

## Cabinet - 4 February 2026

### Draft New Forest Creative and Cultural Framework

Purpose	For Decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>The New Forest does not currently have a Cultural Strategy. This draft Creative and Cultural Framework sets out a shared vision for how culture can strengthen our communities, help drive economic growth and enhance wellbeing. It aims to ensure that cultural activity is inclusive, sustainable, and aligned with local, regional, and national priorities, making the sector more resilient and investable.</p> <p>The framework is not owned by the Council, and therefore it is not responsible for the implementation. However, it will be a member of the Creative Forest Steering Group with a role in monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the outcomes.</p> <p>Following a consultation process, and consideration of the responses, it will be recommended that the framework is adopted and endorsed by all key stakeholders.</p>
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>That Cabinet approves the draft Creative and Cultural Framework for public consultation.</b>
Reasons for recommendation(s)	Without a framework, opportunities for collaboration, funding, and impact are fragmented, whereas a clear plan helps unlock resources, attract tourism, and embed culture at the heart of place-making and identity.
Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Dan Poole – Portfolio Holder for Community, Safety and Wellbeing

Strategic Director	Peter Matthew – Housing and Communities
Officer Contact	Joanne McClay Service Manager – Environmental and Regulation 02380 285325 <a href="mailto:joanne.mcclay@nfdc.gov.uk">joanne.mcclay@nfdc.gov.uk</a>

## Introduction

1. This report outlines the development of a draft Creative and Cultural Framework, which has been designed to provide a unified approach and strong advocacy for culture across the New Forest over the next 6 years.
2. Although the Council has led the development of this draft framework, it has been shaped through extensive consultation with key stakeholders, Members, the creative sector and the public, to ensure priorities reflect a shared vision for culture in the New Forest.
3. The report and draft framework will be presented to the Housing and Community Panel for review prior to Cabinet consideration. At this stage, recommendations will be sought to proceed with public consultation on the draft framework.
4. An eight-week public consultation will follow. Feedback following the consultation will be reviewed and the framework amended where required, after which Council will be asked to formally adopt the framework.

## Background

5. Local Government reorganisation, devolution, and a challenging funding environment make it critical, for the New Forest’s creative and cultural sector to speak with one voice through a shared framework.
6. The New Forest has benefited from significant Arts Council England investment in recent years (£2 million), with the latest success being a £1 million grant for Culture in Common to continue to deliver the Creative People & Places programme from 2026–2029. This marks a new level of cultural activity for the district and highlights the need for a strong strategic framework to sustain and support this growth.

7. Whilst the district has rich cultural assets, they are dispersed, and greater collaboration is needed to maximise impact. Culture is a key driver across multiple policy agendas—health and wellbeing, economic growth, skills development, environmental sustainability, and placemaking—making a unified strategy essential.
8. This framework is underpinned by a robust foundation of evidence drawn from studies commissioned by NFDC, Arts Council England, and Culture in Common in the past 3 years. Together, these reports offer a comprehensive understanding of cultural life in the New Forest—its strengths, challenges, and opportunities. The evidence includes extensive community engagement, detailed data and insights research, and in-depth cultural analysis.
9. The SWOT analysis from this data has given us a clear understanding of our strengths and challenges which has enabled us to identify and prioritise opportunities for growth. By building on our unique cultural assets, strong sense of place, and active networks, while addressing barriers such as access, skills gaps, and resource constraints, we can unlock the full potential of culture in the New Forest. This strategic approach ensures that opportunities for collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity are maximised to deliver lasting benefits for communities and the local economy.

### **Overview of the draft Cultural and Creative Framework**

10. The mission and vision statements set out a shared ambition for culture in the New Forest—defining what we want to achieve and how we will work together to get there. They provide a clear direction for strengthening the cultural sector, ensuring it is inclusive, resilient, and positioned to deliver social, economic, and environmental benefits for our communities.
11. These shared ambitions are underpinned by core values to ensure culture in the New Forest is inclusive, sustainable, and authentic. There is a commitment to equality and access for all, environmental responsibility and stewardship, and celebrating the area’s distinct heritage and identity. These principles will shape decisions and partnerships, aiming to create a cultural future that is fair, resilient, and rooted in place.
12. The following four ambitions set out how culture in the New Forest will grow and thrive over the coming years. They are:
  - High quality arts and culture for all
  - Drive sector growth through ambitious partnerships
  - Champion culture and creativity in balance with nature

- Culture and creativity for health and wellbeing
13. The draft Framework is aligned with local, regional, and national priorities, ensuring culture contributes to health, wellbeing, skills, sustainability, and economic growth. It reflects priorities in the Councils Corporate Plan and the National Park's Partnership Plan while connecting to national frameworks such as Arts Council England's *Let's Create* and the Creative Health agenda.
  14. The draft is attached (**Appendix 1**).

### **Initial Consultation and Review**

15. In June and July 2024 Chris Rolls from Collective Sense was engaged by NFDC and Culture in Common to carry out action research public engagement activity with different stakeholder and community groups across the New Forest.
16. The workshops were Town and Parish Councillors, after school workshop with young people and 5 community engagement sessions in Totton and Eling, Waterside – Fawley, Lyndhurst, New Milton and Ringwood.
17. Attendees were invited to share their views on the concept of culture, its potential to support priority areas within the corporate plan, and the local challenges facing arts and culture. They also contributed ideas and solutions to address these challenges. Recommendations from these workshops have informed the foundations of this framework.
18. The Cultural Development Manager previously employed by NFDC played a key role in drafting this framework.
19. The strategic working group (members from NFDC, NFNPA, St Barbes, Culture in Common, Hampshire Cultural Trust) was reconvened to review the final draft of the cultural framework before public consultation. This feedback has helped refine the document and shape future actions, ensuring it reflects shared priorities and sector needs.

### **Governance and Action Plan**

20. Governance of the framework will sit with the Creative Forest Steering Group, a new structure which will bring together representatives from across the district's cultural ecosystem. The group will include members from each of the key engagement groups (page 20 of the draft Framework) meeting twice yearly to review progress, share insight and oversee implementation.

21. It will be coordinated by Creative Forest (formerly Folio), 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 Cultural Framework and its Action Plan.
22. A single Action Plan will set out the shared programme of activity for the district. It will be held and overseen by the Creative Forest Compact, ensuring accountability, alignment and collaboration across all partners. The group will review progress and update the plan regularly, supporting a joined-up approach to cultural development and impact reporting.
23. NFDC's role will be to champion culture at a strategic level for our communities, act as an active partner within Creative Forest, and use the framework as guiding principles for funding decisions. We will also report annually on our actions to evidence impact and progress against the framework.
24. A one page cultural framework summary is also attached (Appendix 2).

### **Corporate plan priorities**

25. Adoption of the Creative and Cultural Framework for the New Forest District is a priority for the Council and relates to the following corporate priority themes.
26. **Theme:**  
Empowering our residents to live healthy, connected and fulfilling lives and protecting our climate.  
Shaping our place now and for future generations.  
Championing skills and access to job opportunities.
27. **Corporate Plan Objective:**  
Protect and improve the health and wellbeing of our communities.
28. **Service Objective:**  
Adoption and support partners in the implementation of a Cultural Framework for the New Forest.

### **Options appraisal**

29. **Option 1:**  
It is recommended that Cabinet approves the draft Creative and Cultural Framework and recommend that it progresses to public consultation. It is noted that publication of the framework, and

subsequent handover to the cultural sector to deliver its aims, meets with the council's reprioritisation of corporate plan objectives.

**30. Option 2:**

The alternative is to not prioritise the publication of the Creative and Cultural Framework. However, significant work has been undertaken in developing this with partners and there would be risks to our communities, the cultural sector and the council's reputation in not progressing this framework. This option was not considered appropriate given the Council's corporate plan commitments to the health of its residents and to leaving a cultural legacy for the district.

### **Consultation undertaken**

31. In summer 2024, NFDC and Culture in Common commissioned Chris Rolls to lead action research and public engagement through workshops with Councillors, young people, and community groups across the district. These sessions explored the role of culture, local challenges, and solutions, with recommendations forming the foundation of the framework. This final draft was refined through input from the strategic working group, ensuring it reflects shared priorities and sector needs.
32. There is no legal requirement to consult further, however it is recommended prior to approval. All comments received will be reviewed and the draft Framework amended as required prior to final adoption.
33. The Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the draft Framework and supported it for public consultation.

### **Financial and resource implications**

34. The cost to develop the draft Creative and Cultural Framework has been funded from existing budgets and with funding from Arts Council England of £15,000. Implementation of the framework and action plan will be by the Creative Cultural Compact.
35. CIL funding provided for Arts and Cultural projects and programmes across the New Forest will be assessed in line with the ambitions in Cultural Framework.

### **Legal implications**

36. It is not a statutory requirement for councils to have a cultural strategy. However, The Council has identified the need for this

Cultural Framework to deliver the priorities in the Corporate Plan and councils also have a general duty under the Local Government Act 2000 and 1999 to promote the economic, social, and environmental well-being of their area. The cultural framework can be used as evidence of fulfilling these duties.

### **Risk assessment**

37. There is no requirement for the council to undertake a formal risk assessment. Governance of the Framework will be handed to Creative Forest with the support of implementation, monitoring and reporting through a Creative Forest Compact.

### **Environmental / Climate and nature implications**

38. The draft cultural framework champions creativity in harmony with the natural environment, embedding sustainability and environmental consciousness at the heart of cultural activity. By celebrating the New Forest's landscapes and biodiversity, it promotes sustainable practices, inspires stewardship, and demonstrates how cultural life can protect and enhance the places we live. This approach ensures that creativity and nature thrive together, positioning the New Forest as a leader in low-impact cultural delivery and environmental responsibility.

### **Equalities implications**

39. The draft framework promotes Equality, Inclusivity, and Access by ensuring cultural opportunities are open to all, regardless of background, age, or circumstance. By leading the way in rural co-creation, it tackles isolation and geographic barriers, bringing culture to underserved communities through mobile, touring, and participatory models. These actions improve health and wellbeing, foster social cohesion, and create a more equitable cultural ecosystem where everyone can engage, contribute, and benefit.

### **Crime and disorder implications**

40. A cultural framework can help reduce crime and disorder by fostering pride in place and a strong sense of identity, which are proven drivers of community cohesion and resilience. When people feel connected to their local heritage and cultural life, they are more likely to engage positively with their community, reducing isolation and anti-social behaviour. Cultural initiatives—such as festivals, creative projects, and heritage activities—create shared experiences, strengthen social bonds, and give residents a stake in their environment, which in turn discourages vandalism, crime, and disorder by promoting belonging and responsibility.

## **Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications**

41. No specific implications.

## **New Forest National Park implications**

42. Ambition 3: in the Framework is to Champion culture and creativity in balance with nature and the Creative and Cultural Framework covers both the New Forest District Council and New Forest National Park areas.

43. The inclusion of the New Forest National Park in the development and initial review of the Framework has ensured their priorities are addressed and they will be a key member on the future steering group for development of the action plan and governance.

## **Conclusion**

44. The draft Framework has been consulted on with many stakeholders and we are now seeking approval to consult more widely on the document.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - Draft Creative and Cultural Framework  
Appendix 2 - One page cultural framework summary

### **Background Papers:**

None