

Inspirational Creativity, Transforming Lives Every Day

Our cultural ambition for Kent

DRAFT

Our Vision

By 2027 Kent will be a confident, vibrant county, where extraordinary cultural activity is easily available to all and which enriches and transforms everyone's lives.

Our Ambition

Our ambition is to create a place where:

- our investment in creativity and innovation ensures that entrepreneurs and extraordinary cultural practitioners choose to invest, live and work in Kent
- enchanting, surprising and innovative things happen,
- diversity is celebrated and thrives,
- we are recognised nationally and internationally for our transformative cultural product, achieved through ambitious and resourceful cultural planning.

Introduction

This strategy sets out a ten year plan from 2017 to 2027 for the shared ambition of all the creative partners in Kent: where culture becomes a part of people's everyday lives with more people engaging with, experiencing and being inspired by excellent arts.

Culture is a key driver for the prosperity of the county. The creative economy is one of the fastest growing sectors in the UK – growing at 8.9% per annum. The digital and creative industry is one of six sectors highlighted by government as a priority for growth and Kent has much strength to contribute to this.

In the last few years, you [the Creative Industries] have been the fastest growing sector in the economy, earning nearly £90bn in 2015, more even than our successfully spectacular automotive sector. This industry leads the way. Two million people employed in all parts of the UK, a quarter of a million businesses - you make Britain what we are but you also tell the world what Britain can do.

Greg Clark, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

Culture is also an essential ingredient for a fulfilling and richly rewarding life. Creativity helps us to see the world differently and understand our place within it. A rich cultural heritage builds our sense of who we are and where we are from, affirms our identity and helps us to build our resilience and self-esteem.

Our county, largely rural, extensively coastal, with internationally important arts and heritage and post-industrial estuary towns, has a distinctive offer. Kent is the UK's main gateway to Europe and with its unique location between mainland Europe and London is well positioned to maintain and grow our international outlook.

Our region is on the edge of significant change – over the next ten years the Kent and Medway population will increase by just over a quarter. This will need to be met with significant housing and infrastructure growth. The county is characterised by some notable highlights with emerging companies alongside comparatively small and geographically dispersed creative clusters. In order to fulfil our potential and play a nationally significant role we must build on these to establish greater critical mass and strengthen our collective voice.

This strategy is shaped by and aims to strengthen the collaborative work of the cultural sector and the local authorities. The time is right for the sector to seize the multiplicity of opportunities, to enable significant economic growth for the area and to work with local people embedding culture in the very heart of our society.

We will do this through three key actions:

- *Create*
- *Innovate*
- *Sustain*

Create

Supporting and enabling the presentation of excellent art and growth in world class creative productivity

The creation of excellent cultural product is at the heart of everything we do. Bold and experimental art encourages people to take part, and helps us to build a reputation as a dynamic county that provides rich cultural experiences for every person as part of their everyday lives.

A strong cultural infrastructure is vital to the production and presentation of excellent work and has a number of essential elements, which go beyond our networks of venues and technology. It includes people, collaboration, creativity and networks, which collectively form an ecology that supports delivery of high quality arts and cultural experiences.

We will...

- Enhance the cultural infrastructure where there is proven potential for sector growth.
- Ensure that all children and young people in Kent have access to high quality culture from an early age and on their own terms.
- Support the production of ambitious high quality work
- Deliver excellence through production, commissioning and programming by valued creative, cultural and heritage professionals
- Nurture skills and practice built upon strong artistic principles,
- Provide exciting and challenging experiences that will have a long lasting impact upon participants and audiences.
- Encourage and support the creation of work that demonstrates collaboration across a wide range of diverse backgrounds, organisations, disciplines and perspectives.
- Showcase Kent's reputation as a creative county locally, nationally and internationally.

Innovate

Developing original and creative ideas, encouraging creative leadership and supporting skills and learning.

Success is dependent upon encouraging and embracing innovation, and creating the space for experimentation. With the growth of new communities and creative clusters throughout Kent, it is vital that we encourage and nurture creative ideas. Creating the right kind of workspace is also critical – from artist's studios to large-scale production hubs.

Encouraging experimentation and linking with Kent's world class research institutions and universities will support growth, innovation and skills development. Leadership and skills development are key to innovation and we will nurture new talent, new ideas and a new skilled workforce.

We will...

- Pursue inward investment to enable cross sector collaboration and risk taking.
- Invest in creative clusters and workspace development
- Invest in and build upon the strengths of existing leadership and develop schemes to grow the creative leaders of our future
- Prioritise the development of the creative industries workforce with a focus on supporting the needs of freelance practitioners.
- Work with our outstanding education institutions, further developing creative and cultural research and digital innovation
- Promote cultural learning with improved careers guidance and vocational learning opportunities to develop employability, social and creative skills.
- Embrace advances in technology as essential components of the cultural landscape, and harness their creative potential to maximise use as artistic tools.
- Enable children and young people to become respected as commissioners, curators and producers of culture as much as they are audiences and participants.

Sustain

Delivering access to finance, support for businesses, smarter ways of working, and empowering entrepreneurship

Kent is ideally placed to further develop its thriving creative economy and become an area where creativity is at the heart of everyday life. However, we need to ensure that it continues to thrive and grow.

We know that a substantial proportion of the creative sector in Kent is freelance. We will review established business models and explore ways of working together to shape the sector to become more resilient. It will be a journey that realises potential, encourages collaboration, supports development, enables growth and works towards financial stability to support a mixed economy of skilled freelancers, micro-businesses and larger companies.

Building the profile of Kent and its unique role as a centre of creativity will also be key. Culture-led regeneration has already made a tangible difference to many areas and through effective partnership working, profile building and collaboration, we will enable Kent to become seen as the most exciting and innovative creative centre.

We will...

- Develop an approach to sector specific business support that champions resilience and sustainability.
- Explore new investment opportunities and access to finance, including engaging with public sector commissioning and supporting the creative sector to be investment ready.
- Embed culture and the creative economy firmly within Kent planning frameworks, ensuring that cultural provision and good design is at the heart of all new developments and integral to the growth of strong, resilient and successful communities.
- Develop and encourage creative clusters
- Collaborate with other sectors such as education, tourism and health to create areas of critical mass and strengthen the visibility and integrity of the creative sector.
- Maximise the role of digital distribution to showcase and promote work extensively and reach new audiences.
- Expand the county's cultural tourism offer, to grow the visitor economy further through enhanced connectivity and innovation.

Towards 2027

Creating a highly successful, innovative creative economy that contributes to everyday life in Kent will not happen by accident. There will need to be specific initiatives that will take place over the next 10 years. This will need to be an iterative process but will include:

- Cultural and creative industry investment programme throughout Kent
- Cluster-led development programme building on our strengths and seizing the opportunity presented by the Thames Estuary corridor
- Invest in a skills, training and business development programme
- Creation of high powered digital connectivity across Kent
- Investment in affordable creative workspaces that sustain sector growth
- Growth of cultural infrastructure and activity to match population increase and planned housing growth
- Ensuring the development of transport and planning infrastructure is fit for purpose for digital and creative industry growth

How will we know we have been successful?

- Kent will be respected locally, nationally and internationally as an ambitious, creative county
- All Kent residents will access rich cultural experiences as part of their everyday lives.
- Our ambitions for increased cultural entitlement for children and young people will be realised and demonstrated through the ART31 Charter
- More people and businesses will be attracted to both visit and locate in Kent

How will we measure success?

We will design and implement different methodologies for evaluation and collecting data, but will consistently capture specific data throughout the life of the strategy including:

- Creative outputs and outcomes
- Young people as board members of creative organisations
- Levels of investment
- Employment, training and volunteering
- Participation, audience reach and engagement including statistics gathered through programmes such as Audience Finder
- Press coverage, marketing and publicity

The success of this strategy relies upon the individual actions of all stakeholders, coherently presented in support of our shared ambitions.

Drawing on evidence included in case studies, commissioned research and evaluation, we will continue to build support, including political support and engagement from those in economic development, business, tourism, health and education. We will clearly communicate our impact on the outcomes for Kent's residents and restate the case for sustained investment. We must use our collective voice to influence decision makers.

Delivery and ownership

This strategy will be adopted by Kent County Council and is supported by the Kent Cultural Transformation Board, whose purpose is to connect the cultural sector in the county, creating opportunities for engagement and enabling collaboration with partners.

The Strategy will work alongside the individual business plans and artistic ambitions of Kent's creative sector, the strategic plans of key stakeholders such as Arts Council England and Historic England, and the County Council's Strategic Statement 2015 – 2020. The vision and key themes of the strategy should also be viewed alongside wider plans, particularly those arising from local, regional and national governments, including SELEP, Towards A National Prospectus for The Creative Economy in the South East, Kent's Growth and Innovation Framework, Kent and Medway Economic Partnership and the Thames Estuary Growth 2050 Commission.

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