

Wiltshire Cultural Strategy 2024-2030

Connecting through creativity

DRAFT

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1. Foreword

To be added by Leader post adoption

2. Introduction and context

Wiltshire is an exceptionally varied county with a rich tapestry of distinctive places set in an ancient and dynamic landscape. Wiltshire is home to the World Heritage Site of Stonehenge and Avebury, three National Landscapes – North Wessex Downs, Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs and the Cotswolds – and the New Forest National Park, all linked through vibrant connected green and blue infrastructure. Salisbury Plain exemplifies the multiple layers of use and identity so typical of Wiltshire, being simultaneously an important area for biodiversity, farming and military activity so integral to the county's identity. Our history as a place for creativity and innovation, connection to nature and living, working and celebrating alongside each other stretches back thousands of years and is symbolised by our iconic white horses carved into a landscape shaped by a huge range of custodians over time.

Wiltshire is a patchwork of over 250 villages and towns and the historic cathedral city of Salisbury. Each have their own distinctive characters, histories and identities. From ancient Lacock, the home of English photography, to the modern super-garrison town of Tidworth where a quarter of the population are under 15 years old, from the vibrant music, literature and visual arts of Corsham to the rich and unique calendar of colourful festivals and fairs in Devizes, and from the modern market town of Trowbridge with its thriving tech cluster to the lively market town of Chippenham, the county has been shaped into places made distinctive through culture.

Wiltshire's heritage is constantly being reinvented and made relevant through engagement with communities and contemporary ideas, led by organisations including the National Trust, English Heritage, Salisbury Cathedral, Wessex Archaeology, the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Wiltshire Museum and Salisbury Museum.

Wiltshire also has a rich contemporary culture with three Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations - Wiltshire Creative, Wiltshire Music Centre and Pound Arts - and arts organisations such as Trowbridge Town Hall Arts, Devizes Outdoor Celebratory Arts (DOCA), Kandu Arts, Folio Arts and the Last Baguette Theatre Company. Wiltshire has several recognised creative clusters in Trowbridge, Salisbury, Malmesbury and Marlborough and specialisms in createch, architecture, publishing and the creative arts. The county has long been a magnet and inspiration for visual artists, writers and musicians, and a place that inspires people to get involved in culture as volunteers.

The county is animated year-round by a rich and diverse range of festivals and events that together tell Wiltshire's collective story of cultural tradition and contemporary interests. There are 95 festivals including Salisbury International Arts Festival, WOMAD, Verve Festival, Chalke History Festival, the Westbury, White Horse Soapbox Derby, the Pewsey Carnival (which has been running since 1898),

the Urchfont Scarecrow Festival and the Devizes Confetti Battle (dating back to 1913).

Despite all these strengths there are challenges. There are social and health inequalities in some communities and access to cultural opportunities depends on where you live. The scale and geography of the county can make communication and knowledge exchange difficult. The creative and cultural sector is fragmented and fragile and levels of engagement and visitor numbers have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. There are particular issues around raising the aspiration and attainment of young people and the need to ensure that there is more in the cultural offer to inspire and empower them. Wiltshire's identity, economy and future is intrinsically linked with the natural environment and the county is committed to taking an ambitious approach to addressing climate change and enhancing the natural environment in all it does.

This is Wiltshire Council's first Cultural Strategy, and it seeks to address these challenges through a better connected, stronger creative and cultural sector and a more vibrant and diverse cultural offer, delivered through collaboration with strategic partners, the cultural and creative sector and communities. The Strategy has been developed through an extensive research process which analysed over 100 data sources, conducted four national case studies and mapped 639 cultural assets. The consultation process engaged with 772 local people during March and April 2024 in conversations, via workshops and through a public survey.

Key Statistics

- Population of 510,400 with 47.2% living in rural areas, including smaller towns, villages, hamlets or isolated dwellings ¹
- 3,255 square kilometres
- 253 towns and parishes
- 173 town halls
- 164 community groups
- 134 Areas of Special Scientific Interest
- 95 annual festivals and events
- 53 outdoor assets
- 50 museums
- One County Archive and Local Study centre
- 30 libraries
- 23 performing arts venues
- 22 visual arts galleries and studios
- 18 historic houses and gardens
- 17 Artsmark schools
- Eight White Horses
- Five National Landscapes (Cranbourne Chase, North Wessex Downs, West Wiltshire Downs, Cotswolds and New Forest National Park)
- Three Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations
- One World Heritage Site
- International Visitor spend was worth £92 million to the economy in 2019 (Visit Britain)

¹ Calculated using [2011 Rural-Urban Classification](#)

- Stonehenge was the most visited attraction with 977k in 2022
- Creative industries account for 5% of employment and 10% of businesses

2.1 What we were told

“A vibrant range of cultural events that represent the many and varied communities in the county, where providers are given the investment to do what they do best - engage and work with Wiltshire residents to increase their wellbeing and enrich their lives through learning, sharing, actively engaging with Wiltshire's amazing cultural heritage that has the capacity to bring everyone together through a shared joy of history.”

“A way of life that is simply celebrated”

“Accessible, wide ranging, exciting, ground-breaking.”

“Part of everyday life.”

“Wiltshire punches well above its weight in offering arts, culture and heritage - it just needs to publicise it better both locally and nationally.”

“We want to see a thriving ecosystem of partnerships amidst increasingly dwindling resources and the climate crisis doing bold stuff because we have to.”

‘How do we coordinate people having more, better, accessible high-quality fun?’

2.2 Definition of culture

Culture means many things to many people, and we take it to mean all those places, practices, activities and objects whose origin lies in human creativity, whether past or present.

It includes all arts, culture, creative practices, and heritage – built, natural and intangible such as local customs and traditions. It encompasses festivals and events, arts centres and arts development, music venues, community hubs for culture, libraries, museums, creative industries, archives, heritage sites and activities, the historic environment and the open public spaces where cultural events can happen.

For Wiltshire Council, culture is understood through five key themes:

- Economy - Culture is a central pillar of our approach to economic development, regeneration, and the development of vibrant local communities. It helps us re-imagine the way in which people engage with their towns and encourages long-term and sustainable businesses on our high streets
- Identity - Culture connects people with the places they live. It helps us discover more about our environment, its history, and its heritage. It also teaches us about ourselves, and our connection with our county
- Tourism - Culture is a key component of our offer to visitors, both from the UK, and further afield
- Health and wellbeing - Culture contributes to both mental and physical health. It helps people get active. It stimulates minds, and encourages healthy, active, and engaged lifestyles

- **Community:** Culture brings communities together, whether it's through village fetes, community fairs and festivals.

3 Our vision – connected through creativity

Wiltshire will be a vibrant beacon of culture where the joys of curiosity, community, nature and heritage help imagine new futures and improve the quality of life for everyone. Our vision is for Wiltshire to be a place of creativity, celebration and connection, inspired by the rich diversity of our surroundings, powered by culture, driven by purpose, and united in action.

By 2030, our vision is for a better-connected place where culture is the heartbeat of every village, town, city and landscape. Through creativity, shared experiences, a collective commitment to our environment and access for all, we aim to foster a sense of belonging that resonates with everyone. Wiltshire will be a place where culture supports health and happiness, where young people and creative enterprise can flourish and where economic growth is stimulated through distinctive and vibrant places where people want to visit, live, work, and raise a family. We want all residents in Wiltshire to enjoy the benefits that culture brings including those who face additional barriers to cultural engagement and creative participation.

4. Our principles

The strategy is built on three shared principles, which everyone will be encouraged to adopt:

- **Empower others** - Take an enabling approach, working in partnership, co-creating and making things easier for independent action.
- **Environment** - Be ambitious in caring for and enhancing the natural environment and addressing climate change
- **Access** - Work towards universal 'cultural entitlement' and ensure all opportunities are designed to be inclusive and accessible to all

4.1 Summary of our pillars and outcomes

There are seven pillars to our strategy, and each has an outcome for 2030 and beyond.

- **Identity** - Wiltshire will be a national leader in connecting people to the natural landscape through culture, and where the rich diversity of its different towns, villages, cities and landscapes encourages creativity, curiosity, and discovery
- **Health and wellbeing** - People in Wiltshire live full, healthy and enriched lives through developing their creativity and taking part in sociable cultural activity
- **Community** - People in Wiltshire live in cultural communities with distinctive, sustainable cultural hubs and vibrant high streets. There is a year-round calendar of festivals and events that attract people from across the county and beyond and which operate in an environmentally responsible way

- **Economy** - Everyone has the opportunity to develop the cultural and creative skills they need to flourish in life. Wiltshire is the natural place to grow creative and cultural enterprises of all types
- **Tourism** - Wiltshire is a place where everyone is invited. There is something for everyone amongst its rich natural beauty and vibrant cultural offer so go explore
- **Communicate** - Wiltshire has a thriving and connected cultural ecosystem where learning is shared, and success is captured and celebrated
- **Connect** - Cultural leadership in the county is dispersed, collaborative and collegiate, based on unity of effort and freedom of action working towards common goals.

4.2 Summary of our core objectives

The objectives we want to achieve through our cultural strategy are:

- Increase the number of people experiencing and creating culture in Wiltshire
- Increase engagement in arts and cultural activities by diverse audiences, including those who face engagement barriers
- Enable places to shape their own cultural identity
- Support good physical and mental health and wellbeing and community resilience
- Use art and culture as a vehicle to revitalise town centres and increase footfall
- Use art and culture as a mechanism to support economic growth in Wiltshire
- Enable the creation of a diverse creative workforce for the future
- Use art and culture to attract greater visitor numbers to Wiltshire and increase tourism
- Increase engagement with nature and the environment through culture and reduce the environmental impact of cultural activity

5 Our priorities

5.1 Identity

There is a need to balance the unique identities, independence and opportunities of each place with the huge gains which will come from working together on shared initiatives that transcend any one organisation or place.

We know:

- Engaging in local arts and cultural activities is valuable in fostering a sense of collective identity, space for interaction and shared experience and thus contributes towards people having a stronger attachment to place.²

Our ambition is:

- We want Wiltshire to be a national leader in connecting people to the natural landscape through culture, and where the rich diversity of its different towns, villages, cities and landscapes encourages creativity, curiosity, and discovery.

² The value of arts and culture in place-shaping (2019) Wavehill

We will:

- Co-ordinate and initiate landscape-scale cultural projects ensuring that culture is embedded from the start (Appendix A: Action Plan: 1.1)
- Support places to develop their own cultural narrative statements by sharing best practice and providing templates for co-creation (Appendix A: Action Plan: 1.2)
- Co-ordinate themed programming and joint planning and promotion across the county, starting with literature, visual arts and heritage (Appendix A: Action Plan: 1.3)
- Shape places through culture making good use of the public art guidance and other opportunities through planning gain. (Appendix A: Action Plan: 1.4)

Links to:

- ACE Outcomes: A Creative and Cultural Country and Cultural Communities
- Wiltshire Council: Resilient Society, Thriving Economy, Sustainable Environment.

5.2 Health and wellbeing

Wiltshire has a great quality of life, but health outcomes can vary hugely amongst different communities and in different places. It is important to encourage people to take responsibility for their own wellbeing and physical health by inspiring them to get active and connect with others. Arts and culture have been shown to have a transformative effect on health and happiness and there is a growing interest in Creative Health.

We know:

- Scientists have found that those who engaged in crafts during middle and old age were 45% less likely to develop mild cognitive impairment.³

Our ambition is:

- People in Wiltshire live full, healthy and enriched lives through developing their creativity and taking part in sociable cultural activity.

We will:

- Increase engagement and awareness of Creative Health through briefing sessions, workshops and advocacy (Appendix A: Action Plan: 2.1)
- Support social prescribing working with GPs and cultural partners from across the county (Appendix A: Action Plan: 2.2)
- Engage Public Health via a cultural workshop and identify opportunities to embed culture in community conversations, consultation and commissioning (Appendix A: Action Plan: 2.3)
- Harness our key assets in the natural environment, heritage and libraries to support universal access to creative health opportunities (Appendix A: Action Plan: 2.4).

Links to:

- ACE Outcomes: Cultural Communities

³ <https://www.thebestofhealth.co.uk/health-conditions/dementia/arts-crafts-prevent-memory-loss/>

- Wiltshire Council: Empowered People, Resilient Society.

5.3 Community

Wiltshire is home to some exceptional cultural venues that serve as important landmarks and cultural development hubs for their community, and which bring life to the high street. We want every community to have the hub they deserve. We want to do more to support cultural volunteers and ensure the ongoing sustainability of the joyous and eclectic mix of festivals and events which celebrate place and drive significant social and economic benefits through increased audience diversity.

We know:

- If people feel proud of the places they live, they are more likely to engage in other civic areas and activity including volunteering.⁴

Our ambition is:

- People in Wiltshire live in cultural communities with distinctive sustainable cultural hubs and vibrant high streets. There is a year-round calendar of festivals and events that attract people from across the County and beyond and which operate in an environmentally responsible way.

We will:

- Support new and existing cultural hubs working with cultural organisations and communities to increase investment and sustainability (Appendix A: Action Plan: 3.1)
- Champion Cultural Volunteers through promoting best practice, providing training and profiling culture within wider volunteering strategy and activity (Appendix A: Action Plan: 3.2)
- Work with festivals and events to encourage them to network, collaborate and take a leading role in improving environmental sustainability (Appendix A: Action Plan: 3.4)
- Run a workshop with Council Environmental Health and Licensing officers and the sector to improve guidance and develop toolkits (Appendix A: Action Plan: 3.4).

Links to:

- ACE Outcomes: Cultural Communities, Creative People
- Wiltshire Council: Resilient Society, Thriving Economy, Sustainable Environment.

5.4 Economy

The vitality of our creative economy relies on our cultural vibrancy and on improving the flow of talent, ideas and skills across and beyond the county. Cultural education is the foundation of both, and we want to ensure that all young people can develop their potential and creative passions through access to culture and a creative education throughout their lives. We want to make the creative and cultural sector

⁴ Townscapes: Pride in Place (2022) Bennet Institute of Public Policy

more visible and better connected, helping it to grow through targeted support, advice and resources.

We know:

- The creative industries and cultural sector combined contributed almost £160 billion to UK GVA in 2022. Creative Industries are growing faster than the UK economy as a whole.⁵

Our ambition is:

- Everyone has the opportunity to develop the cultural and creative skills they need to flourish in life. Wiltshire is the natural place to grow creative and cultural enterprises of all types.

We will:

- Seek to ensure a cultural education for all by working with schools to increase the number of ArtsMark and ArtsAwards, consulting with young people to understand more about their needs and by building links between the creative and education sectors (Appendix A: Action Plan: 4.1.1)
- Develop a Young People's Arts and Culture Forum (Appendix A: Action Plan: 4.1.2)
- Help creative businesses to grow by recognising the richness of the whole of the cultural and creative ecosystem (Appendix A: Action Plan: 4.2)
- Attract new creative businesses by providing attractive and affordable spaces and providing support programmes for creative start-ups (Appendix A: Action Plan: 4.3).

Links to:

- ACE Outcomes: Creative People, A Creative and Cultural Country, Cultural Communities
- Wiltshire Council: Thriving Economy, Resilient Society, Empowered People.

5.5 Tourism

Wiltshire boasts some major attractions and has a huge variety of honeypot sites within its boundaries. Stonehenge attracts around a million people per year and the county is an exceptionally attractive film and event location. We want to raise the profile of Wiltshire internationally and encourage visitors and residents to explore all the county has to offer year-round, encouraging active and sustainable travel wherever possible.

We know:

- Culture enhances our profile overseas. Culture in the UK ranked fourth in the world in the Nation Brands Index driven by its interesting and exciting contemporary culture and rich cultural heritage.⁶

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-and-digital-sector-gva-2022-provisional>

⁶ <https://www.visitbritain.org/research-insights/uks-image-overseas> Nation Brands Index (2023)

Our ambition is:

- Wiltshire is a place where everyone is invited. There is something for everyone amongst its rich natural beauty and vibrant cultural offer, so go explore.

We will:

- Develop a Visitor Economy Strategy that recognises the key role that the cultural and creative sector play in growing a sustainable visitor economy (Appendix A: Action Plan: 5.1.1)
- Work more closely with our strategic partners and the operators and stewards of key sites to support the impact of tourism, events and film (Appendix A: Action Plan: 5.2)
- Grow the Explore Wiltshire and Event Wiltshire apps as a cultural resource and cultivate culture ambassadors who can curate recommendations and itineraries (Appendix A: Action Plan: 5.3)
- Develop the Wiltshire Marque and roll out to include makers and artisans. The Wiltshire Marque will give individual businesses a distinctive 'Wiltshire' banner under which to sell their goods, promoting Wiltshire as a quality food destination and helping customers identify Wiltshire produce. (Appendix A: Action Plan: 5.1.3)

Links to:

- ACE Outcomes: Cultural Communities
- Wiltshire Council: Thriving Economy, Sustainable Environment.

5.6 Communicate

Wiltshire is blessed with a huge variety of cultural activity delivered in a range of different ways, but the size, geography and transport infrastructure of the county can make it hard to navigate. Improving communication was a key request across all of our consultation. We want to do more to profile good practice and encourage networking, knowledge exchange and collaboration. We want to work together to make the case for culture and celebrate our successes.

We know:

- 96% of Wiltshire residents we surveyed rate Culture as important or extremely important to their lives.

Our ambition is:

- Wiltshire has a thriving and connected cultural ecosystem where learning is shared and success is captured and celebrated.

We will:

- Expand and promote the Arts in Wiltshire blog so that it is aligned to the themes of the cultural strategy and provides the sector with a voice (Appendix A: Action Plan: 6.1)
- Run an annual Cultural Assembly every autumn to showcase best practice and provide networking opportunities (Appendix A: Action Plan: 6.2)

- Capture and celebrate value by developing a shared evaluation framework so that we can better make the case for culture. (Appendix A: Action Plan: 6.3)

Links to:

- ACE Outcomes: Cultural Communities
- Wiltshire Council: Thriving Economy, Resilient Society.

5.7 Connect

Culture in Wiltshire is created by a wide range of organisations and diverse groups of people, located in different parts of the county. Culture reaches broadly across many of Wiltshire Council's different service areas, functions and partnerships. Wiltshire Council wants to work through these partnerships and play a greater co-ordinating role, enabling the county's independent spirit to thrive whilst amplifying impact and making better use of resources.

We know:

- In 2021/22 61.6% of people in Wiltshire attended an arts event, museum or gallery or spent time doing an arts activity compared to 60.2% nationally.

Our ambition is:

- Cultural leadership in the county is dispersed, collaborative and collegiate, based on unity of effort and freedom of action working towards common goals.

We will:

- Develop a county-wide Strategic Partnership bringing together key cultural organisations in Wiltshire (Appendix A: Action Plan: 7.1)
- Work with Area Boards and Town and Parish Councils to encourage the development of local cultural partnerships and plans, aligning investment priorities (Appendix A: Action Plan: 7.2.2)
- Bring Council officers from across the organisation together into a Council Culture Forum to share progress and knowledge on a regular basis (Appendix A: Action Plan: 7.3.1)
- Seek to increase inward investment in culture across the county (Appendix A: Action Plan: 7.4).

Links to:

- ACE Outcomes: Cultural Communities
- Wiltshire Council: Thriving Economy, Resilient Society.

6 Evaluation

We have developed a detailed evaluation plan (Appendix B) to measure progress against our seven core objectives. Some baselines and targets have been established through our evidence base and others will be developed in the initial year.

We will use the following methods to evaluate and report on our progress:

Data collected and shared at a national level which enables us to compare our progress with other local authorities and includes:

- [Visit Britain](#) - Day visits and overnight stays
- [Active Lives survey](#) - Children and adults engagement with arts and culture, sport and volunteering
- [Lottery investment](#) - Amount of funding invested in the county
- [ONS survey](#) - Levels of Wellbeing and Life Satisfaction
- [Nomis](#) – Labour market and census

Data we produce each year for our [Community Area Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) which brings together 140 indicators spanning 10 topics including communities, recreation and culture and which enable us to compare needs and progress across the 18 different Community Areas.

We will include questions around culture in Public Health and Community Engagement surveys, starting with the Youth Engagement Consultation planned for 2024.

We will include questions about engagement with, and perception of, culture in Resident and Visitor Surveys.

We will conduct a high-level online Sector Survey health-check to capture key information from the sector to measure progress and shape ongoing support.

We will bring impactful examples of good practice to life via case studies, commissioned articles on the Arts in Wiltshire blog and through the annual Cultural Assembly.

The Arts in Wiltshire blog will evolve to be an archive of stories, case studies and annual reports over time. We will undertake regular subscriber surveys to ensure that the blog remains relevant.

The mapping exercise will be repeated in 2029 as part of the development process for the next strategy.

We will produce update reports for key Council meetings including Executive Leadership Meetings, Cabinet, the Health and Wellbeing Board and for distribution via the Community Area Boards.

7 Governance and delivery

This Strategy has been developed by Wiltshire Council through consultation and is envisaged as being a Strategy that can be owned and delivered by different stakeholders.

The Strategy has been developed to align with the priorities and work-plans of Wiltshire Council and its key strategic partners, and to deliver the outcomes of key stakeholders such as the DCMS, Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Overall leadership will be provided by a Wiltshire Council Steering Group which will include senior officers from Leisure, Culture and Communities and Economic

Regeneration. Co-ordination will be undertaken initially by the Arts and Funding Manager until additional resources can be identified.

We have developed a detailed Action Plan (Appendix A) which sets out how Wiltshire Council will deliver the Strategy, and which identifies lead officers and partners inside and outside the Council.

Actions are identified as being short, medium or long-term priorities using the following definitions:

- Short-term: Already underway or can be within 3-6 months, via existing or newly aligned resources
- Medium-term: To be undertaken within 1-2 years; may require additional planning, fundraising and resources
- Long-term: To be realised over a 3-6 year timescale for more complex work programmes.

We will encourage our key stakeholders to identify where they can align or develop activity which supports the delivery of the outcomes of this strategy. We will co-ordinate this through our leadership of the Connect theme and its three layers of cultural partnership working:

- The Strategic Partnership Group will include the National Trust, English Heritage, National Landscapes, the Canal and River Trust, Natural England, the Environment Agency, National Highways, Salisbury Cathedral, a representative from the funded arts organisations and Wessex Archaeology. This will be convened and chaired by Director of Leisure, Culture and Communities. This group will meet twice a year
- Once they are established, the place-based cultural partnerships will become part of the Cultural Assembly Steering Group. This will be convened and chaired by the Arts and Funding Manager. This group will meet three times a year.
- The Council Forum will include officers from Culture, Heritage, Libraries, Communities, Economic Regeneration, Engagement and Partnerships, Planning, Natural and Historic Environment, Licensing, Public Health, Families, Children and SEND. This will be convened and chaired by Head of Development, Leisure Culture and Communities This group will meet four times a year.

We will utilise these fora to build consortiums and partnerships to develop new projects and bid for major funding when the opportunities arise.

We will capture and share progress through our leadership of the Capture theme through the Arts in Wiltshire blog, the Cultural Assembly and shared evaluation framework.

8 Appendix

Appendix A: Wiltshire Cultural Strategy 2024-2030: Action plan

Appendix B: Wiltshire Cultural Strategy 2024-2030: Evaluation plan