



New Forest

Creative and Cultural Framework

2026–2032

A shared vision for culture & creativity across the New Forest district



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



Funded by
UK Government



New Forest
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Contents

- 2 Introduction
- 4 A Definition of Culture and Creativity
- 6 Creativity and Culture in the New Forest – Current Picture
- 8 A Case for Creativity and Culture
- 10 Aligning with Local, Regional and National Strategy
- 11 Readiness for Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation
- 12 The Impact of Culture
- 13 Our Vision and Mission
- 14 Our Values
- 15 Our Ambitions
- 22 Action Plan Monitoring and Evaluation
- 23 Appendix



During our community consultations, we collaborated with local poets to co-create a series of poems that captured local voices and experiences. These poems reflect the pride, identity, and shared hopes of people across the New Forest, and excerpts feature throughout this strategy.

“Everyone is invited, everywhere is invited to open their doors and join the chorus of creativity learning laughter and celebrating song as libraries and live spaces erupt alike in art and joy as fabulous fringe fuels fun all across the forest.”

Poem excerpt co-created by Steven Mizen and residents of Totton



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



Funded by
UK Government



Commissioned by New Forest District Council and Arts Council England

Written by Kealy Whenray (Consultant) | Designed by Absolute Graphics

Foreword

Cllr Dan Poole
Portfolio Holder Housing and Communities NFDC



Alison Barnes
Chief Executive New Forest National Park Authority



Maria Ragan
Director St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery and Creative Forest Partner



Paul Sapwell
Chief Executive Hampshire Culture Trust



Jacqui Ibbotson
Programme Director Culture in Common



Introduction

The New Forest District is a landscape of striking contrasts, with ancient woodland and open heathland alongside working ports and modern industry, coastal villages beside historic market towns, and communities that range from rural hamlets to urban edges. At its heart lies the New Forest National Park, a designated protected landscape of global significance for its natural beauty, biodiversity and cultural heritage. For centuries it has been shaped by the practice of commoning, a unique way of life that continues to define local identity, stewardship and connection to place.

Home to more than 170,000 residents, the district is both historic and dynamic, a place where deep-rooted traditions sit alongside innovation and creativity. Culture here reflects this diversity. It can be found in festivals, community events, heritage sites, museums and galleries, as well as through a growing network of creative enterprises, studios and independent practitioners. From village halls and forest clearings to arts centres, shipyards and coastlines, creativity thrives in unexpected places, connecting people across generations, sectors and landscapes.

The population of the New Forest is older than the national average, with nearly a quarter aged 65 or over. Around 60 per cent of residents live in rural villages, hamlets or dispersed settlements, shaping both the rhythm of community life and access to services. The area has a smaller proportion of young people and working-age residents, and many local businesses face challenges in attracting and retaining younger talent, including within the creative and cultural industries. These dynamics create both challenges and opportunities, balancing conservation and change, protecting heritage while embracing innovation, and ensuring that culture remains relevant, inclusive and future-focused.



The Mycelium Network

In nature, trees don't stand alone. Beneath the forest floor, a hidden web of mycelium connects roots, passing nutrients, information, and energy across the whole ecosystem.

We see culture in the New Forest in the same way. We are stronger as a network of networks, creative practitioners, organisations, community groups, schools, and partners; all connected, all sharing, all supporting each other, working together.

Rather than relying on one big tree or central trunk, our strength lies in the richness of the whole forest. Each connection makes the system healthier, more resilient, and more creative.

Together, like the mycelium, we can make the New Forest's cultural life grow and thrive in ways no single organisation could achieve alone.

Executive Summary

Culture and creativity are vital to the New Forest's identity, wellbeing, and prosperity. They connect communities, support the visitor economy, nurture talent, and enrich everyday life. This strategy sets out a shared vision for how culture will strengthen our district, ensuring it is locally grounded, regionally connected, and nationally recognised.

Like the mycelium that connects and sustains a forest, the New Forest's cultural strength comes from being a network of networks; creative practitioners, organisations, communities, businesses and partners working together. This collective approach makes our cultural life more resilient, more creative, and better able to deliver for our people and place.

Why now?

- Local Government Reorganisation, devolution, and a challenging funding landscape makes it essential that the New Forest Creative and Cultural sector speak with one voice.
- The district's cultural assets are rich but dispersed, and collaboration is needed to maximise impact.
- Culture delivers across key policy agendas: health and wellbeing, economic growth, skills, environment, and place.

Our vision

A thriving New Forest where culture and creativity strengthen community, enrich wellbeing, and drive sustainable growth.

Our four ambitions

- 1. High-quality arts and culture for all**
Position the New Forest as a place where everyone can experience and contribute to exceptional, high-quality creative and cultural activity – in ways that reflect the district's landscapes, communities, and distinct identity.
- 2. Drive sector growth through ambitious partnerships**
We will strengthen the creative economy by building partnerships, developing career pathways, and embedding culture in development and investment. This will grow prosperity, support the visitor economy, and make the New Forest a thriving place to live and work as a creative.
- 3. Champion culture in balance with nature**
We will embed sustainability in cultural delivery, create opportunities that connect people with the Forest's landscapes, and work with environmental partners. Culture will support stewardship of the natural environment and demonstrate national leadership in sustainable practice.
- 4. Culture for health and wellbeing**
We will place culture at the heart of healthier communities, tackling isolation, improving mental and physical health, and strengthening resilience. By aligning with health and care partners, culture can contribute to preventative outcomes and assist in reducing pressures on services.

How we will deliver

- Creative Forest will oversee delivery, ensuring accountability and alignment with local, regional, and national priorities.
- Actions are designed to be high-level, district-wide, and achievable within existing resources, enabling many organisations and businesses to align and contribute existing and new projects and programmes.
- Shared approaches to evidence and impact will underpin all ambitions, demonstrating the collective value of culture to our people, place, economy, environment, and health.



A Definition of Culture and Creativity

We align with Arts Council England's definition of culture and creativity and adopt this as the basis for our own strategy.

Our definition of culture

'Culture' means many things to many people and is sometimes used to describe food, religion or heritage. In this strategy, we use it to describe a wide range of activity across artforms and organisations: collections, combined arts, dance, libraries, literature, museums, music, theatre and the visual arts.

By bringing these activities together under the single term 'culture', rather than separating them out as 'the arts', 'museums' or 'libraries', we aim to reflect the full breadth of creative life in the New Forest. Research and consultation for this strategy also showed that the public often associate the word 'the arts' narrowly with classical music, opera, ballet or fine art, so a broader term helps ensure inclusivity.

We are using the term creative practitioners as an umbrella for everyone who creates, interprets or reshapes cultural content, rather than using the word 'artist' alone.

Our definition of creativity

'Creativity' describes the process of applying knowledge, skills and imagination to bring something new into being.

Although creativity is part of everyday life, in this strategy we use it specifically to describe the process of making, producing or taking part in cultural activity. We also recognise that traditional boundaries between artforms are dissolving as new technologies and social changes reshape how culture is created and shared.

We welcome these shifts, which are likely to accelerate in the coming decade, and will remain flexible and open to the evolving forms of cultural activity that emerge.

Source: Arts Council England.



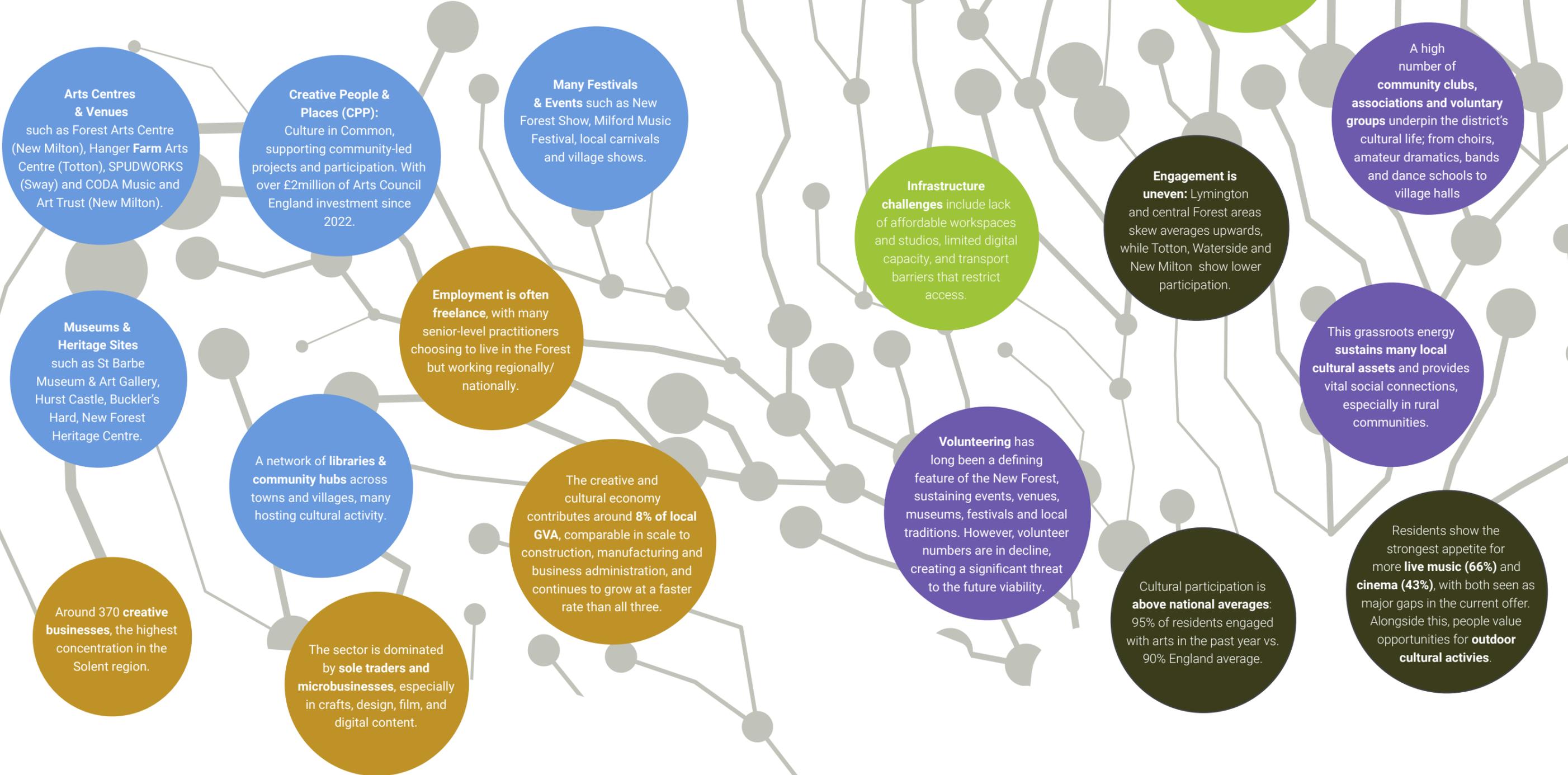
Stretching down the Solent along the Waterside you have stunning places Fawley, Calshot, Hythe and many more villages and towns along way picturesque postcards thriving in the Solent spray.'

Poem excerpt co-created by Steven Mizen with residents from the Waterside



Creativity and Culture in the New Forest – Current Picture

The New Forest has a diverse cultural and creative ecology, though it is dispersed and often fragile. Together these assets represent a significant but under-recognised strength for the district.



- Organisations & Provision
- Creative & Cultural Businesses
- Infrastructure and Networks
- Community & Voluntary Activity
- Participation & Demand

A Case for Creativity and Culture

This strategy is built on a strong foundation of evidence gathered across three major studies carried out between 2022 and 2025, commissioned by NFDC, Arts Council England and Culture in Common. Together, these reports provide a comprehensive picture of cultural life in the New Forest, its strengths, challenges, and opportunities.

Community consultation

(Forging Culture Rights in the New Forest, 2024) captured the voices of residents, councillors, young people and sector professionals exploring how local people experience culture, what they value, and what they want for the future.

Data and insights research

(New Forest Culture Insights Report, 2024) provided detailed evidence on creative industries, workforce, participation patterns, and the wider impacts of culture on economy, health, and place.

Cultural situational analysis

(Culture in Common Situational Analysis, 2022–23) mapped the wider demographic, geographic, and cultural landscape of the district, identifying key trends, gaps, and barriers to engagement.

Taken together, these reports reveal a consistent set of themes: the power of culture to shape identity and wellbeing; uneven access and participation across the district; pressures from an ageing population, rurality, and transport; and the need for stronger collaboration, innovation, and sustainability.

This evidence base underpins the case for culture in the New Forest; demonstrating why investment in cultural life matters, how it contributes to health, wellbeing, economy, tourism, and community cohesion, and why now is the right time to act.



What We've Learnt



- Unique natural environment and heritage, with the New Forest's landscapes, history, and traditions central to local identity and provide a powerful cultural brand.
- Our distinct sense of place; a nationally recognised name associated with quality of life, creativity, and stewardship of the natural world.
- Strong community pride and participation with residents valuing their local identity, volunteering, and community-led events such as carnivals, fetes, and shows.
- Rich and varied cultural assets, from museums and heritage sites to creative hubs, alongside iconic events.
- Dispersed but diverse provision. Cultural activity exists in many towns and villages, offering breadth across the district even if geographically spread.
- A growing creative economy. The New Forest has the highest concentration of creative businesses in the Solent region, driven by a strong freelance and microbusiness base.
- Skilled and active creative practitioners such as artists, makers and producers contribute to a high-quality, locally rooted creative scene with national connections.
- Plenty of outdoor and participatory culture, our festivals, carnivals, and open-air events are deeply embedded in local life and celebrated across generations.
- Established networks and partnerships such as Creative Forest and Culture in Common who have strengthened coordination, capacity, and shared learning.
- Appetite for everyday creativity. Residents express a strong desire for participatory and hands-on cultural experiences, reflecting an inclusive, community-driven cultural spirit.



- Ageing population, shrinking working-age group, and limited ethnic diversity.
- High levels of loneliness, long-term health conditions, and poor mental health, particularly among young and older residents.
- Disparities between high-engagement areas (e.g. Lymington) and low-engagement areas (e.g. Totton, Waterside, New Milton).
- Limited public transport, long travel times, and lack of confidence in travelling at night.
- Few dedicated spaces, activities, or career pathways for young people; many feel there is "nothing for them."
- Many assets but poorly connected; weak cross-sector collaboration; limited data capture and sharing.
- Employers highlight skills shortages (digital, project management, leadership); high housing costs and limited career routes make it hard to retain creative talent.
- Risk of exclusion or narrow definitions of culture; limited representation of diverse narratives and voices.
- Limited financial capacity and infrastructure to deliver bold ambitions.



- Use the New Forest's landscapes, heritage, and traditions as the foundation for cultural identity, storytelling, and tourism.
- Expand programmes tackling isolation, supporting mental health, and building intergenerational/community bonds.
- Focus new provision in areas with low engagement, improving access through mobile, touring, and pop-up models.
- Invest in youth-led spaces, creative opportunities, and skills pathways; create career routes to retain local talent.
- Build on networks (e.g. FOLIO), empower councillors and local champions, and encourage shared leadership of strategy
- Support microbusinesses and freelancers, align with Solent Creative Strategy, and foster sustainable creative enterprise.
- Position the New Forest as a national exemplar for embedding environmental awareness and low-impact cultural practice.
- Embrace everyday creativity, new artforms, and co-creation to broaden participation and reflect a wider range of voices.
- Use technology to reach isolated communities, expand access, and engage new audiences while addressing the digital divide.
- Use arts and culture to help people explore, communicate and make sense of complex issues, from global challenges to local change, strengthening empathy, dialogue and shared perspective.

Aligning with Local, Regional and National Strategy

Our evidence base aligns strongly with the policy local, regional and national landscape and provides a clear route to delivery.

LOCAL (New Forest)

New Forest District Council – Corporate Plan

Our actions contribute to community wellbeing, resilient places, and a vibrant local economy. We will focus on equitable access, achieving health and wellbeing outcomes, town/village vitality, and skills pathways that support local businesses and freelancers.

New Forest National Park Authority – Partnership Plan

We will connect culture with nature recovery, landscape stewardship, sustainable tourism, and access for all. Programming will champion environmental awareness and low-impact delivery models, using outdoor and place-based work to deepen people's relationship with the Forest.

Solent Cultural Plan

We will plug the New Forest into the Solent's creative cluster, supporting microbusinesses and freelancers, growing the talent pipeline, improving workspace and connectivity, and brokering

REGIONAL (Hampshire)

Hampshire Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2035

The Hampshire strategy emphasises reducing inequalities, using a community asset approach, and embedding health across all policies. Our strategy aligns by reinforcing culture's role in promoting equity, place-based strengths, and wellbeing across Hampshire's communities.

Cultural Connects – Hampshire Cultural Trust

We'll align with county-wide ambitions to coordinate cultural delivery, share learning and resources, and evidence impact, positioning the New Forest as a strong contributor to a joined-up Hampshire offer.

NATIONAL (UK wide)

Arts Council England - Let's Create

We will deliver against ACE's three outcomes Creative People, Cultural Communities, a Creative & Cultural country and embed the four Investment Principles of Inclusivity & Relevance, Environmental Responsibility, Ambition & Quality, Dynamism. Priorities include youth-led opportunities, co-creation with underserved places and sector capacity-building through partnerships and skills.

National Centre for Creative Health - Creative Health Review

We align with the National Creative Health agenda, which calls for creativity to be embedded across health and social care to reduce inequalities, improve quality of life, and relieve pressure on services. Our strategy responds by strengthening cultural partnerships with health and care providers, ensuring creative opportunities contribute directly to healthier, more connected communities.



Readiness for Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

To represent the New Forest effectively in upcoming LGR discussions, we will:

- **Speak with one voice:** Creative Forest will convene cultural stakeholders to ensure the sector is represented clearly and efficiently, articulating shared priorities and pipeline projects aligned to ACE, NFDC, NFNPA, Solent, and Hampshire.
- **Show clear alignment:** Keep up to date with the changing regional and national policy landscape and respond appropriately, ensuring that local priorities remain connected to wider agendas such as wellbeing, engagement, skills, sustainability, and the visitor economy.
- **Evidence impact:** Using this shared strategic framework and Action Plan for evaluation, we will produce an annual impact report for the district that demonstrates how culture delivers for people, place, economy, environment, and health.

We will ensure the New Forest has an investable cultural proposition that is locally grounded, regionally connected, and nationally aligned, ready to shape and thrive within any new governance arrangements.



“ Tweenies need to try out things, local and low cost
You can't get there by pony if there ain't no car or bus.
Mentors share their knowledge "light attracting light"
yes, it's rough around the edges but with help we'll get it right
*Poem excerpt co-created by Damian Kelly-Basher
and residents of Lyndhurst* ”



The Impact of Culture

The cultural sector plays a vital role in shaping the future of the New Forest. Its impact reaches beyond the arts, touching every aspect of life, place, and community. By nurturing creativity and cultural activity, we can deliver meaningful benefits across five key areas:



Our Vision and Mission

Statement

A thriving New Forest where culture and creativity strengthen community, enrich wellbeing, and drive sustainable growth.

Vision

Our vision is for the New Forest to be a place where culture and creativity flourish at the heart of community life. The cultural sector will celebrate the Forest's unique heritage and identity, enrich everyday experiences, and open up opportunities for all. By strengthening cultural participation and supporting creative practitioners and organisations, we will drive economic growth, attract and sustain tourism, and enhance the health, wellbeing, and cohesion of our communities. Through strong partnerships and shared ambition, we will nurture an inclusive and sustainable cultural ecosystem that ensures the New Forest is known as a place where creativity, nature, and people thrive together.

Mission

Our mission is to strengthen the New Forest's cultural sector for the benefit of our people and place, by working collectively with creative practitioners, organisations, and communities. By positioning ourselves as a united cultural voice ahead of local government reorganisation, we will ensure our sector is visible, resilient, and ready to play a central role in shaping the future of the New Forest.



Our Values

Our mission is underpinned by a set of core values that shape the way we work and the outcomes we seek to achieve. These principles ensure that culture in the New Forest is not only vibrant, but also fair, sustainable, and rooted in place. They guide our decisions, partnerships, and cultural activities, ensuring the New Forest's cultural future is inclusive, resilient, and authentic.

Equality, Inclusivity and Access

We believe culture should belong to everyone. We are committed to removing barriers and ensuring opportunities for participation, expression, and enjoyment are open to all people, regardless of background, race, age, or circumstance.

Environmental Sustainability and Stewardship

We are dedicated to building a cultural sector that is environmentally responsible and future-focused, protecting the Forest's landscapes and communities for generations to come.

Celebrating our Distinct Local Identity

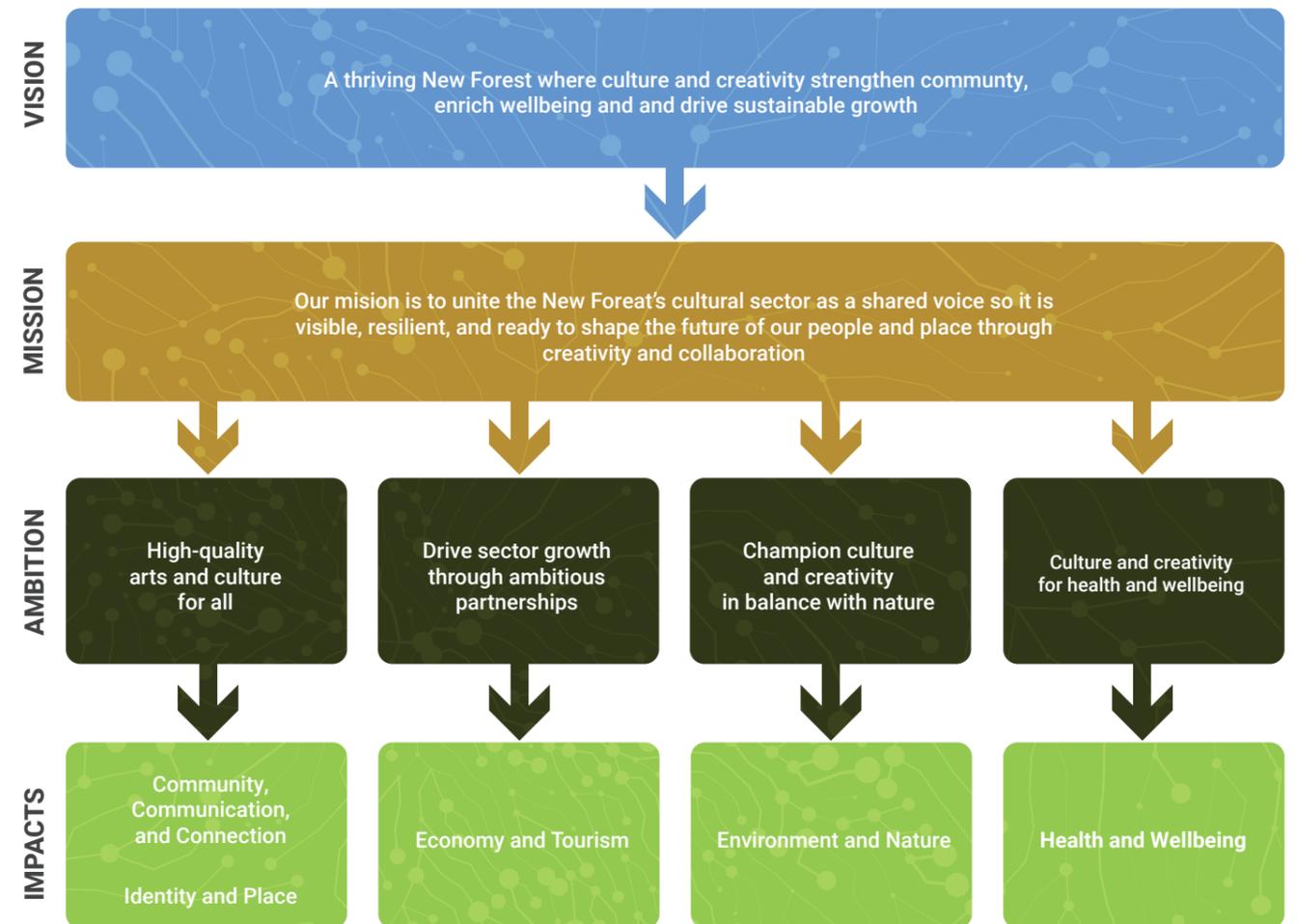
We are rooted in the uniqueness and special nature of the New Forest. Our work celebrates the area's diverse communities, heritage, and creativity, fostering pride of place and strengthening social bonds.



“ Let’s knead the dough until it starts to rise.
 Let’s warm up the cold spots be pleasantly surprised
 when we flood the algorithms with solutions and good news
 and when people create the changes we’ll re-invent, continue..re-invent, continue.
 Poem excerpt co-created by Damian Kelly-Basher and residents of Ringwood ”

Our Ambitions

The following four ambitions set out how culture in the New Forest will grow and thrive over the coming years. Developed from community consultation, local insight, and national policy, they respond directly to the district's strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Together they provide a clear framework for action: positioning the New Forest as a leader in rural co-creation, driving innovation through ambitious partnerships, championing culture in balance with nature, and harnessing culture to improve health and wellbeing.



Ambition 1: High-quality arts and culture for all

Position the New Forest as a place where everyone can experience and contribute to exceptional, high-quality creative and cultural activity – in ways that reflect the district’s landscapes, communities, and distinct identity. We will champion excellence and inclusion side by side: ensuring that outstanding creative work is made with, by and for local people, and that every resident has the opportunity to take part, experience, and feel pride in the cultural life of their place. Culture in the New Forest will be ambitious, participatory, and rooted in place – connecting high-calibre artists and organisations with communities, and demonstrating how rural areas can lead in quality as well as innovation.

What we know:



Strong community pride, active volunteering, outdoor culture, and deep local identity.



Uneven participation, underserved young people, narrow definitions of culture, limited inclusion.



Empower communities and young people, diversify cultural narratives, broaden participation, grow ambition and quality.

Our actions:

- **Lead the way in rural co-creation** – embedding high-quality creative practice within communities through shared making, learning, and collaboration.
- **Take culture out into communities** through pop-ups, touring, and local activity, meeting people where they are and making participation easy and accessible.
- **Support creative ambition** by connecting local talent with professional artists, training, and commissioning opportunities that raise quality and confidence.
- **Celebrate local stories and traditions** through collaborative projects that connect cultural and community partners, linking identity with placemaking.
- **Adopt shared ways of evidencing community impact** to demonstrate how high-quality rural culture enriches lives and strengthens place.

What is co-creation?

Co-creation is about working together as equals. Creative practitioners and communities share ideas, skills and decisions to create something meaningful. It is built on trust and active listening, so that everyone involved feels ownership, pride and value in what is made.

“If “teamwork is dreamwork” imagine a new pronoun, beyond ‘me’ or ‘us & them’, “Hi, I’m ‘Co’ for co-operate, co-create, co-evolve, letting all ideas grow at the same time.
Poem excerpt co-created by Damian Kelly-Basher and residents of New Milton”

Ambition 2: Drive sector growth through ambitious partnerships

Grow the New Forest’s cultural and creative economy through ambitious partnerships that unlock investment, drive innovation and build resilience. By connecting organisations, venues, and businesses we will amplify impact, strengthen digital capability, and create new opportunities for learning and collaboration. Through shared training, aligned infrastructure, and coordinated communication, we will support a thriving, visible, and future-ready cultural sector that contributes to local vitality, supports the visitor economy, and makes the New Forest a great place to live and work as a creative.

What we know:



Rich but dispersed cultural assets, growing creative economy, existing networks like Creative Forest.



Fragmented sector, weak collaboration, limited data and insight, poor digital connectivity and communications, resource constraints.



Strengthen collaboration, connect venues and organisations, align training and skills, grow the creative economy, share knowledge and digital innovation.

Our actions:

- **Broker cross-sector collaborations linking culture** with business, tourism, environment, and education initiatives to unlock new investment and innovation.
- **Align training and skills programmes across artforms and sectors** – including creative, digital, tourism, and green industries – to create a coherent local talent pipeline.
- **Develop creative career pathways for young people and emerging talent**, investing in a skills audit and data-led approach to future workforce planning.
- **Strengthen digital infrastructure and communications**, improving connectivity, data sharing, and digital literacy across cultural organisations and freelancers.
- **Work with partners to embed culture from the outset** in district development plans, business growth initiatives, and regional investment projects to ensure culture shapes long-term prosperity.
- **Establish shared measures for data and insight** to build a collective evidence base on the cultural sector’s economic and social value, including its impact on the visitor economy and workforce development.



Ambition 3: Champion culture and creativity in balance with nature

Embed sustainability and environmental consciousness at the heart of cultural activity, ensuring creativity and nature thrive together. By celebrating the Forest’s unique landscapes and biodiversity, we will promote sustainable practice, inspire stewardship of the natural environment, and show how cultural life can protect and enhance the places we live in.

What we know:



National Park status, global natural heritage and biodiversity.



Transport barriers, environmental pressures, limited sustainable practice in cultural delivery.



Embed environmental stewardship, use outdoor and place-based culture, lead nationally on low-impact cultural practice.

Our actions:

- Embed environmental responsibility across cultural practice, ensuring sustainability and low-impact delivery are integral to how cultural activity is planned, produced and experienced across the New Forest.
- **Champion place-based cultural work rooted in landscape and ecology**, using creativity to celebrate the Forest’s natural environment, deepen connection to place, and inspire care for its biodiversity and heritage.
- **Strengthen culture–nature partnerships**, aligning cultural organisations with environmental, conservation, tourism and land-management partners to support shared goals for stewardship and sustainable visitor experience.
- **Build shared understanding and evidence of environmental impact**, capturing learning, data and stories that show how cultural activity supports environmental awareness, behavior change and long-term protection of place.



Ambition 4: Culture and creativity for health and wellbeing

Build healthier, more connected communities across the New Forest by placing culture at the heart of wellbeing. Cultural programmes support people of all ages – tackling isolation and loneliness, improving mental health, and encouraging physical activity. By bringing people together through shared creative experiences, culture can foster stronger relationships, resilience, and a greater sense of belonging. Crucially, culture also delivers preventative benefits – helping to reduce health inequalities, ease pressure on services, and support people to live well for longer.

What we know:



Strong sense of community pride, volunteering, and appetite for participatory culture.



Higher levels of loneliness and isolation among older residents; significant health inequalities; limited provision for mental health support through culture.



Expand cultural programmes that reduce isolation, support mental and physical wellbeing, and create intergenerational connections. Strengthen partnerships with health, care, and voluntary sectors to embed culture as part of local wellbeing strategies.

Our actions:

- **Position culture at the heart of wellbeing**, recognising creativity as a vital contributor to physical and mental health, prevention, and quality of life for people of all ages across the New Forest.
- **Connect cultural projects with health and care partners**, including social prescribing, care networks and voluntary sector organisations, to embed culture within preventative health and wellbeing agendas.
- **Promote inclusive and accessible cultural opportunities**, encouraging everyday creativity, offering low-cost or free entry points, and ensuring people can take part in ways that support their wellbeing and life circumstances.
- **Bring people together through shared creative experiences**, strengthening connection, belonging and resilience by reducing loneliness, supporting intergenerational activity and building stronger community relationships.
- **Build shared understanding and evidence of culture’s preventative value**, demonstrating how cultural participation supports healthier lives, reduces pressure on services and contributes to long-term wellbeing outcomes.

“Overcoming challenges, daily struggles of accessibility and aging through the kindness of creativity sending sparks of incredible colour through brilliant, mindful expression
Poem excerpt co-created by Steven Mizen and residents of Totton”



Governance

Governance of the strategy will sit with Creative Forest (formerly Folio), a new structure bringing together representatives from across the district's cultural ecosystem. Creative Forest will include members from each of the key engagement groups, meeting twice yearly to review progress, share insight and oversee implementation. It will be coordinated by Creative Forest, which is currently reorganising and building capacity following new Arts Council England investment in October 2025. Creative Forest will continue to champion and advocate for culture, connect and support creative activity across the district, and coordinate monitoring of the New Forest Creative and Cultural Framework and its Action Plan.

The governance model has three tiers of engagement:

Creative Forest

Representatives from each engagement group will make up the Creative Forest, managing governance, monitoring and development of the New Forest Creative and Cultural Framework.

1

Creative Forest Partners

A core group of cultural organisations who provide leadership, delivery capacity, and act as the backbone of the cultural ecology in the district:

- African Activities
- Coda Music & Arts Trust
- Fluid Motion Theatre Company
- Forest Arts Centre
- Forest Forge Theatre Company
- New Forest Heritage Centre
- SPUD
- St Barbe Museum & Art Gallery

2

Key Stakeholders

Strategic partners who connect culture to wider agendas including health, wellbeing, economy, environment, and education:

- Arts Council England
- Energize Me / Culture in Common
- Hampshire Cultural Trust (HCT)
- New Forest District Council (NFDC)
- New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA)

3

Wider Network

A broad network of over 200 individual creative practitioners, community groups, and cultural organisations across the New Forest who contribute to cultural life, feed into planning and evaluation, and collaborate on delivery.

Looking ahead, there are ambitions to develop a cross-sector engagement plan that introduces key stakeholders from health, education, tourism, business, public services, and community charities. This will strengthen collaboration, embed culture within wider systems of policy and practice, and open up new opportunities for investment and impact.

Creative Forest will convene these groups to provide strategic leadership, coordination, and advocacy, ensuring alignment with local, regional and national priorities. It will also oversee monitoring, evaluation and impact reporting, working to embed culture as a driver of wellbeing, identity, economic growth and sustainability across the district.

During uncertain times, and with impending local government reorganisation, Creative Forest will remain responsive and agile while maintaining integrity, and its commitment to creativity and culture. Each year at the time of impact reporting, Creative Forest, together with key stakeholders, will review the effectiveness and relevance of the strategy. This process will ensure that progress is measured, learning is shared, and the strategy is updated as required to remain responsive to local needs and changing circumstances.



Action Plan Monitoring and Evaluation

Our four ambitions provide a clear framework for culture in the New Forest. They are more than statements of intent: they shape how we work, where we focus effort, and how we define success. This framework ensures that ambitions translate into coordinated action and measurable impact across the district.

A single Action Plan will set out the shared programme of activity for the district. It will be held and overseen by Creative Forest, ensuring accountability, alignment and collaboration across all partners. Creative Forest will review progress and update the plan regularly, supporting a joined-up approach to cultural development and impact reporting.

Each ambition will be supported by specific actions developed with communities, cultural organisations and stakeholders, identifying who will lead, when activity will take place and what difference it will make. Many of these activities are already happening across the district but lack a clear framework for visibility, coordination and shared impact measurement. Recognising the importance of demonstrating value, an annual impact report will evidence how culture contributes to people, place, economy, environment and health, helping to strengthen cross-sector partnerships and attract future investment.



Appendix

[Culture in Common – Situational Analysis \(2022–23\)](#)

[Forging Culture Rights in the New Forest \(2024\)](#)

[New Forest Culture Insights Report \(2024\)](#)

[Arts Council England – Let’s Create \(2020–30\)](#)

[New Forest District Council – Corporate Plan \(2024–28\)](#)

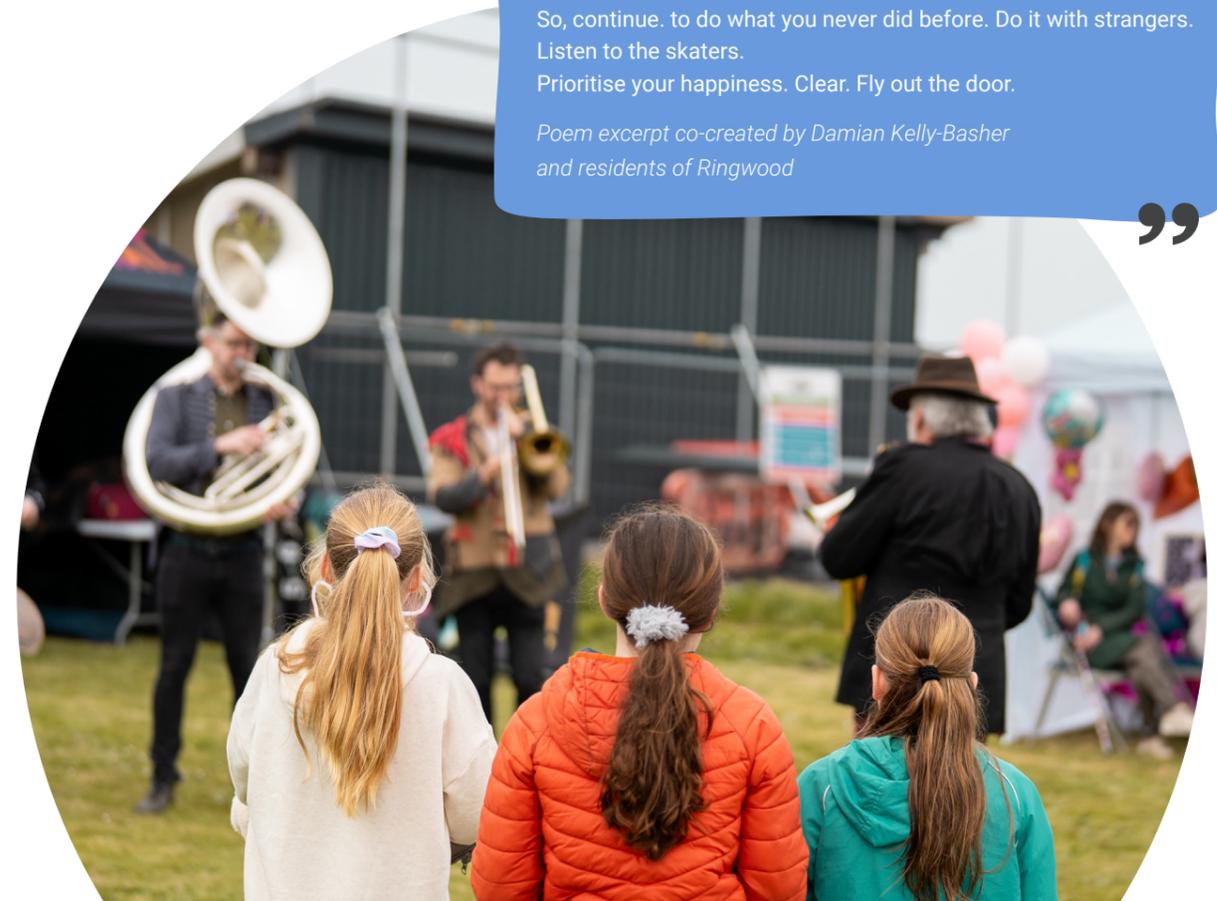
[New Forest National Park Authority – Partnership Plan \(2022–27\)](#)

[Solent Cultural Plan 2025–29 \(Solent Growth Partnership, 2025\)](#)

[Hampshire Cultural Trust – Cultural Connects](#)

[Creative Health Review \(2024\) – National Centre for Creative Health](#)

[Hampshire Health & Wellbeing Strategy \(2025–35\)](#)



“
Empty churches open for creative congregations. And after-school Sports Halls host DJs and dance evenings.
So, continue. to do what you never did before. Do it with strangers.
Listen to the skaters.
Prioritise your happiness. Clear. Fly out the door.

Poem excerpt co-created by Damian Kelly-Basher and residents of Ringwood

”



New Forest

Creative and Cultural Framework
2026–2032



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



Funded by
UK Government



New Forest
DISTRICT COUNCIL