and national level

Despite vastly decreased financial capacity for local government over the past decade, Waltham Forest Council prides itself in continuing to play a pivotal role as a champion of culture and creative industries.

This plan strives to bring about change and deliver on Mission Waltham Forest, the Council's plan for a more equal borough by 2030,⁹ by harnessing the power of culture and creativity to:

- Ensure every family and every child are given every opportunity
- Build an economy that works for everyone
- Make Waltham Forest a great place to live and age well
- Lead the way for a net-zero borough
- Create safe, green neighbourhoods where everyone can thrive



Ridgeway Park Pavilion, Chingford. Photo by Aaron English.

“

Culture is not an exotic notion studied by a few specialists. It is a mode of thought and feeling inextricably bound up with the everyday life.

”

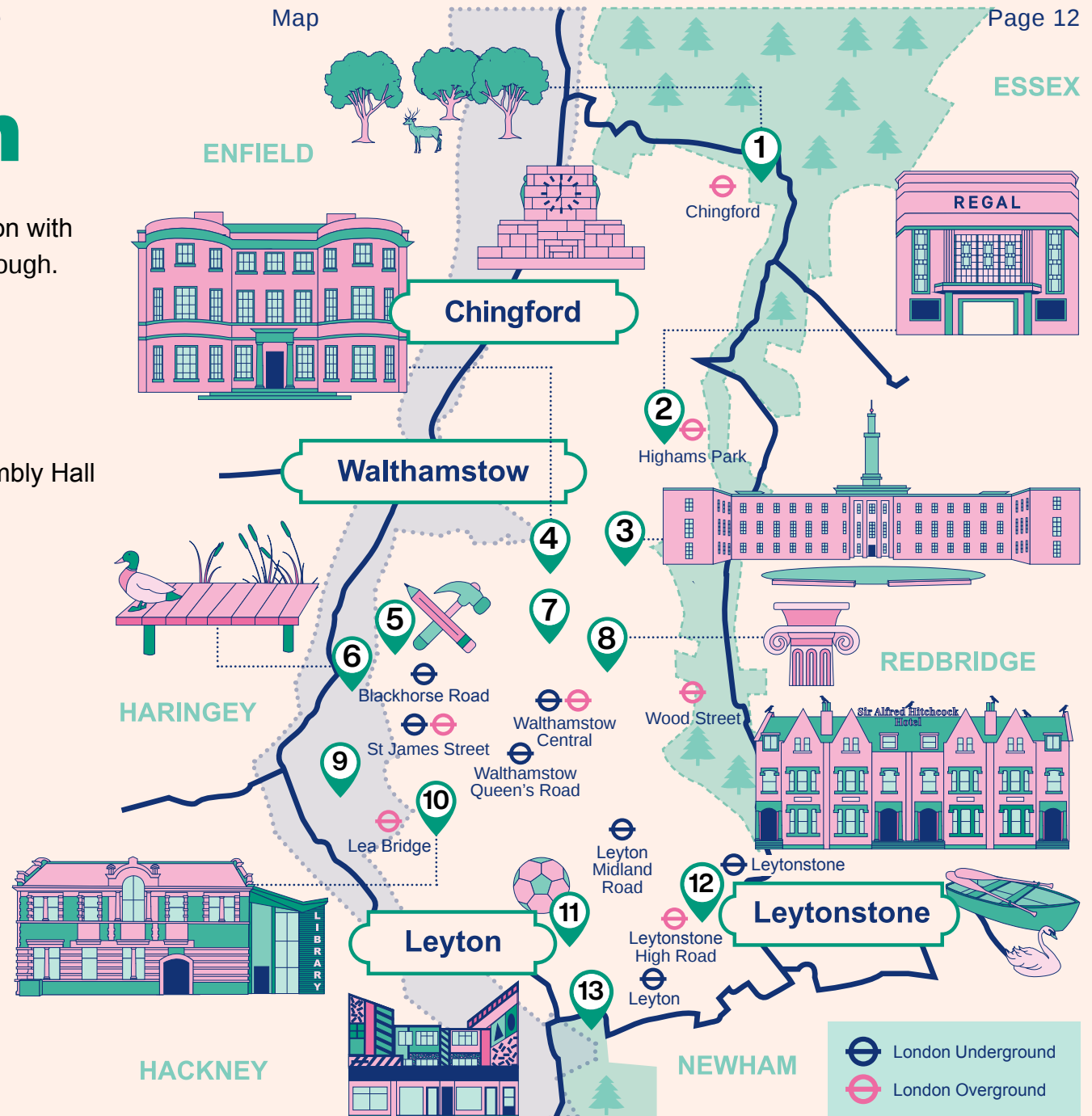
— Stuart Hall



Our Borough

This map gives an overview of our place in London with a snapshot of spaces and venues across the borough.

- 1 Epping Forest
- 2 Regal Cinema
- 3 Fellowship Square and Walthamstow Assembly Hall
- 4 William Morris Gallery
- 5 Blackhorse Lane Creative Enterprise Zone
- 6 Walthamstow Wetlands
- 7 Soho Theatre Walthamstow
- 8 Vestry House Museum
- 9 Lea Valley Regional Park
- 10 Lea Bridge Library
- 11 Leyton Orient FC
- 12 Good Shepherd Studios
- 13 Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park



Our Journey

2009

First cultural strategy published



£6.4m Heritage Lottery Fund to improve access to and interpretation at Epping Forest

2010

£5.2m invested in the William Morris Gallery for complete refurbishment



2012

Cultural Olympiad, Waltham Forest is an Olympic borough

2013

Arts and Culture grants established, now called Make it Happen.



William Morris Gallery wins first Art Fund Museum of the Year award



2014

First Walthamstow Garden Party in partnership with the Barbican

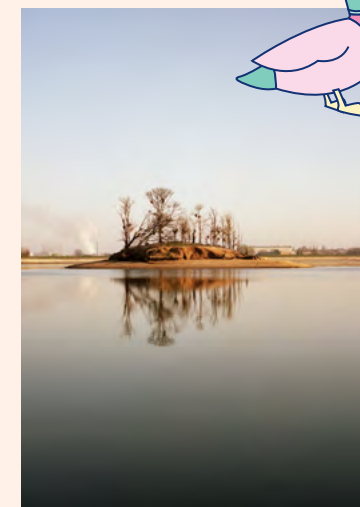
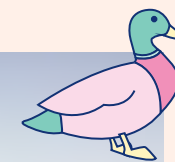
2017

Creative Connections, a 3-year participation programme, is awarded £1.36m through the Great Place Scheme



2018

Walthamstow Wetlands opens after a £10.6m investment by Waltham Forest Council, Thames Water, Heritage Lottery Fund and the Greater London Authority



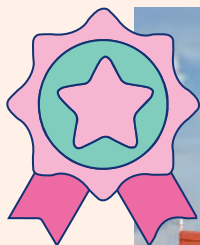
Launch of Making Places, a series of 20 creative public realm projects



2019

Waltham Forest becomes the first London Borough of Culture

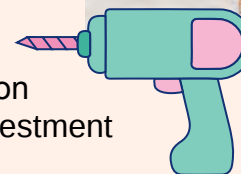
Launch of Cultural Education Partnership and Future Formed, which aims to support young people into paid work in the creative industries

**2021**

Blackhorse Lane is designated a Creative Enterprise Zone by the Mayor of London

Fellowship Square reopens to the public with a programme of events

Lea Bridge Library extension opens as part of a £4m investment in local libraries

**2023**

Walthamstow Culture For All awarded £17.7m of Levelling Up Fund

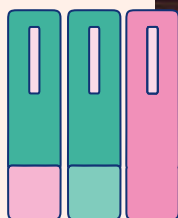
Chingford Mount and Highams Park awarded £10.3m of Levelling Up Fund

**2024**

Waltham Forest Archives move to Chingford Assembly Hall

2024/25

Coronation Square in Leyton opens

**2025**

Soho Theatre Walthamstow opens in the former Granada cinema after £30m+ Council investment

Walthamstow Assembly Hall reopens as a music and events venue

2026

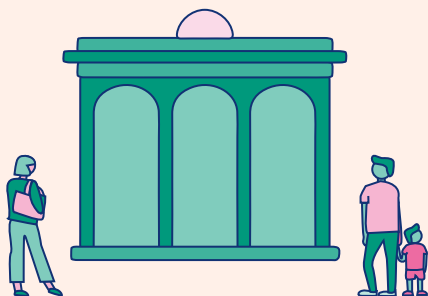
The Regal Cinema in Highams Park due to reopen

Vestry House Museum due to reopen following a revitalisation project

The New Standard opens as a cultural and music venue

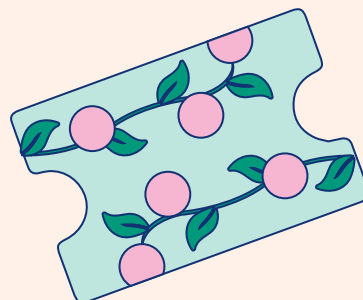


Our Story In Numbers



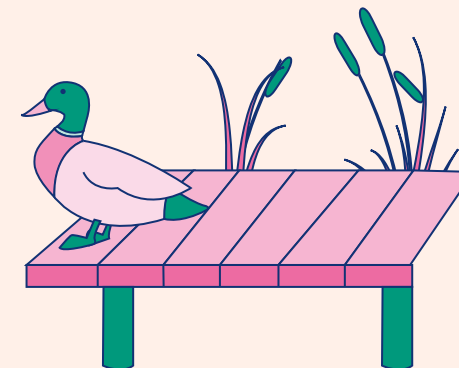
825,000

visits to culture events and venues in the last year



170,000

visitors to William Morris Gallery in 2023



450,000

visitors to Walthamstow Wetlands annually



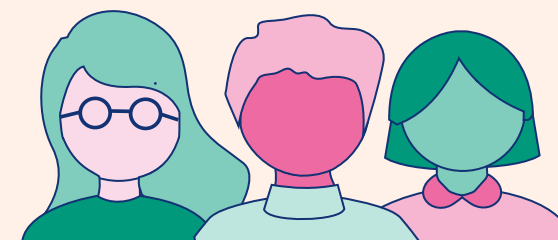
780

cultural events supported by the Council in 2023



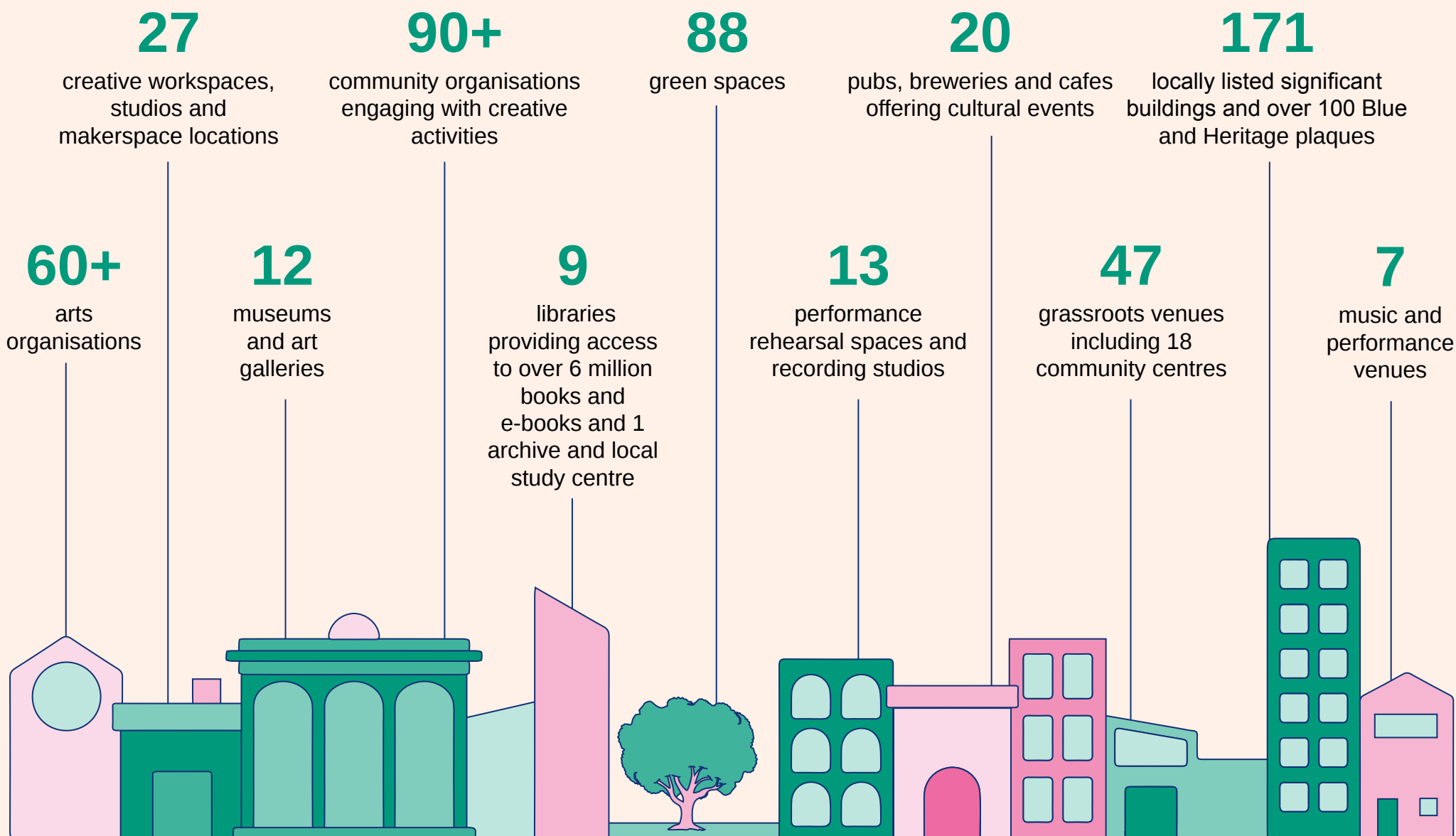
£1.3 million +

invested by the Council in arts and culture grants since 2013



640

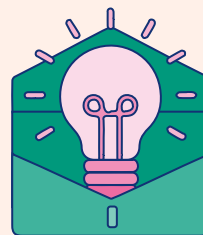
local creative people and enterprises provided support trading and performing in the last year





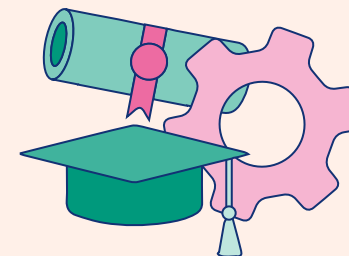
The Shade, Aldriche Way, Highams Park. Image courtesy of Build Up Foundation.

Our Story in Numbers



1,965

creative businesses



600+

training and skills opportunities
created at cultural sites and
events in 2023

2,500+

creative sector jobs

44%

increase in creative
sector jobs between
2015 – 2022 in
Waltham Forest

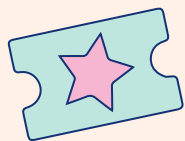


220

young residents have been
supported by paid opportunities
and training through our Future
Formed programme

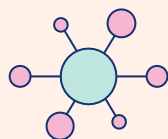
Building on our year as the first

London Borough of Culture



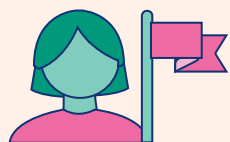
1,000+

events and activities



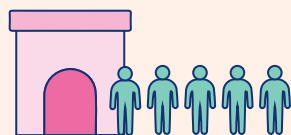
£200,000

in Make it Local Fellowship funding



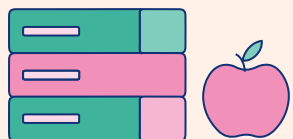
11,300+

hours provided by more than 1,000
Legends of the Forest volunteers



500,000

visits to London Borough
of Culture events



100%

of schools in Waltham Forest
engaged with the programme



64

Cultural Education Partnership
leads in our schools



Dobet Gnahore performs at Africa Express during London Borough of Culture 2019. Photo by Brendan Bell.

How we developed this action plan

This Cultural Action Plan has been shaped and informed by an extensive process of research and engagement.

We started with desk-research, reading local and national reports, strategies and cultural policies. Then, we engaged with Waltham Forest residents and our creative community to ensure the Cultural Action Plan was reflective of, and co-developed with, the whole borough and its diverse communities. This engagement process included residents, artists and creatives, businesses and the local cultural sector.

We did this through:

-  a digital survey
-  in-person focus groups
-  drop-in sessions in libraries, markets and community spaces
-  consultation meetings and workshops with cultural organisations and strategic partners
-  consultation meetings and workshops with colleagues and teams within the Council



1,200

people across the borough have helped us to shape this action plan



100

interviews with young people were conducted by our Streetbase team



30

teams across the Council were consulted on the action plan and co-designed specific actions



46

local cultural organisations and networks and strategic partners shared their views in meetings, workshops and focus groups



1,000

people responded to our digital survey



50+

reports, strategies and policy documents were consulted

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

This process has helped us to understand challenges faced by specific parts of our community and how culture might address them. It also helped us to put our local cultural and creative landscape in the wider context of London, and the UK. By understanding the distinctive character of culture and creativity in Waltham Forest and the local needs of our residents, we can target support and investment.

The actions laid out in this plan have been shaped collaboratively through consultation, workshops and focus groups. We recognise that the Council can not realise these actions alone. We will work in partnership with many organisations, residents and communities, and in a coordinated way across teams and services within the Council, to achieve its ambitions.



Liberty Festival 2019, Walthamstow.

How we will deliver and evaluate this plan

This Cultural Action Plan presents background information, sets out a vision and defines key areas of focus.

Each year, a detailed delivery plan will enable us to move forward with each action within a set timeframe. The delivery plan will focus actions on key cohorts each year of delivery, aligning with the Council's mission: A Preventative Approach to Stronger Communities.¹⁰

Based on progress, the Cultural Action Plan will be reviewed and updated annually, through an annual summary report which will be published on the Council's website. The annual report will include key actions delivered and measurable impact. It may amend or introduce priorities and actions responding to a changing environment and to new challenges and opportunities.



Shake the High Road, Leytonstone. Photo by John Williams.

“

In any community the arts and associated amenities, serious or comic, light or demanding, must occupy a central place. Their enjoyment should not be regarded as something remote from everyday life. Beginning in the schools and reaching out to every corner of the nation's life, in city and village, at home, at work, at play, there is an immense amount that could be done to improve the quality of contemporary life.

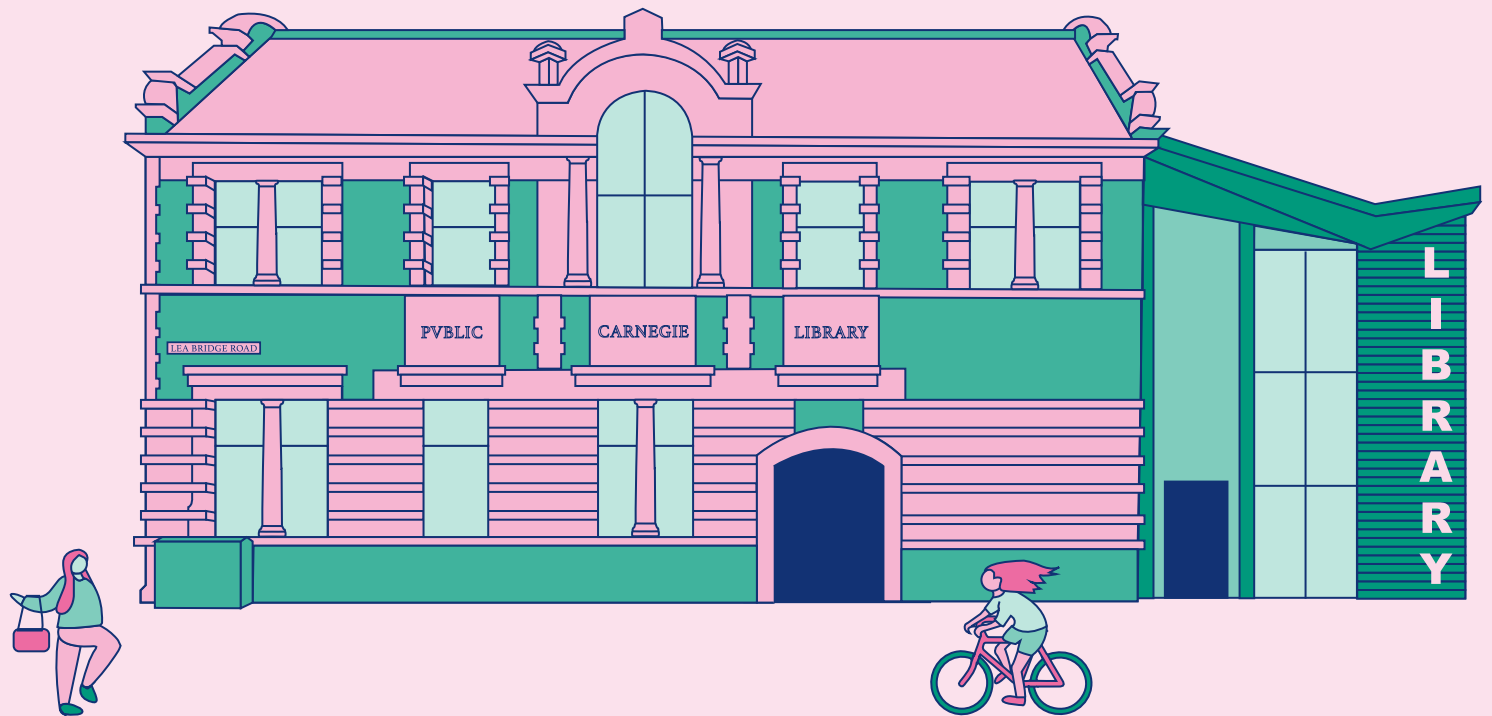
”

— *A Policy for the Arts*
(White Paper),
Jennie Lee, Presented to
Parliament 1965

Mural at Bell Corner, Walthamstow

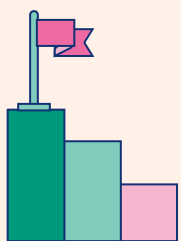


Action Areas



Lea Bridge Library, Lea Bridge.

Action Area 1: Community- powered Culture



OUR AIM

Our community has a central role in making decisions about culture. Increased community power and ownership results in programming and participation that is representative of, and responsive to, our diverse borough.

Mission Waltham Forest:

- Make Waltham Forest a great place to live and age well
- Ensure every family and every child are given every opportunity

Why it's important

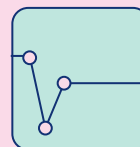
While there has been a sustained commitment to support and invest in culture in Waltham Forest, its benefits have not been equally felt across our communities. The most deprived parts of the borough lack spaces to make and experience culture. Engagement and participation substantially increased as a result of London Borough of Culture in 2019, but this was subsequently impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite significant progress, cultural participation is not fully reflective of the borough's demographics.

This is not unique to Waltham Forest. Nationally, there has been little change in cultural participation for the last 15 years despite it being an explicit priority across the sector. Unequal representation in the cultural and creative industries compounds imbalances in who makes, and makes decisions about, culture.



70%

of respondents to our survey considered the local community having a central role in shaping a priority. This was the 2nd highest priority.¹¹

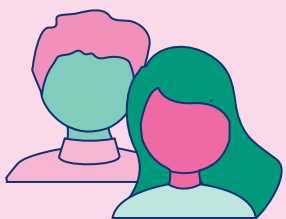


Nationally, the proportion and demographics of people participating in culture has not changed in the last 15 years.¹²

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

However, we found the words that people most associated with culture and creativity in Waltham Forest were 'diverse', 'inclusive' and 'community'. They described the grassroots and community-led nature of culture here as one of our most valuable assets.

Ensuring that our community has a central role in deciding what counts as culture, where it happens, who makes it and who experiences it requires a sustained and systemic shift. A shift which implicates models of governance, funding structures and how cultural value is measured and understood. A shift that is based on the strength of our relationships and which recognises and values the creative acts of all.



43%

of audience members for hero events during London Borough of Culture were non-white British.¹³

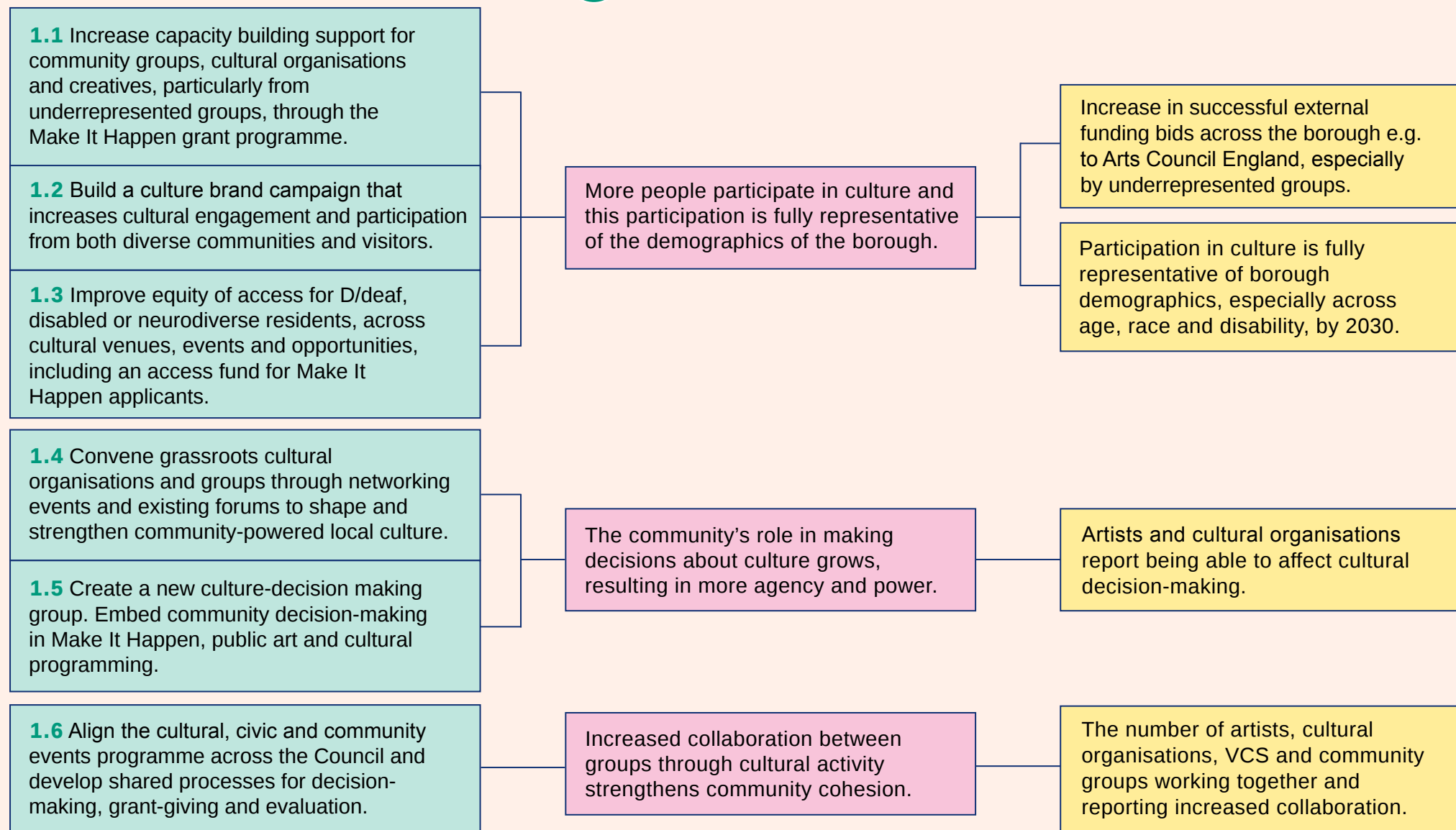


East Side Story by RAW Academy, Chingford Assembly Hall. Photo by Ellie Kurtz.

ACTIONS

OUTCOMES

KEY MEASURES





Thilini showcasing her Sri Lankan pumpkin curry recipe. Photo by Laura Martinez.

Case Study: Stories & Supper

Stories & Supper is an organisation that brings refugees, asylum seekers and local residents together over food and stories. We spoke to them about the role grassroots organisations play in creating cultural participation for all.

We create spaces of welcome and encounter where we can counteract negative narratives about migration. We run weekly creative workshops and allotment sessions, as well as hosting events such as supper clubs, story cafes and festival pop-ups.

We have been supported by Make it Happen grants twice. First, during London Borough of Culture which enabled us to publish our recipe book, which sold out. Then in 2023, which resulted in a series of cookery videos in which members share their favourite recipes as they talk about some of the challenges they have faced. This gave us the confidence to apply for Arts Council England funding, to develop an anthology of refugee writing.

“

We believe that providing spaces for refugees and asylum seekers to explore creativity with local residents is vital for wellbeing and engendering hope in difficult circumstances.

”

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

We currently host weekly creative workshops at the William Morris Gallery. For Refugee Week in June, we organised a set of activities sharing our message of hope and solidarity with visitors to the gallery.

This support has helped raise our profile and create more opportunities for the refugees and asylum seekers in our group. Creativity is key to our method of working. We believe that providing spaces for refugees and asylum seekers to explore creativity with local residents is vital for wellbeing and engendering hope in difficult circumstances. We hope that creating platforms for people with lived experience of forced migration to share their own stories helps to change narratives about migration.

Grassroots arts organisations and community groups have a strong understanding of the richness and vibrancy of creative output that already exists in the borough. It's important that the diversity of the borough is reflected and celebrated, especially marginalized groups that are often excluded from the arts. These organisations help to create opportunities for a wide range of people, not just those who know how to navigate systems of funding and support.

“

**When we are together, I think we can do more.
We can laugh more, ... we can develop our
story, we can become bigger.**

”

– Carine, *Refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Stories & Supper Trustee*

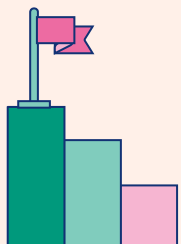


Thilini showcasing her Sri Lankan pumpkin curry recipe. Photo by Laura Martinez.



Walthamstow Market

Action Area 2: Creative Health and Wellbeing



OUR AIM

Residents' health and wellbeing is improved through cultural participation, fostering greater health equity.

Mission Waltham Forest:

- Make Waltham Forest a great place to live and age well
- Ensure every family and every child are given every opportunity

Why it's important

There is significant health inequality in Waltham Forest, as evidenced by the Marmot report. Life expectancy for residents in the south of Waltham Forest is up to 7 years lower than in the north.¹⁴

Being creative and taking part in cultural activities can keep us well, aid recovery from illness and contribute to longer, better lives. Creative health approaches can help meet major challenges such as health inequality, ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and poor mental health, and they can help save money in health and social care.



82%

After engaging with arts, 82% of people in deprived communities in London enjoyed greater wellbeing.¹⁵

With increased evidence of its benefits, creative health is a priority for Arts Council England and the Greater London Authority, with a major strategic focus on building London as a Creative Health City. The North-East London Integrated Care Board (ICB), which covers Waltham Forest, has a Creative Health Associate, one of only two in London. 59% of residents surveyed said culture and creativity supporting health and wellbeing should be a priority for the Council. It was their third highest priority out of 8 topics.

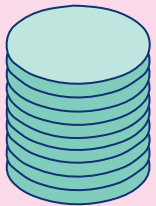
Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

In Waltham Forest we will embed culture and creativity into wider health strategies, programmes and spaces as part of a preventative approach to tackle inequalities.



46%

Dancing for older adults reduces the risk of cardiovascular death by 46%.¹⁶



£1.09 – £2.90

Arts-based social prescribing programmes have a social return on investment of £1.09-£2.90 for every £1 spent.¹⁷



Art Night at Walthamstow Trades Hall, London Borough of Culture 2019. Photo by Matt Rowe.

 ACTIONS

2.1 Map creative health provision and evidence-base in Waltham Forest, working with the Creative Health Associate at the North-East London ICB.

2.2 Co-locate culture and health provision through existing or new health and cultural spaces or Welcome Hubs.

2.3 Embed creative health provision in the redevelopment of Whipps Cross Hospital.

2.4 Increase creative mental health provision in collaboration with Public Health, through wellbeing cafes or Make It Happen grants.

2.5 Ensure older residents can participate in arts and culture. Increase the number of dementia-friendly cultural venues and activities.

2.6 Develop cultural social prescribing activities, by working closely with social prescribers and link workers and offering training and support to local cultural organisations.

 OUTCOMES

Culture is harnessed as a preventative driver for better health. New evidence and creative health mapping drives future funding opportunities.

Culture supports greater health equity and better health outcomes, especially for cohorts with the greatest need

 KEY MEASURES

50% of respondents report improvement in mental health and wellbeing after cultural participation.

Participation in creative health activities increases every year. There are more referrals to cultural activities through social prescribing.



Case Study: Kazzum Arts

Kazzum Arts is a charity who use creativity to enable children and young people who have been impacted by trauma and adversity to feel seen, heard and valued. They do this by providing opportunities to explore creative expression and agency through multidisciplinary arts activities. We spoke to them about how culture and creativity can support better health outcomes.

In Waltham Forest we run a project called Apollo. Apollo is one of our longest-standing programmes and takes place on the Acorn Ward at Whipps Cross Hospital. We were funded by Waltham Forest Council for our work on the ward in 2021-22. This took the form of 3 week-long residencies. Workshops gave children and young people in hospital access to creative art activities with skilled practitioners. We then used the work created by children to enliven the hospital environment.

“

These activities are really good. My child is nervous in hospital, so this is helping her and other children to relax. Kazzum should be here every day to do activities like this.

”

– Apollo Participant Parent

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

The project had a positive impact on participants, helping them to feel calmer and happier while in hospital.

A hospital stay can be a source of great anxiety and isolation for children and young people. They may be admitted to a hospital ward, to stay for an extended period of time without the comfort of a home environment that they are used to. Children can feel lonely, excluded, scared and stressed, increasing the likelihood of experiencing mental ill-health. Arts based workshops can be critical in reducing isolation and increasing wellbeing for children undergoing treatment.

One cultural or creative thing we would like to see happen in Waltham Forest by 2030 is to have a permanent and ongoing presence at Whipps Cross Hospital. To extend what we do across the hospital to support more children and their families in this way.

“

My favourite activity was making balloons and writing a story, because I felt like I was at home and trying something new. It made me feel happy.

”

– Apollo Participant



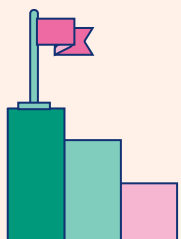
Photos by Becky Bailey. Courtesy of Kazzum Arts



Bob & Roberta Smith outside William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow.

Action Area 3:

Creative Education, Skills and Jobs



OUR AIM

Residents, particularly those who face added barriers, have the skills and experience they need to access good jobs in the creative sector. Their confidence and employment prospects improve so they can get the creative jobs they want, within and beyond the borough.

Mission Waltham Forest:

- Build an economy that works for everyone
- Ensure every family and every child are given every opportunity

Why it's important

Waltham Forest has a younger population than the London average; 30% of our population is under 30. Local young people have told us they want more paid opportunities in the culture and creative sector.

Unemployment and low-quality work is closely linked to deprivation and inequality. It disproportionality impacts those from a global majority background; the unemployment rate for global majority residents not born in the UK is four times higher than white, UK-born residents.¹⁸

The creative sector is experiencing skills gaps and shortages, with almost half of employers reporting skills issues. It struggles to be representative of the population. 52% of the national workforce in the creative industries are from a high socio-economic background, and just 24.5% of creative jobs in London are held by people from a global majority background.



1 in 5

jobs in London are in the creative industries.¹⁹



44%

increase in creative sector jobs in Waltham Forest (2015-2022), higher than the 29% increase across London.²⁰

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

Here in Waltham Forest, the majority of our 1,965 creative businesses are sole-traders or micro-businesses (less than 9 employees). They often need support to offer training and employment opportunities. Beyond the borough, there are key creative clusters on our doorstep: East Bank in the Olympic Park, the wider Lea Valley and the Thames Estuary Creative Corridor.

Creative education, upskilling young people and breaking down barriers to create more equitable routes into the creative industries are a key policy priority. Schools and further education colleges in the borough told us that to develop a relevant creative curriculum they need close collaboration with creative businesses. Our Cultural Education Partnership, a legacy of London Borough of Culture, has a key part to play in this.



42%

of employers in creative industries in the UK are reporting skills shortages.²¹



Atomic 50, Blackhorse Worksho. Photo by Ellie Kurtz.

ACTIONS

OUTCOMES

KEY MEASURES

3.1 Through the Cultural Education Partnership, increase children's access to creative education and support curriculum development, reactivating culture leads in every school.

3.2 Develop creative skills in children and young people through our cultural sites and cultural programming, building on initiatives such as Future Formed.

3.3 Increase training and job opportunities for residents, particularly diverse young people and residents with SEND:

- i.** through social value procurement and agreements with operators and suppliers;
- ii.** by supporting local creative businesses to offer educational, training and job opportunities;
- iii.** by brokering strategic partnerships with city-wide and regional institutions e.g. East Bank, Upper Lea Valley

3.4 Integrate youth-led cultural programming and decision-making into events and spaces.

Education, skills and careers opportunities are coordinated from early years to adulthood to give residents the best route into creative jobs.

More diverse young people are accessing creative jobs and opportunities. They take an active role in local cultural programming, fostering an inclusive creative sector.

Increase in pupils and students visiting cultural events and venues.

More children and young people participate in creative activities, in and out of educational settings.

Increased number of partners offering education, training, skills and employment opportunities in the creative sector.

Increase in residents accessing skills and employment opportunities in the creative sector, especially diverse young people.

Case Study:

Shakira Crawford

Future Formed participant

Future Formed is a programme that offers Waltham Forest residents insight and exposure to the creative industries and aims to support participants into paid work. We spoke to Shakira Crawford, a participant in Future Formed, about the importance of creating skills and jobs opportunities for young people to get into creative jobs.

I'm Shakira Crawford. I started with the Future Formed programme in 2022. I now work in events and have experience as a podcast producer, co-host, sound engineer, editor and assistant stage manager.

Only a couple of years ago, I was a single parent with no real aspirations. I never knew what I wanted to do for work, nothing lit a fire in me. Attending Set Ready training as part of Future Formed gave me my answer. I was placed on a TV set and then went on to do paid work on cultural events in the borough. Future Formed helped me get a role as an assistant stage manager for the Jacksons Lane theatre production of Jack and the Beanstalk. Then I went on to be a co-producer on a podcast called Oh Pod! From there I've been a producer on podcasts and short films and became a board member for a local film CIC The Digital Story Company.



Photo by Kaveh Rahnama

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

Being involved in Future Formed helped build my confidence and skills greatly. They go above and beyond and have a real impact on individual lives. Discovering the possibility of working in a creative field changed my life more than I ever thought possible. I can't imagine doing anything other than working creatively and fortunately, Waltham Forest is a good place for opportunities.

Supporting residents who feel alone, think they're not smart enough or good enough, lack motivation and direction, is so important. These feelings of inadequacy or lack of opportunity can take a toll on someone's life but the silver lining is there is time to change it. Work programmes like Future Formed are so necessary in helping young individuals realise their potential and actually get them to take the steps they need to improve their lives.

By 2030, I'd like to see more exposure for work opportunities in the creative field. I never knew it was a possibility for me and I've spoken to younger individuals who are also in the dark that it is possible to make a living using your creativity. In my opinion, harnessing your creativity leads to a happier, healthier mind. There are so many different avenues to discover if you walk the creative route.

“

By 2030, I'd like to see more exposure for work opportunities in the creative field. I never knew it was a possibility for me [...] In my opinion, harnessing your creativity leads to a happier, healthier mind.

”



Photo by Marie Horner



Photo by Mike Wornell



Virtual Collaborators Festival. Photo by Alessandra Davison.

Case Study:

Danusia Samal

Participant in Soho Theatre Writer's Lab

Soho Theatre Walthamstow will open in 2025. Danusia Samal has been working with Soho Theatre in the borough since 2018 and went on to be commissioned as part of their Soho Six programme. We spoke to her about the important role they have played in nurturing creatives in the borough.

I am Danusia — an actor, writer and campaigner. I work in the TV and theatre industry and do work to create a green screen industry. My background is in community work, and I sometimes organise events and support other artists to produce new work.

I have organised a number of events in the borough and taken part in creative schemes offered by Waltham Forest Council. I have always felt that the borough is supportive of artists.

Over 7 years in the borough I've grown from organising my first live event to writing for critically acclaimed TV shows. First, I started regular scratch night called The Leytonstone Itch. I then went on to collaborate with Soho Theatre to write a theatre show in and around Langthorne Park. In 2018, I performed my self-written show at the HighTide Festival in Walthamstow. In 2020, I led the ambitious Virtual Collaborators festival in Leytonstone. It was one of the first events

to take place post-Covid. Supported by Arts Council England, it involved 100 artists who had collaborated together online during lockdown.

In late 2022, I founded the Green Rider campaign. It is a rapidly growing initiative to encourage actors and productions to collaborate to reduce emissions on set. The project has been trialed on 4 major TV shows, supporters range from Bill Nighy to Paapa Essiedu. I believe I owe a lot of the organising skills behind Green Rider to projects I have run in Waltham Forest.

The Soho Theatre project was one of my first professional writing commissions, and I learned a lot from the experience. I have gone on to win the Theatre503 International Playwriting Award (2018), have been shortlisted for the Gregory Divine Award (2020), and have written on critically acclaimed TV shows including Bodies (Netflix) and Gangs of London (Sky).

Being a freelance artist means you're often travelling to where the work is. Having support close to home was invaluable to me as an early-career artist. It helped me build connections to other creatives in my area and tap into many creative and learning opportunities available.

With large-scale venues like Soho Theatre now finding a home in Walthamstow, I'd love to see a creative festival made in with local communities, on their doorstep. It's important that these venues don't just bring in visitors, but they support the creative lives of residents!



Virtual Collaborators Festival. Photo by Alessandra Davison.

“

Having support close to home was invaluable to me as an early-career artist. It helped me build connections to other creatives in my area and tap into many creative and learning opportunities available.

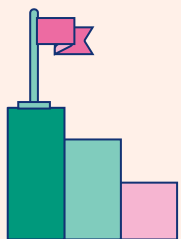
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Fellowship Feast, Fellowship Square, Walthamstow

Action Area 4:

Cultural Infrastructure and the Creative Economy



OUR AIM

Creatives and creative businesses have the space and support they need for inclusive growth. Cultural infrastructure is sustained and increased, and revenue from cultural sites is re-invested in grassroots culture and creativity.

Mission Waltham Forest:

- Build an economy that works for everyone
- Create safe, green neighbourhoods where everyone can thrive

Why it's important

To provide cultural opportunities for all residents, we need the right spaces to create and experience culture across the borough. Our creative community has told us that access to affordable creative space is the support it needs most. We know that the provision of cultural infrastructure is heavily concentrated in Walthamstow. The five most deprived wards in the borough have relatively few spaces for residents to experience and enjoy culture.

National investment in culture has reduced by 40% in the last 15 years. Couple this with the legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic, soaring energy and rent prices, and cultural venues are finding it difficult to survive. We face the same conundrum in Waltham Forest, how to maintain and develop a diverse mix of spaces for culture to be made and experienced within these harsh economic realities. We need a variety of cultural spaces, some of which are highly specialised like recording studios. There is a continual tension for cultural and creative spaces to find operating models that balance financial viability with the civic and social value they offer.



70%

The top priority for supporting creatives was more affordable creative spaces.²²



76%

of respondents to our survey feel there are cultural and creative spaces and events for them to enjoy.²³

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

We will rethink the long-term funding and operating models of cultural spaces to ensure longevity and security. This requires innovative approaches at policy and planning level to protect and grow cultural and creative uses across existing spaces, as well as targeted support for the sector to develop business and operational models which can unlock and sustain spaces.

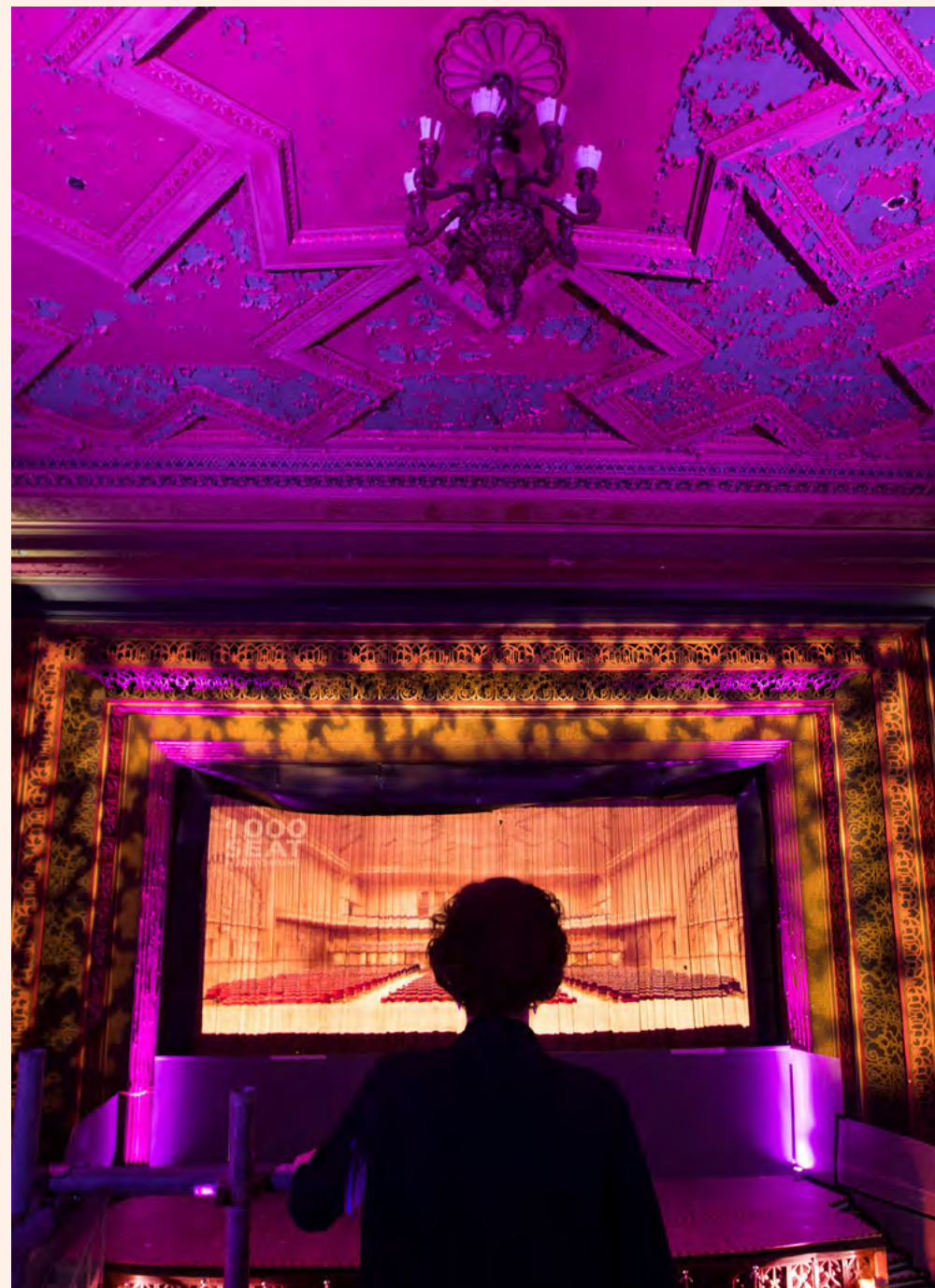
We will address the imbalance of cultural infrastructure across the borough. This will involve making better use of community spaces, civic buildings and outdoor spaces, or locating cultural uses within Welcome Hubs, a new initiative to co-locate a range of council services to help those most in need. Programming and meanwhile use of unconventional spaces can help seed future uses, developing a pipeline which is shaped by and embedded in the communities it serves, as well as harnessing the power culture has to make the case for inward investment.

Waltham Forest will deliver an ambitious transformation of cultural sites which aims to bring buildings across the borough back into use through specialist operators. Our ambition is to create a funding model which reinvests revenue from these sites into grassroots culture, via a Local Cultural Fund.



2 NPOs

We only have 2 National Portfolio Organisations, funded by Arts Council England, which puts us in the lowest 20% of all London Boroughs.²⁴



Former EMD/Granada Cinema, opening as Soho Theatre Walthamstow in 2025

ACTIONS

4.1 Develop cultural sites into assets that meet the needs of local creative enterprises and create tangible impact for residents. Work with specialist operators to maximise the potential of these spaces.

4.2 Identify and retain 'at risk' cultural infrastructure working with internal and external stakeholders. Leverage our Local Plan to develop, enhance and protect cultural infrastructure.

4.3 Implement a directory of spaces and booking system which enables commercial and community uses of council assets and other venues. For example, commercial hires for film and TV through our film office.

4.4 Develop cultural tourism through our culture campaign, working with local and strategic partners such as London & Partners to bring visitors and investors to the borough.

4.5 Create a Local Cultural Fund, where revenue shares from cultural site operators and commercial events funds cultural participation.

4.6 Signpost cultural and creative organisations to relevant business support including through the delivery of the Blackhorse Lane Creative Enterprise Zone programme:

- i. access to public procurement
- ii. mentoring and networking
- iii. training and capacity building to attract external funding

OUTCOMES

Cultural infrastructure is protected and grown. Existing spaces are better used and generate additional income, to re-invest in our communities.

Waltham Forest is recognised as a place to make and experience exceptional culture and creativity.

Increased investment and business opportunities for local creative enterprises results in inclusive sector growth, with funds reinvested in cultural participation.

KEY MEASURES

Net increase of cultural infrastructure and of spaces offering cultural opportunities across the borough.

Blackhorse Lane Creative Enterprise Zone is established as a hub for creative innovation and inclusive growth. Business support, training and jobs for all those wanting to pursue a career in the creative sector are provided through partners.

Increased visitor footfall and spend.

1% of turnover generated by commercial operators and events is re-invested in cultural participation via a Local Cultural Fund.

Increase in local enterprises provided support, trading and artistic opportunities at events and venues.



Teresa Rivera and Grant Wilkinson. Photo by Zelig Lockhart.

Case Study:

Wilkinson & Rivera

Design studio, based at Blackhorse Workshop

Blackhorse Workshop opened in 2014. It is a social enterprise dedicated to making, offering easy access to a fully equipped wood and metal workshop that's open to all. We spoke to Wilkinson & Rivera who founded their multidisciplinary design studio there in 2021 about the vital role the workshop plays.

At Wilkinson & Rivera we design and manufacture contemporary furniture and homeware, with a focus on traditional processes and materiality.

We lived in Walthamstow and our studio began here in Blackhorse Workshop in 2021. Before becoming a member, I had been a carpenter for five years. We became parents in 2020 and my job at the time as a set builder was a profession that requires incredibly long hours. The workshop answered a question I'd had my whole working life, of how to establish my own practice and create my own work.

It is near impossible to find access to a workshop in London. Blackhorse Workshop is one of few places where this is possible. Discovering the workshop at the time felt near miraculous. With access to a fully-equipped wood workshop, my partner and I were

able to design and create our first piece of furniture. I have worked full-time for Wilkinson & Riveria ever since and have now developed a body of work. As we have become more established in the design world, we've found almost everyone knows the workshop. Half of them have used it at some point or started their practices here.

For us, the workshop itself is a cultural hub. Their work in opening opportunities to local residents who would otherwise be unlikely to gain practical skills is exceptional. The worlds of design and craft are often insular and difficult to access. By offering affordable courses and access to skills, the workshop makes a profound difference to residents' lives and career trajectories.

Waltham Forest is a really diverse area, and the design industry is not. Seeing groups of teenagers come here and develop skills, particularly through Blackhorse Responders, is a rare and inspiring sight. It's important that young people of all demographics know about, and have access to, the wealth of opportunity open to them in the design world.

Equally, the workshop hosts coffee-morning events for elderly residents, where they can find a community centered around crafts. The cafe hosts all kinds of events which draw in local residents - in the last few years we've seen the workshop transform into a diverse hub for the local area. I'd love to see it continue to grow and for more people across the borough to be able to know about it.

“

For us, the workshop itself is a cultural hub. Their work in opening opportunities to local residents who would otherwise be unlikely to gain practical skills is exceptional. The worlds of design and craft are often insular and difficult to access. By offering affordable courses and access to skills, the workshop makes a profound difference to residents' lives and career trajectories.

”



Image courtesy of Blackhorse Workshop.



Dialled In the Park. Photo by Mike Portlock.

Case Study: Dialled In

Dialled In is a south asian-focused arts and culture organisation who have been working in the borough since 2021. We spoke to them about the importance of supporting arts organisations to grow and develop

Dialled In serves communities that have long been marginalised in society. This includes Black individuals, people of colour, and migrant communities and working-class, disabled, queer, and/or trans people within these communities. Our overarching goal is to effect structural change within these communities. Ultimately, leading to a proliferation of nuanced narratives from marginalised perspectives.

We strive to provide artists with the resources, collaboration and support systems they need to thrive in the creative industries. Our vision is to empower these creatives to navigate, collaborate, and exert influence within the mainstream creative landscape.

Our relationship with culture and creativity in Waltham Forest is deep and symbiotic. The south asian-focused arts and cultural festivals we have organised in the borough aimed to address the lack of resources and support for south asian creatives. These events have been deeply collaborative and have drawn robust local participation. Dialled In the Park, which took place in Lloyd Park and William Morris Gallery, drew record breaking gallery visitors and energized the local economy. The festival led to more nuanced and diverse narratives within the arts in the borough.

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

Internally, our team has expanded with new roles. This growth has streamlined our processes and bolstered our ability to execute and promote large-scale events.

Working with Waltham Forest gave us the sturdy foundations to build properly. The most important thing that has happened as a result of our collaboration with Waltham Forest is that Dialled In has become an NPO organisation, funded year-on-year by Arts Council England.

We see Waltham Forest's commitment to providing spaces and support for artists, creatives, and creative businesses as crucial for several reasons. When artists and creatives have the resources they need, they contribute to a vibrant cultural landscape, offering diverse and enriching experiences for the community. This brings people together, fostering social connections and bridging gaps between different demographic groups.

Dedicated spaces and support systems ensure that underrepresented and marginalised groups have platforms to express their voices and share their stories. This inclusivity enriches the cultural tapestry of Waltham Forest and promotes equity.

Creative industries can drive economic development: attracting tourism, generating local jobs, and stimulating the economy. Artists and creative businesses often bring fresh perspectives and solutions to social and environmental challenges. Providing support and spaces for them encourages this innovation.

Additionally, when creative spaces provide educational opportunities, they can inspire and nurture the next generation of creatives. When it comes to Dialled In, we hope in the long-term that the borough will become the centre point of our global music academy.



Nayanalz performing at Dialled In. Image courtesy of Dialled In.

“

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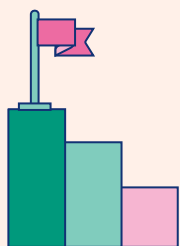
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Nao performing at Chingfest 2019, Ridgeway Park, Chingford. Photo by Andrew Baker.

Action Area 5:

Creative Neighbourhoods



OUR AIM

Our neighbourhoods are enriched through culture and creativity, nurturing a sense of belonging and togetherness. Each neighbourhood has the support it needs to sustain a thriving creative community, that can activate spaces and lead creative programming which is distinctive of their place.

Mission Waltham Forest:

- Create safe, green neighbourhoods where everyone can thrive
- Tackling the housing crisis head on
- Make Waltham Forest a great place to live and age well

Why it's important

Our residents' priority is to enjoy safer and vibrant neighbourhoods, and this can be achieved through cultural activations. Culture and creativity can nurture a sense of belonging and togetherness, offering opportunities to come together, share experiences and develop relationships with each other.

We need to support creative ecosystems which are distinctive to the people, businesses, spaces, histories and experiences that make up each neighbourhood, from Leyton to Leytonstone and Walthamstow to Chingford. It is these creative networks that can develop cultural activities that suit their place best.

We know that cultural infrastructure and experience is uneven across our neighbourhoods. This means we need to activate existing spaces in new ways. These might not be spaces traditionally associated with culture, such as businesses on our high streets, vacant buildings, housing estates, civic buildings and open spaces.



40%

of respondents to our survey said they would participate in culture more if it was closer to where they live.²⁵



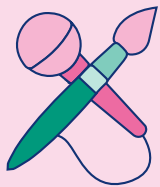
62%

of UK adults agree that cultural experiences on the high street give them a sense of pride about their local area.²⁶

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

We know that culture and creativity have brought investment and opportunities for new homes to the borough. Culture plays an ongoing and vital role in bringing new residents together with existing communities and making their neighbourhoods welcoming and vibrant.

At the neighbourhood scale, culture and creativity can make the biggest impact on issues such as community safety and social inclusion. They can change the perception of a neighbourhood for those who live there or visit. This can have an economic ripple effect, bringing opportunities and investment for local businesses and residents with it. It is essential to ensure this social and economic value sustains the neighbourhood and community who created it.



18%

Young offenders who take part in arts activities are 18% less likely to re-offend.²⁷



Ways of Seeing, London Borough of Culture 2019. Photo by Thierry Bal.

ACTIONS

5.1 Map each neighbourhood with residents and the creative community, to understand the local creative ecosystem and inform distinctive cultural programming in each area.

5.2 Co-create a local festival programme, distinctive to each area. Working with Area Regeneration to support cultural activations on our high streets, in our town centres, in our housing estates and across industrial locations.

5.3 Identify specific areas where cultural projects and public art can contribute to community safety e.g. anti-social behaviour hotspot areas in Leyton.

5.4 Identify and unlock existing spaces within neighbourhoods for cultural and creative uses. This may include night-time activations, extended opening hours, meanwhile use and collaborative projects with local businesses and housing associations..

5.5 Work jointly with Libraries team to seek funding for a cultural programme within Libraries/Welcome Hubs. Develop bid-writing skills within the Libraries team, with a long-term ambition to apply for Arts Council England NPO for one library

5.6 Activate open and green spaces through cultural programming and commercial festivals. With the aim of encouraging physical activity, improving safety and increasing revenue.

OUTCOMES

A thriving creative community in each neighbourhood delivers cultural activities.

Improved community safety and social cohesion through culture, creating a sense of belonging and togetherness.

Creative activities increase footfall for businesses, build social capital and support vibrant town centres and housing estates.

KEY MEASURES

Number of cultural activities happening in each neighbourhood.

Residents report an increased sense of safety, cohesion and belonging, through cultural participation.

Creative activities bring more footfall and local economic benefit to each neighbourhood.



Images courtesy of Highams Park Planning Group

Case Study: Highams Park Arts & Culture group

The Highams Park Arts & Culture group (ARC) is a working group under Highams Park Planning Group (HPPG). It started 10 years ago as a lot of people felt there was a need to support arts and artists in Highams Park. Now there are about 200 members and a central organising group of four. We spoke to them about their work.

The annual Highams Park Arts Trail is one of our biggest projects, with more than 50 artists involved in each edition. We've really seen the audience grow since it started, now it's established people put it in their calendars. We've done a whole range of projects and activities across the last 10 years. We have commissioned public art, including an animal sculpture trail connecting art and nature and a number of different murals across the neighbourhood. We have a rotating exhibition showcasing different artists in Hale End Library. We organise five concerts a year across different types of music. We've also been involved in creating community spaces that are used for creative and cultural activities. The planning group set up a community space called Station Rooms and refurbished, and now run, Humphry's café, a community café and space in the park which hosts creative activities and exhibitions of local artists.

As a result of the Arts & Culture group coming together, we've seen other cultural groups form and activities start happening. For example, we started Highams Park Creatives. There are now regular pottery classes and a knitting group. So much has come out of bringing the creative community together and connecting them up with businesses and other parts of the community through the wider network of HPPG. We use community assets like the library, Humphry's cafe, pubs and shops - that brings different groups of people into those spaces.

We run the group in an inclusive way. There are AGMs of the whole planning group to share views and make decisions together. The working groups meet regularly, and we have three ARC socials a year so that people can meet and find out more about getting involved. The art trail always has an open call, so anyone can get involved. Last year the theme was community – that was about inviting people to interpret what community means to them.

Arts and culture can give people that sense of ownership and pride in the area they live in. For example, through creating new public art and community landmarks that celebrate history and heritage, but also through telling stories and learning together. We'd love to transform the walkway in the station into an interactive creative experience for the community and we're working on a project to reimagine the station carpark, hopefully with some eco-pods that local start-up businesses can benefit from!



Images courtesy of Highams Park Planning Group

“

Arts and culture can give people that sense of ownership and pride in the area they live in. For example, through creating new public art and community landmarks that celebrate history and heritage, but also through telling stories and learning together.

”



Photo by Gar Powell-Evans.

Case Study:

Leytonstone Loves Film

Leytonstone Loves Film started during London Borough of Culture as a partnership between the Barbican and a network of local partners and creatives. We spoke to Danie Gilbert, one of the founders of Good Shepherd Studios in Leytonstone about the festival and its legacy.

I'm Danie Gilbert, I'm one of the founders of Good Shepherd Studios and the non-profit side of that called We Flock CIC which supports the community to come together and ensures that the space serves the community's creative needs.

Leytonstone Loves Film celebrated the presence of film in the borough, and in Leytonstone in particular. There's a history of film - Alfred Hitchcock was born in Leytonstone - but the festival was also about the strong film culture here in the present day. There were three editions and then to leave a legacy behind a fund and a venue guide that local film enthusiasts could use to screen or make films.

Good Shepherd Studios were a hosting venue for Leytonstone Loves Film and I was one of the panelists for their community fund. On a personal level, being involved changed my perspective. I'd describe my relationship to film before as quite passive, but through the festival I gained an understanding of the depth and breadth of film and how

film is made. From the perspective of the building, it opened our eyes into how we can provide a cinema for locals. We now have two amazing screens and projectors which allow us to offer film screenings. We're seeing members who are interested in film and want to use the space to screen films, watch films and talk about film. For example, tomorrow we have a youth screening and this Thursday there will be a Turkish film screening which will bring the Turkish community together with the wider Leytonstone community.

It's so important for culture and creativity to be present in our neighbourhoods. I use the example of children, because I've been a teacher for quite a few years – working with music and singing. There is an opportunity to see or experience things and this can change what happens to us in the future. We might have the next Alfred Hitchcock here who wouldn't get there unless they experience certain things as a child. On the other end of the spectrum, we have a lot of people come to Good Shepherd who have a certain creative interest that they haven't been able to explore in their younger years. Then we have people where creativity is their craft, their livelihood. They are all here together. I think anything where people come together will combat some element of loneliness and increase connection through commonality.

It's not just about a warm fuzzy feeling though, it contributes to education, progression and the economy. Helping us bring life to an area.

I'd love to see more freedom to pursue creative interests no matter what your circumstances are. That there is a universal entitlement to cultural experiences. It could be people contributing towards those who can't afford certain things, like going to the cinema, to be able to access creativity.



Photo by Gar Powell-Evans.



WALTHAM FOREST HERITAGE



JAMMER

British Grime pioneer, MC, and Producer grew up here.

Best known for being a member of

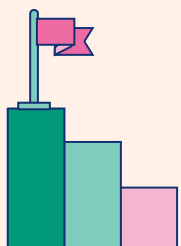
Boy Better Know and a former member of Nasty Crew.

**Lord of the M.I.C.S was founded
in the basement of this house in 2003.**



Jammer, pioneer of British Grime at Chingfest 2019. Photo by Andrew Baker.

Action Area 6: Culture and Climate



OUR AIM

Our creative communities play a key role in collective climate action in Waltham Forest. Our cultural sites operate in low and zero carbon ways. Our creative sector is equipped to respond to climate emergency and our communities can draw on creativity to support local climate action.

Mission Waltham Forest:

- Lead the way for a net-zero borough
- Create safe, green neighbourhoods where everyone can thrive

Why it's important

In 2019, Waltham Forest declared a climate emergency and climate action is a key priority for the borough. Our residents are seeing the impacts of climate crisis locally and 90% of them are concerned about it.

To meet this challenge, all sectors must radically decarbonise and act to halt biodiversity loss. Culture and the creative industries are no exception. In Waltham Forest, 17% of businesses are creative businesses. This means supporting and equipping them to decarbonise makes a significant contribution towards our net zero targets.

However, the contribution that culture and creativity can make goes beyond technical and operational change. They have a wider role to play in raising awareness, encouraging shifts in behaviour and transforming our collective imagination.



9 out of 10

our residents are concerned about climate crisis.²⁸



7 out of 10

think climate change is affecting their local area.²⁹

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

There is huge potential for nature-based cultural activities across the borough. A fifth of the borough is made up of green spaces, with the ambition to increase this to 40% by 2030. However, access to nature is not equal. Offering creative experiences in these spaces can encourage our residents to spend more time in nature and increase their awareness and agency around climate and environmental action.

Embedding cultural responses and creative approaches in place-based climate action can help to bring people together around complex and interconnected issues. For example, food waste is an emissions issue but also intersects with human health, social justice and complex economic supply chains. Many examples of creative climate action demonstrate the role creativity, and creatives, can play in transformative action, particularly at a hyperlocal scale. We know this role is not always obvious, so we need to advocate for and build up evidence of the vital contribution culture can make.



GIANT being performed in Highams Park. Photo by Andrew Baker.

 ACTIONS

6.1 Establish baseline data for council-owned cultural sites and events to inform net zero targets and plans. Pilot calculating emissions with key cultural sites and events, to inform wider support across the borough.

6.2 Develop low and zero carbon cultural infrastructure. Through capital projects, environmental management plans and embedding green infrastructure in temporary event spaces e.g. parks, public realm.

6.3 Increase climate and environmental literacy amongst cultural organisations and creative enterprises through Carbon Literacy Training and signposting to specific guidance, tools, networks and funding.

6.4 Make changes in our own commissioning, procurement and grant funding models to support environmental sustainability and climate action.

6.5 Devise joint creative interventions to support awareness raising and behavioural change initiatives. Identify specific opportunities for creative enterprises in key industries (e.g. fashion and textiles, making and manufacturing) to develop innovative responses to environmental issues.

 OUTCOMES

Net zero cultural infrastructure and events in the borough.

Our creative enterprises and cultural organisations are equipped to respond to climate and ecological emergency. They have access to the knowledge, skills, networks and investment to do so.

Our communities draw on creativity, and creatives, to support local climate action.

 KEY MEASURES

Reduction in carbon emissions across cultural sites and events in line with emissions targets set in our Climate Action Plan.

Increase in creative businesses and cultural organisations operating in the borough who are equipped to monitor and reduce their environmental impact.

Increased number of creative climate collaborations with a measurable impact on behavioural change



Case Study: thinkFOUND

We talked to Chris Barrett, the Director and Founder of thinkFOUND. They are a furniture company and a training body with creative climate action at their heart. They make furniture out of reclaimed materials at the same time as training young people.

We work with young people, SMEs, local organisations and many more across the borough to achieve our threefold mission.

- **thinkGREEN;** Reduce waste by reusing and recycling material for furniture production.
- **thinkSOCIAL;** Help those furthest from employment pathways achieve social mobility through work.
- **thinkFUTURE;** Provide further opportunities to young people and local enterprises and embedded circular economy and green practices.

We have our own product line and work on bespoke commercial projects too. We collaborate with councils and developers on community use areas and meanwhile spaces. In Waltham Forest this includes 228 Chingford Mount (a meanwhile space on the high street) and a parklet project. Last year we built a stage using reclaimed wood for Dialled In the Park festival. That project specifically worked with local south asian young people, who learnt how to work on a build for a live event from prototype to assembling the stage on site.

Creativity is the hook to get people into what we do, it's a big part of how we tell our story. Cultural events support our diversity and inclusion aims and build connections with larger companies, local service users and residents.

Last year we were awarded a Green New Deal grant through ReLondon. We've been working with Fallen and Felled, who are based in the borough. They source sustainable hardwood timber from trees which have fallen or been felled in and around London. 90% of these trees go into the waste stream as woodchip. Working with them we've diverted 2 tonnes of waste wood, developed a new range of premium products and supported 30 young people into employment and training.

We draw inspiration from William Morris; as a designer, social activist and pioneering environmentalist. In our work these things are intertwined. Small businesses like us can influence bigger industries, for example we work with social value teams in the construction and development industry to embed environmental and social impact. Educating and skilling up the next generation to have a reuse mentality is fundamental to what we do.

I'd like to see a circular economy hub happen in a retrofitted building to bring us together with other local like-minded initiatives. This would help to scale impact, inclusion, opportunities and investment.

“

Accessible climate action is at the heart of our work. It's not just how we source materials – we save emissions, support zero waste and respect the environment in all our choices. This includes the products we use, our processes, how we manage our workshop along with our suppliers, partners and how we deliver our products.

”



Images courtesy of thinkFOUND.



Case Study: Community Apothecary

Community Apothecary is a community herbalism project. We talked to them about the importance of spending time in nature to support collective action around climate and ecological crisis.

We run a plant medicine garden and work with the local community on collective medicine making. This includes sharing learning, knowledge and skills through courses, workshops and weekly herbal garden sessions.

We work at the intersection of land and ecosystem care, community health and wellbeing, and collective resource sharing. We seek to restore ancient practices of herbal medicine and healing through communal knowledge-sharing. This includes our cultural heritages, practices and our connections to the earth.

We support creative expression by bringing creative practices alongside our core activities of growing, gardening and medicine making. This includes crafting with materials from the land and sharing foods and remedies made by our participants. We find it exciting how centering and honouring the rich mix of cultures within this borough, helps us to explore our bonds and affinities through our healing traditions.

We have encountered, engaged, and continue to develop relationships with a range of community members in Waltham Forest. We have grown a 'family' of regulars who come to our medicine garden sites weekly. It is by working together that we continue to learn how to share resources better and deepen our connection with our local land. This exchange of care, knowledge and respect has strengthened our organisation's aims and development. Spending time in the garden together opens up possibilities for how we can all play a part changing the systems we live in, to create healthier futures.

Culture and creativity inspire, provoke and make us think. They help us imagine other realities and new ways of living. They give us hope in difficult times. They can also generate collective energy and action. Each of us has a particular creativity and an imaginative relationship with the world around us. The more we can share each other's visions, the stronger and more together we feel. This can do a lot to resist injustice, to work together, and share resources.

We would love to see regular gatherings in big open spaces where people come together in the spirit of mutual exchange, to share skills for healthier futures and the collective good. Our wish for Community Apothecary in the future is a 'community cookhouse'. A permanent space for collective creative activities that supply resources for the people, made by the people.



Photos by Rasheeqa Ahmad. Courtesy of Community Apothecary.

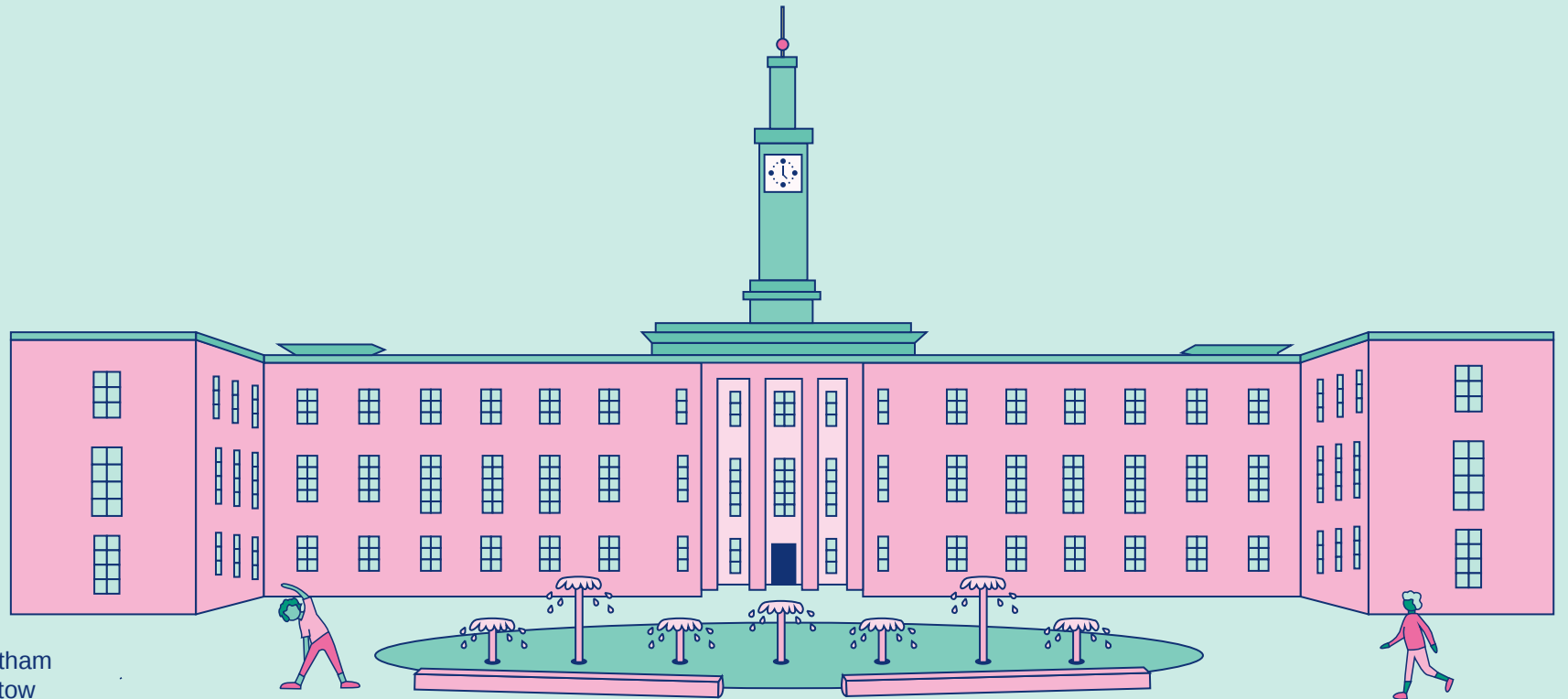
“

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”



Appendix



Fellowship Square, and Waltham
Forest Town Hall, Walthamstow

Glossary

Cultural democracy

The term Cultural Democracy describes an approach to arts and culture that actively engages everyone in deciding what counts as culture, where it happens, who makes it, and who experiences it.

(64 Million Artists)

Community cohesion

A cohesive community is one where there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities. The diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued. Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities and there are strong relationships between people from different backgrounds.

(Local Government Association)

Creative Health

Creative approaches and activities which have benefits for our health and wellbeing. This may include visual and performing arts, crafts, film, literature, cooking and creative activities in nature, such as gardening. Creative health activities involve creative and innovative approaches to health and care services involving co-production, education and workforce development.

(All Party Parliamentary Review on Creative Health)

Cultural infrastructure

The buildings, structures and spaces where culture is:

Consumed: Places where culture is experienced, participated in, showcased, exhibited or sold.

Produced: Places of creative production, where creative work is made, usually by artists, performers, makers, manufacturers or digital processes.

(Greater London Authority)

Creative economy

The creative economy describes the contribution that cultural and creative assets make to the economy. A common characteristic of definitions is that the creative economy contributes to economic, social and cultural development.

(United Nations Economist Network)

National Portfolio Organisations

These are a group of museums, libraries and art organisations that get regular funding from Arts Council England, which invests public money for creativity and culture in England.

Social capital

The extent and nature of our connections

with others and the collective attitudes and behaviours between people that support a well-functioning, close-knit society.

(Office for National Statistics)

Community wealth building

A people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people.

(Centre for Local Economic Strategies)

Net zero emissions

Net zero emissions are achieved when emissions of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere caused by human activity are balanced by removals of greenhouse gases over a specified period of time.

(Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)

Climate justice

Climate justice acknowledges that those who are most vulnerable to climate change are often the most economic disadvantaged and that responsibility for human-caused climate change is distributed unevenly globally. It also highlights the relationship between inequalities, such as structural racism, and climate change.

(Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment)

Engagement summary

Public and creative sector engagement for the Cultural Action Plan took place between January – March 2024 through:

- a digital survey
- in-person focus groups
- drop-in sessions in libraries, markets and community spaces
- consultation meetings and workshops with cultural organisations and strategic partners

“

[We need support for] creative community charities who know their community and are the experts on community culture and creativity but don't have the resources and support behind them.

”

Cultural engagement and participation



88%

agree culture and creativity should be a priority for the Council.

This is an increase of 26% from 2019.



LGBTQ+ respondents were most likely to agree (92%), and Global Majority respondents less likely (63%) and would like to have a bigger role in shaping local culture.

The top 3 words associated with culture and creativity were:

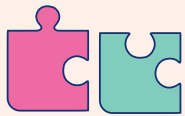
Community

Diverse/diversity

Inclusive

Developing Stronger Communities through Culture

Respondents from global majority backgrounds were more likely to prioritise:



The role of the community in shaping local culture



Support for under-represented and marginalised groups

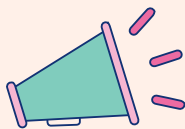
Open comments suggest:

- While multi-culturalism is recognised and valued a cluster of comments associate culture and creativity with a white, middle-class demographic.
- Children and families are particularly well catered for.



Young residents felt there was a lack of culture and creativity in Waltham Forest and were not sure where they could access and experience it.

Respondents would participate more in cultural activities if they were:



Promoted better **(64%)**



More affordable **(54%)**



Closer to where they live **(40%)**



Doorstop Carnival, Priory Court, Walthamstow. Image courtesy of GB Carnival

Cultural provision and infrastructure



76%

felt there are cultural and creative spaces and events for them to enjoy in Waltham Forest

This sentiment was shared by the majority of demographic groups, **except respondents with a disability or long-term health issue** who were less likely to feel there were spaces and events for them to enjoy (57%)

Respondents associated a large number of places and spaces with culture and creativity, including:



Specific culture infrastructure:
galleries, museums, theatre, libraries



Natural spaces:
wetlands, forest, parks



Public and community spaces:
markets, breweries, church, mosque



William Morris Gallery was mentioned the most as a specific place associated with culture



Other specific venues mentioned were clustered in E17: Blackhorse Lane, Vestry House, God's Own Junkyard, Trades Hall, The Mill, soon-to-open Soho Theatre



Luna Lounge (Leytonstone) and Patchworks (Leyton) were the only venues outside E17 mentioned in open-comments

Some comments highlight lack of cultural infrastructure: lack of a cinema, desire to see the Regal Cinema (Highams Park) reopen

Responses reflect that provision is Walthamstow-centric and that there are a lack of spaces and events in the north and south of the borough, particularly in South Leytonstone, Leyton, Lea Bridge and Chingford Mount.

Young residents particularly mentioned food and festivals in terms of what they would like to see, with specific previous events (e.g. Carnival and Chingfest). Sports, markets and shops were also key places and activities to seek cultural or creative experiences.

Open comments highlight the need to:

- Protect and support existing grassroots assets, such as music venues
- Reimagine and work creatively within existing community spaces and venues

Perceptions and sentiment

When asked what three words they associate with culture and creativity in Waltham Forest respondents were 9x more positive than negative.

Aspects that stand out as most associated with the character of culture and creativity in the borough are: local, heritage, music, craft & making, street art, food.

Residents' priorities



Culture supports safe & vibrant neighbourhoods **(73%)**



The local community has a central role shaping culture **(70%)**



Culture and creativity support health & wellbeing **(59%)**

Young Residents' priorities (13 – 19 year olds)



More events for them (music, food, festivals)



Free & better promoted events



Paid opportunities

Support for local creatives



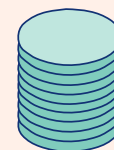
45%

of creative individuals, businesses and organisations feel supported to grow and develop in Waltham Forest.

Priorities for local creatives:



More affordable creative spaces **(70%)**



More funding opportunities **(62%)**



63% of Global Majority respondents felt support for under-represented and marginalised groups was a priority

In open-comments creatives offered other ideas to support them:

- Choosing local artists and suppliers for events.
- More longer-term funding models than project funding.
- Unlocking empty spaces for creative use.

“

Culture itself is a barometer for hardiness of a community

”

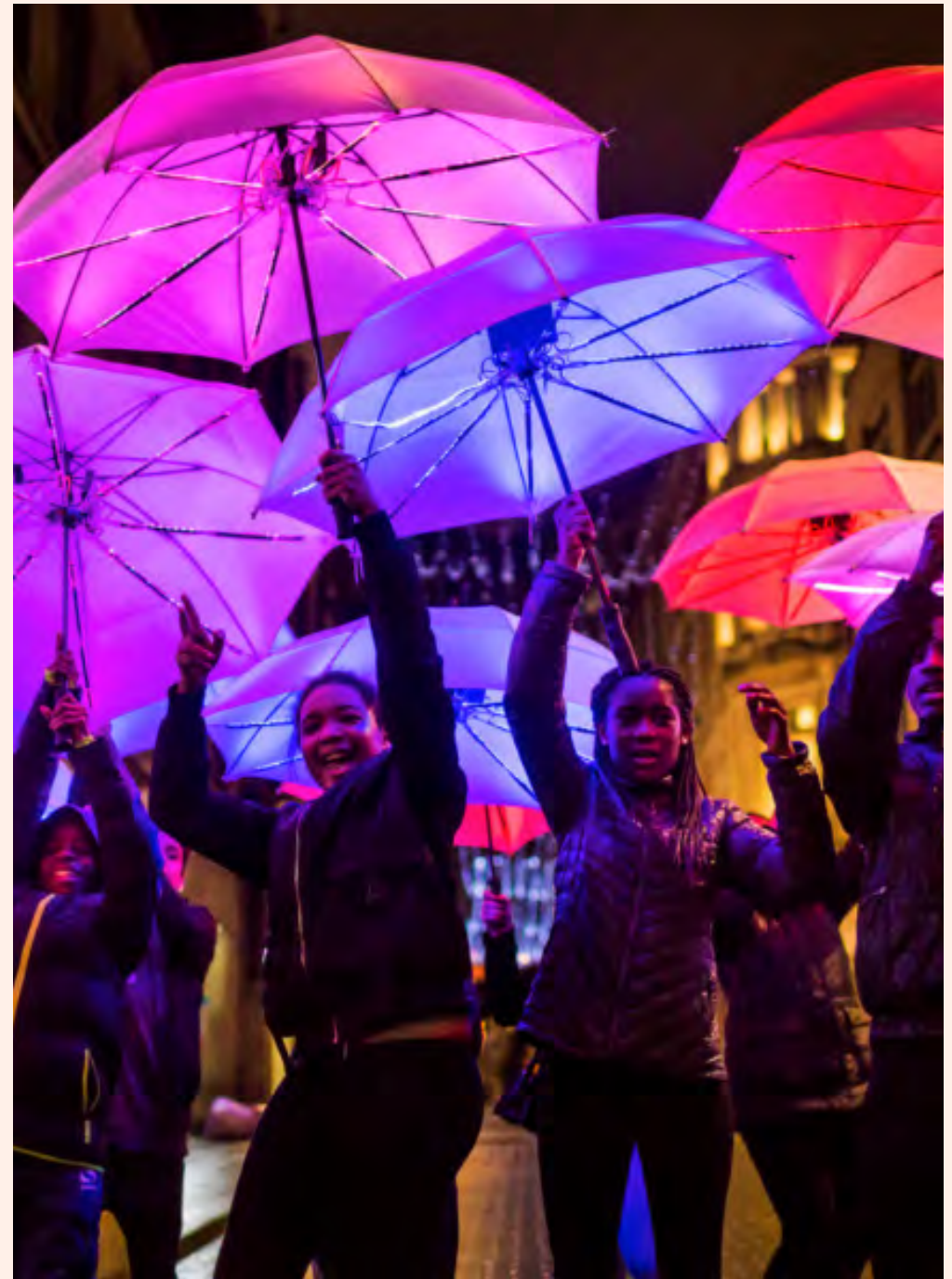
An in-depth focus group highlighted several key insights:

- The need for relational approaches. The Council spending more time listening and connecting.
- Ecosystem development. Building connections, developing artists and organisations into a mutually beneficial ecosystem.
- Funding and programming models should support stability. More long-term approaches are needed.
- Reducing bureaucracy where possible. While there was a recognition that Local Authorities have administrative requirements they must meet, the focus group urged designing processes like grant-funding from a principle of trust.
- Concerns included the state of creative education, lack of diverse representation and instability of creative organisations and practitioners.
- Big ideas included considering a form of 'UBI [Universal Basic Income] for culture', systems of cultural capital like skill-sharing and social value rebates for culture.

“

Funding for arts and culture is being cut and more support is needed for grassroots initiatives particularly those who may struggle to find funding opportunities.

”



Cirque Bijou during London Borough of Culture 2019.

Representation

We knew from previous engagement that the demographics of digital survey respondents isn't reflective of all backgrounds.

For example, **18%** of digital survey respondents were from a Global Majority background, compared to **47%** of residents (Census 2021). Young people (**1.7%**) were underrepresented in the survey and men (**23%**) were also under-represented.

As there were 1000 respondents, there was a good sample of responses from:

183

from global
majority
respondents

118

LGBTQ+
respondents

176

respondents with a
disability or a long-
term health condition

which helped us to better understand the views of specific groups.

To address this, we planned:

- A focus group led by local artist which engaged **15 members** of our creative community and had **53%** representation from a global majority background

- Streetbase patrols,³⁰ which engaged **97** young people across four patrols in Chingford Mount, Highams Park, Leytonstone and Leyton. **64%** of young people surveyed were from a global majority background
- In person sessions hosted in Community Living Rooms, Community drop-in sessions, community and creative network meetings and youth events, particular in the north and south of the borough

The engagement representation reflects findings from other recent engagement

“

Cultural activity should become more responsive to, and reflective of, the particular communities and demographics in [Waltham Forest].

”

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Page 72: Engagement Summary [Luna Lounge].
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30. Streetbase is an innovative peer-to-peer outreach programme in Waltham Forest.

Credits and acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the Cultural Action Plan including officers and Councillors within Waltham Forest Council, residents, community organisations, cultural professionals, creative organisations and businesses and strategic partners in the borough and beyond.

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Olivia Twist with pupils from Newport Primary School

Graphic design:

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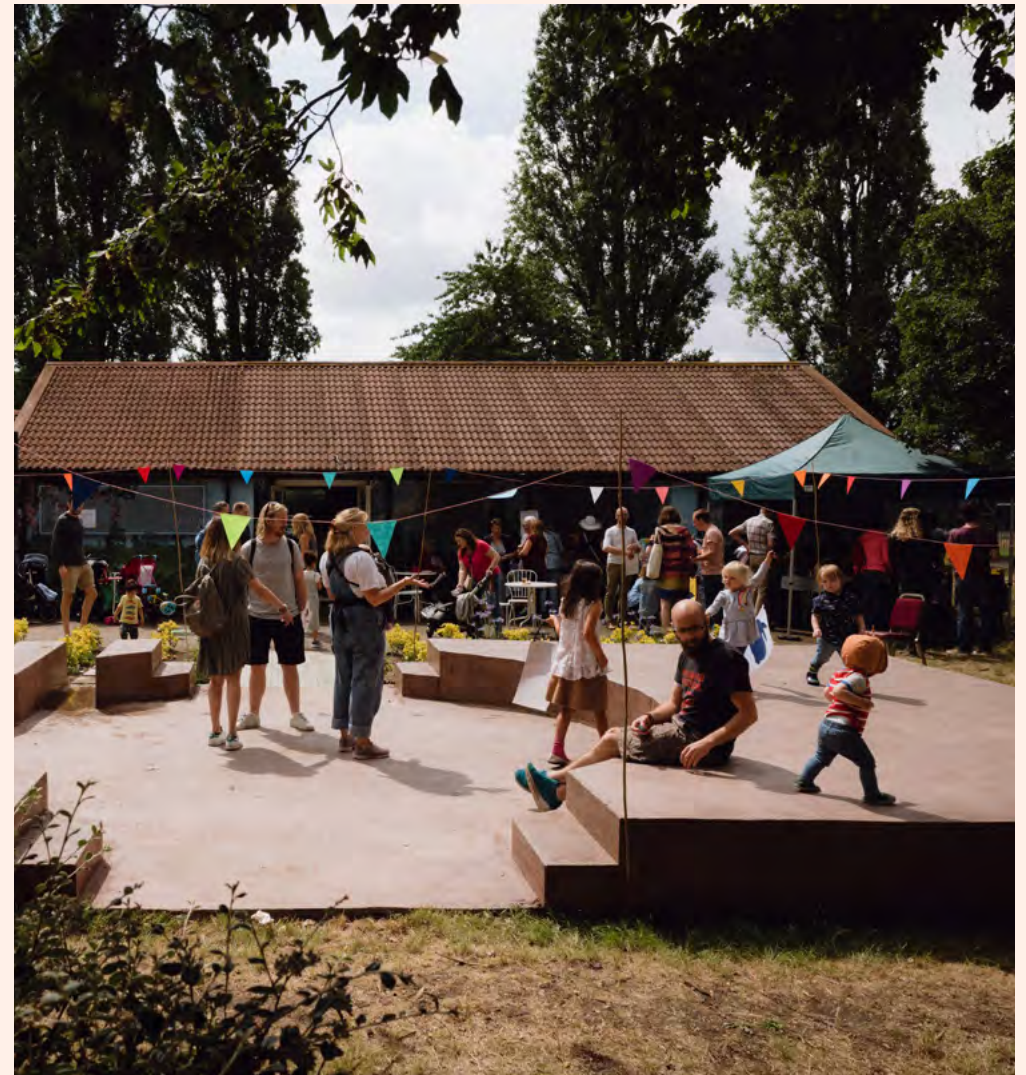
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Higham Hill Theatre. Photo by Lewis Ronald.



Doorstop Carnival, Chingford Hall

