

LEICESTER LEADING

A stronger, more
inclusive cultural and
creative economy

2025-2030





Image: Nitin Makadia @snapmakadia_photography

AMBITIONS

4,400 new creative economy jobs

10% increase in arts engagement

The cultural and creative sector in Leicester is strong already but has massive potential for growth.

We have two over-arching ambitions. To grow our creative workforce by 28% from 15,600 to 20,000 people by 2030¹. To improve our overall rate of adult engagement with the arts, from 80% now to the national average of 90%².

RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

This strategy has been based on extensive engagement and research led initially by consultancy **Fifth Sector**.

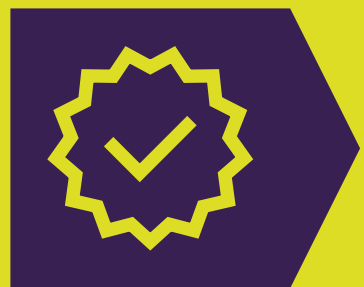
This strategy has been facilitated by a partnership comprising Leicester City Council, De Montfort University, the University of Leicester and Arts Council England³.

"Over the past decade and working with our many partners the council has been able to directly invest more than £75m of capital to improve our cultural and creative economy and we remain hugely ambitious for the future of the city though our own financial situation is increasingly difficult. "

**SIR PETER SOULSBY,
LEICESTER CITY MAYOR**

"Leicester has been named as one of the top five creative cities in the UK³"

FIFTH SECTOR



EXCELLENCE, EQUALITY AND TALENT

LEICESTER LEADING

New collaborations and best
in class delivery

EMPOWERING TALENT

Delivering new talent for the
creative sector



AUDIENCES

SHARING AND SHOUTING

Sharing data,
programming and a new
communications platform

A SIGNATURE FESTIVAL

A multi artform event
to showcase the
city's creativity



PLACE

INCLUSIVE HERITAGE

Communities developing and
sharing heritage to create
community cohesion

INSPIRATIONAL SPACES

Spaces to work, perform,
display, enjoy and admire



CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

CREATIVE CIRCUITS

Strengthening creative
industry sector networks

VISION FOR GROWTH

Innovation
and investment

CELEBRATING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION

AND PROVIDING ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL



LEICESTER LEADING

"A Cultural and Creative Strategy is key for the development of Leicester as a specialist centre for arts. Central to that is how we work together. I am excited by the opportunity to take part in the cultural strengthening of our diverse offering and to showcase our world class provision."

**PROFESSOR KATIE NORMINGTON,
VICE-CHANCELLOR,
DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY**

Image: Photography by Marc Brenner



WHY?

Our overall ambition. To be excellent in what we do, how we do it and with a view to the future. Much of our output already reflects excellence but our challenge is to also be a leader in how we work, with a clear focus on who benefits.

As the first super diverse city in the UK there is a particular need not just to champion diversity but to lead the way in tackling the entrenched inequalities in jobs and careers, leadership positions and governance structures across both the cultural and creative economy. Genuine commitment to collaboration and partnership, anti-racism, enabling access for all and to co-creation is needed to make this work. Promoting these themes will be an integral thread of our 'Shouting' strand.

41%

The 2021 census showed **41%** of Leicester's population was born outside the UK. The first plural city in the UK where no ethnic group has a majority.

"Research into Leicester's Creative Industries and Cultural Sector revealed a vibrant and dynamically clustered ecosystem."

"The performing and visual arts sectors, have shown remarkable post-lockdown recovery, with employment levels soaring sixfold since 2020."

FIFTH SECTOR

Excellence

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING AND WHAT'S THE PLAN?

Many Leicester businesses and cultural organisations are already leading. Curve is one of the UK's leading producing theatres, making world-class work for audiences in Leicester and around the country. Creating possibilities for disabled children has made Bamboozle Theatre internationally famous. Let's Dance International brings the best talent in the world to the city every year. The King Richard III Visitor Centre has been identified by Trip Advisor as one of the top 10% visitor attractions in the world. The National Space Centre attracts 1/3 million paying visitors every year. The Talent 25 programme is a ground breaking action research project about the benefits for babies and young children of being regularly involved in arts and creative activities.

Fifth Sector analysis confirmed that design remains a driver of employment, productivity

and growth in Leicester's creative economy with the city and the wider county economy showing highly similar patterns. It also found excellent examples of new fusion and/or Createch learning in both FE and HE. Both the Institute of Creative Technologies at De Montfort University and the Institute for Digital Culture at University of Leicester are delivering cutting edge learning and research around new technologies. Both Universities have key cultural assets such as Attenborough Arts and The Gallery as part of their superb campus facilities.

The city's designation as 5th most Creative city in the UK was no surprise given our longstanding entrepreneurial tradition. Ensuring Leicester continues to Lead will rely on multiple organisations and businesses being ambitious and other parts of this strategy being successful.



OUTCOMES

- ✓ Events, stories, seminars and conferences showcase Leicester regionally, nationally and internationally
- ✓ More Leicester creative businesses are recognised as sector leaders and enabled to grow



"Leicester is a diverse and international city with its artists, cultural organisations and creative industries making it a great place to live, grow up, study, work, and visit.

This strategy provides an ambitious pathway, so that by 2030 people at all stages of their lives, and from all parts of the city, can actively participate in and benefit from high quality cultural and creative activity. They will also experience the wide-ranging positive effects of cultural investment – through regeneration, economic growth, job creation and improved wellbeing.

That's why we're really pleased to be supporting Leicester's Cultural and Creative Strategy and to work with partners across the city to realise its ambitions."

**PETER KNOTT,
MIDLANDS AREA DIRECTOR,
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND**

Tackling Inequalities

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING AND WHAT'S THE PLAN?

Opal Arts, 2 Funky Arts, Phizzical, Nupur Arts, Cosmopolitan and Inspirate were Leicester’s new National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) funded by Arts Council England in the 2023 round and all of them lead work with global majority communities. Together with the broader NPO network (24 organisations), they are making the Creative Case for Diversity through targets to diversify their governance, leadership, workforce, programming and audiences so that the sector is more reflective of Leicester’s communities.

Work is underway to review how the city’s cultural offer can better reflect our Muslim communities, now a very significant proportion of the city population but currently underserved. The city’s new All In Leicester CIC is helping to improve the consistency of accessibility standards across arts and cultural venues.

This strand dovetails with ‘Inclusive Heritage’ work that will identify gaps and opportunities for working with underserved groups and with the ‘Shouting’ theme that will focus attention on work with global majority communities and

others currently under-represented. The Plan is to ensure these topics are regularly discussed and reviewed while we implement this strategy.

Data clearly shows that the wider creative economy remains disproportionately white and many parts are still less accessible for working class communities.

Arts and Cultural interventions and experiences play a crucial role supporting people to improve their life chances, confidence and employability. Tackling worklessness and increasing levels of economic inactivity is a national priority and it is particularly high in Leicester. The strategy seeks opportunities to graft such support on to more traditional skills, support and advice programmes that target vulnerable groups such as offenders, care leavers, the long-term sick, young people not in education, training or employment (NEET) etc.

“Leicester’s rich heritage resides in its diverse communities that shaped the fabric of the city through tangible public spaces, landmarks and buildings and the intangible heritage of arts, culture and acts of solidarity. Everyone is part of a shared story too.”

**PAWLET BROOKES,
CEO, SERENDIPITY**

“Everyone in the city should have the same experience at the same time regardless of ability.”

**BILL HALEY,
DIRECTOR, ALL-IN-ACCESS-ABILITY**



OUTCOMES

- ✓ New arts and cultural initiatives are co-created with Leicester communities
- ✓ Spaces, events and experiences enable genuine access for all regardless of abilities
- ✓ Better career opportunities, representation and leadership roles for global majority communities
- ✓ Better engagement and participation rates
- ✓ Programmes to tackle worklessness and economic inactivity use arts and cultural practitioners to work with vulnerable people
- ✓ Leicester is the most inclusive and accessible city in the UK



De Montfort University is the first university in the UK to receive a silver award in the Race Equality Charter (REC), a programme to improve the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students within higher education

RACE EQUALITY CHARTER

83.6%

37.9%

14.7%

Within the UK creative industries workforce, 83.6% of jobs are filled by people from the white ethnic group, 37.9% are filled by women, and 14.7% by disabled people

DCMS DATA FOR 2023



**EXCELLENCE,
EQUALITY
AND TALENT**

EMPOWERING TALENT

"Leicester is the creative home to some of the UK's leading artists and arts organisations. This strategy provides a framework for our sector to come together with a shared ambition to nurture and invest in talent, achieve artistic excellence, and reflect the rich diversity of 21st Century England across our work, our audiences and our workforce."

**CHRIS STAFFORD,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, CURVE THEATRE**

WHY?

Although the power of arts, culture and creativity to inspire, improve personal confidence and develop teamworking and the skill of listening is well known, the reality is a significant drop in the time apportioned to these subjects at all educational levels. Partly that reflects a lack of demand from students who have been directed to other subjects which can make it uneconomic for learning institutions. Partly it reflects national requirements that prioritised other STEM subjects.

The new creative economy is developing job roles that haven't previously existed and that often prize skills and knowledge combinations that aren't reflected in traditional study and learning programmes. This is both a major challenge and opportunity.

"Leicester's packed with talent, and the creative work coming out of the city right now is truly world-class. It's amazing to see such powerful ideas and fresh perspectives making a mark globally, all starting right here."

**MAT BARTRAM,
DIRECTOR, SOME BRIGHT SPARK**

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING AND WHAT'S THE PLAN?

Leicester has enjoyed a reputation, especially for performing arts training, for many years. That legacy remains strong so there are healthy foundations to build on. De Montfort University remains a conveyor belt for talent in festivals and arts management and the broader design sector including fashion. The city has a particularly healthy dance sector including Addict Dance Academy, Studio 79, People Dancing and produces world class artists such as Aakash Odedra and Akram Khan.

Leicester College and The National Space Centre have collaborated to deliver a new Immersive Design & Development BTEC Diploma Level 3 qualification (equivalent to three A Levels) to 16-18-year-olds students. Leicester University is world renowned for the quality of its Museum Studies and Space research. The Institute for Digital Culture is fusing technology and culture to generate new ideas in digital humanities, digital heritage, media studies, creative computing and data science.

De Montfort University commissioned research to answer the key question ‘To what extent is the Creative Industries Sector in Leicester and Leicestershire supported by, aligned to or divorced from the local skills and talent pipelines?’ The report will be a key tool to guide our skills thinking. It sets out the national picture and the challenges facing the creative economy sector, looks in detail at the current skills provision across Leicester and Leicestershire, identifies gaps and overlaps, strengths and weaknesses and makes specific recommendations. At a national level 42% of Cultural and Creative Industry (CCI) employers report gaps, especially in management and digital skills. High growth sectors such as Screen and Digital report an array of technical skills gaps where it is difficult to recruit sector-ready talent. Most CCI sectors report challenges in recruiting talent with the required fused skill-sets of creative, technical and entrepreneurial. Plus, a growing set of skills are required including legal literacy (managing intellectual property), environmental literacy (ensuring products and services are environmentally responsible) and strategic management.

The key conclusions and recommendations for local action include:

1. There is a notable gap in dedicated courses focusing on business management and entrepreneurship within CCIs.
2. No institutions explicitly offer courses targeting leadership, people management, or advanced management skills tailored for the creative sector.
3. To maximise the city’s diversity advantage we need a system-wide approach to showcase, champion and validate creative career paths for diverse communities, and back this with activities such as mentoring.
4. Digital skills need to be a core element for all creative courses.
5. There is an opportunity to build environmental literacy as a Leicester specialism, linked to our sector strengths in design, textiles and fashion.
6. To boost long-term resilience and competitiveness partners need a much more coordinated and tailored approach to CCI skills provision.



“Wygggeston and Queen Elizabeth I (WQE) sixth form college has one of the broadest creative arts offers in the country. Over 400 students study a creative subject, typically at Advanced level and over 75% then go on to further and higher study in related fields. Over 30 visual, creative and performing arts enrichment groups support the wider creative and cultural skills of students.”

**PAUL WILSON,
PRINCIPAL, WQE**



OUTCOMES

- ✓ Successful new learning programmes that reflect the needs of the creative economy
- ✓ Education and learning institutions work together on a shared plan over the life of this strategy
- ✓ Leicester has a national reputation for performing arts learning



SHOUTING AND SHARING

WHY?

Consistent feedback when developing this strategy has been:

- Leicester undersells itself so we should shout louder.
- We can be better at sharing information and coordinating our plans.
- Diversity is our superpower BUT...
- Some communities and groups aren't engaged or getting enough access to opportunity, attention and resources.

Image: Nitin Makadia @snapmakadia_photography



Shouting

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING AND WHAT'S THE PLAN?

Many individual organisations and businesses are very effective promoting what they do but it is difficult to get a view of our collective city offer. The plan will create a specific communication platform dedicated to showcasing this which people sign up to and support. We want people to feel part of something bigger but also to sign up because it is interesting, informative, practically useful and fun. Otherwise they won't. We will establish the platform by March 2025.

This will be led by the LCB Depot team who are already facilitating and supporting a wide range of creative industry networks and house many of our leading cultural organisations. The team will proactively reach out to showcase positive Leicester success stories not just locally but regionally and nationally. There will be a particular focus on how we strengthen the position of global majority communities and other under-represented groups across the sector.

The city boasts a unique set of assets including key cultural and heritage buildings across the Cultural Quarter, Old Town and the University campuses which will be promoted to attract more high-profile events from the corporate, public and third sectors. This will also be a focus

for the new Canopy workspace that will spotlight our design sector.

We will also be shouting about the advantages and opportunities for living in the city. The city centre residential population has grown from 5,000 in 2004 to 22,000 in 2022 and is forecast to grow rapidly in the next decade. Creating a new city centre neighbourhood with a vibrant economy day and night, quality leisure and cultural assets and attractive accommodation will help drive new investment and encourage new creatives and businesses to locate here.

"Traditionally the city's creative businesses focus on doing great work rather than gaining kudos. But it's time to reverse this tendency for humility and start telling our story to the world!"

**JAMES BURKMAR,
WORKSPACE DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER, CITY COUNCIL'**

"With over 15,000+ creatives, Leicester's cultural and creative workforce collectively has a significant national and global profile."

**GRAHAM CALLISTER,
HEAD OF FESTIVALS AND
EVENTS AND CULTURAL
POLICY, CITY COUNCIL**



OUTCOMES

- ✓ More than 10,000 people sign up to the Leicester Leading communications platform
- ✓ Leicester has a national profile as a cultural and creative hub
- ✓ People feel proud and talk up Leicester
- ✓ More organisers choose Leicester for events about cultural and creative issues
- ✓ Talented people want to move here or stay

Sharing

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING AND WHAT'S THE PLAN?

‘Sharing’ information about who we are (and aren’t) working with, co-ordinating ideas and joining up programming can lever more resources, engage more people, create business opportunities and attract more attention to what we are doing. But it is also essential to shine a light on groups who are under-served, who we need to engage with so they can direct activity in the future. Our engagement rates are well below the national average and that is a real challenge for the city.

Many organisations are already doing this work individually, much of it prompted by Arts Council England support. The opportunities are to join it up more effectively and to strengthen ties with community organisations to drive engagement.

Sharing experiences and ideas is also a key plank of the plan for creative industry growth. That includes support to grow creative business networks that share skills, lever resources and build new supply chains. It also means ensuring learning institutions and business support agencies work together and agree priorities, particularly for attracting new investment. This theme of sharing and joint working is also developed in the plans for Inclusive Heritage and Creative Industries.

"People are doing brilliant work but there are still too many cold spots where people aren't engaged. We need a clearer picture of that and a plan to address it"

**MIKE DALZELL,
DIRECTOR OF TOURISM,
CULTURE AND INVESTMENT,
CITY COUNCIL**



OUTCOMES

- ✓ A clear picture of who isn't engaged or benefiting now and a plan to address it
- ✓ Visibility of progress and a commitment to discuss what is and isn't working well
- ✓ Opportunities for under-represented groups to deliver and direct new work
- ✓ More opportunities for creative industry networks to lead policy and programmes
- ✓ Attract new audiences to our cultural offer via greater data sharing and joint programming





A SIGNATURE FESTIVAL

"Leicester's vibrant arts scene, including festivals and events, galleries, theatres and music venues attract a diverse clientele, enhancing hotel occupancy rates and length of stay."

**MARK HILLS,
GENERAL MANAGER, THE GRESHAM
& CHAIR, LEICESTER HOTEL FORUM**



1,749

Leicester had a massive 1,749 arts events and festivals taking place around the city on a regular basis. Even London only had 1,521

**5TH CREATIVE CITY
– ADOBE EXPRESS
REPORT 2024**

WHY?

Festivals deliver demonstrable economic and social benefits for local communities, promote inclusivity and participation and create excitement. They animate venues and public spaces, foster new artistic partnerships and are a key tool in place-making and cultural tourism. For 21st century cities, signature festivals provide a platform to showcase a city's creativity, diversity and unique cultural offer.

Leicester enjoys many festivals, some with a national / international profile such as Bring The Paint, Leicester Comedy Festival and annual Diwali celebrations. However, the city still lacks a signature arts festival. Nor do we have any established annual major commercial music festivals.

Economic and social benefits to Leicester citizens are greatest where festivals aren't targeted at one specific group but are accessible to all and attract people from across the whole city and beyond. Expanding events that deliver this approach is a key objective going forward.

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING AND WHAT'S THE PLAN?

Case Study: Light Up Leicester – A Collaborative Approach

Light Up Leicester will return in March 2025 based on such a template as a secular four-day event. Led by Leicester City Council, working with core partners BID Leicester, ArtReach and Leicester Cathedral, it will deliver significant visitor footfall and economic impact. Participating National Portfolio arts Organisations (NPO) include Inspirate, Nupur Arts, Darbar Arts and MBD Ltd, with additional opportunities for local artist commissions. Other local partners will include City Retreat / Ramadan FM, Highcross, DMU, Visit Leicester and major local businesses and employers. Programme accessibility, with advice secured through All In, is a key programme aim as is environmental sustainability.

Case Study : Leicester Music Conference & Festival

Familia HQ, PPL PRS, DMU, 2FunkyArts, TiME, UMC and Leicestershire Music Hub, are collaborating as a new Leicester Music Board (LMB) to build on the successful inaugural Leicester Music Conference in February 2024. The plan is to expand from a single-day into a dynamic two-day music and culture festival.

The network for established and emerging music and creative industry professionals will position Leicester as a destination for music and innovation. LMB will also explore commercial music festival models such as a variation of Brighton's successful The Great Escape.



The Signature Festival Opportunity – 'This Is Leicester'

The proposition for a new signature festival is one that celebrates the city's growing creative and cultural offer showcasing its global artists, creativity, arts venues, Universities, heritage, fashion, public realm, food and drink. The ambition is a multi-artform festival to offer audiences a mix of live performance, installations, exhibitions, film, talks, workshops, free and ticketed events. The programme would be reflective of and responsive to the city's communities and super diverse status.

A key element will entail promotion of aligned activity by partners. In other words performances, exhibitions, talks etc that showcase Leicester but that are already planned and budgeted. This should include planned youth / community-based activity as well as work by professional artists. Also, training opportunities for aspiring young artists, producers and event

production staff should be built in alongside volunteering options.

There is scope for the festival to sit between major UK arts festivals in Brighton (May) and Edinburgh (Aug). June would coincide with the end of the University year, offering the potential for significant FE/HE student and academic engagement.

One option is to build an existing brand i.e. Riverside Festival. Increasingly designed as a platform for local artists / NPOs and with a programme appealing to all city communities, the festival attracted an audience in excess of 75,000 in 2024.

The new signature festival would be led and curated by a new Steering Group of individuals and young producers representative of Leicester's NPO's and independent artists. Make-up of the group would be time specific to enable refreshed membership as the festival evolves. The target is to deliver the new festival in June 2026.

"BBC Radio 2 in the Park – Leicester 2023 was the first time we had toured the event after leaving Hyde Park in London and it was an absolute pleasure to work with the team at Leicester who were brilliant partners."

**RHYS HUGHES,
HEAD OF LIVE MUSIC AND EVENTS, BBC**



OUTCOMES

- ✓ Showcasing Leicester's artistic and cultural diversity
- ✓ Collaboration, co-design and new partnership working
- ✓ Economic benefit and external investment
- ✓ Social cohesion, engagement, civic identity and pride
- ✓ Opportunities for local creative talent
- ✓ Environmentally sustainable festivals
- ✓ Programming reflective of and accessible to all Leicester's communities





INSPIRATIONAL SPACES

"Leicester, a city which holds its long history front and centre, makes a perfect home for the Leather Conservation Centre which is focussed on the preservation of our past."

**WILL TUSTING,
CHAIR, LEATHER
CONSERVATION CENTRE**



Image: A new cafe opening on to New Walk is part of the masterplan for Leicester Museum and Art Gallery

WHY?

Iconic spaces and buildings create pride, generate awareness of place and enable culture to be celebrated and businesses to grow. Leicester is already home to many such as Curve theatre, Attenborough Arts, the King Richard III visitor centre, Space City, the LCB Depot and a network of parks and squares that support events, festivals and celebrations. However, across the cultural arts, visitor economy and the wider creative business sector some elements are missing or insufficient.

High quality spaces with the right technical infrastructure, aesthetic qualities and net zero credentials can also help us attract investment and new businesses, generate new collaborations and move us to the next level as a creative economy. This strategy will be used to seek other resources that can help us deliver on the ambition.

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING AND WHAT'S THE PLAN?

The Jewry Wall Roman Experience visitor attraction will open in 2025 following the city council's complete overhaul of the building designed by celebrated British architect Trevor Dannatt, creating a national level attraction that tells the story of 400 years of Roman history in Leicester.

The final element of the Cathedral Revealed project, a new Heritage Learning centre, will also open soon while the Cathedral itself already has after a multi-million pound investment programme. Plans for regenerating Leicester Market will allow for a large and flexible new event space at the heart of the city. All will add to the compelling offer of the city's Old Town which is now the heart of our leisure and visitor economy offer.

New capital investment at Leicester Museum and Art Gallery will enable a comprehensive redisplay of existing art spaces, improving interpretation and access. New social history and climate emergency galleries will be co-curated with city residents, building on the extensive outreach

work with local communities to attract new audiences while a much-improved new café will reveal the historic façade of the building and open out to New Walk.

At Haymarket Theatre, new capital investment will support additional learning and rehearsal space for the performing arts sector, especially for dance, underpinned by a new long-term deal with the Addict Dance Academy. This will also enable the venue to restart performances for audiences in 2025 that can sit alongside its primary purpose for teaching and learning. The programme will be curated to ensure it is complementary to existing city venues.

The legacy of street art created by local and international artists from successive Bring the Paint festivals can be seen everywhere and has made Leicester the stand out city in the UK for street art. Partners will seek new investment in the public realm and in city parks that can reduce costs for event organisers through better wifi, improved utility infrastructure etc.

"Creative spaces may just be what saves the city!"

**STEVEN ALBUTT,
DIRECTOR, STUDIO NAME**

Infrastructure and quality spaces to support the growth of the broader creative economy is also rapidly expanding. More than 60,000 sq ft of brand new Grade A net carbon zero workspace is available from autumn 2024 in three new 'DOCK' workspaces. They will further strengthen the success of Space City, a critical strand of the city's growing knowledge economy that is already home to the likes of Rolls Royce and the National Centre for Earth Observation.

Five sensitively refurbished heritage buildings at King St in the city centre will create Canopy, a new 40,000 sq ft creative workspace, targeted to grow Leicester's Design sector from spring 2025. The complex will support several hundred new jobs and facilitate a new creative community, centred around a glazed reception atrium that will be a destination in itself. Combined, the investment in new workspaces totals more than £30m. The scope for further capital investment is also explored in the Vision for Growth strand.

100,000 SQ FT

100,000 sq ft of new workspace at Space City in 2024 and at Canopy in 2025 will support 500 jobs in the creative economy



OUTCOMES

- ✓ Leicester's 'Old Town' offer is celebrated as a visitor destination by Trip Advisor and similar
- ✓ More bespoke, occupied workspace for growing creative businesses
- ✓ More creative business relocates to the city and activity in the Cultural Quarter expands
- ✓ Promote sustainability and effective responses to climate change





INCLUSIVE HERITAGE

WHY?

This builds on imaginative work in recent years to tell stories that engage communities and groups who are typically left out of standard 'culture'. The specific opportunity and the focus of this strategy is that Leicester has been chosen as a pilot for the National Lottery Heritage Fund's (NLHF) new 'Place' programme. This new funding stream could be worth £10m over the next decade for Leicester and is additional to the existing menu of NLHF funding programmes.

"To mark the 50th anniversary, Navrang secured funding to tell the story of the Ugandan Asian expulsion and its impact on individuals, the community, the city of Leicester and the UK as a whole."

**NISHAL SAUJANI,
NAVRANG**

"Leicester's heritage is distinctive and diverse, and the Inclusive Heritage programme will involve and celebrate communities, telling their unique stories and increasing understanding, access and learning."

**CLLR DEMPSTER,
LEAD MEMBER FOR CULTURE,
LEICESTER CITY COUNCIL**

"We want to boost pride in place and connection to heritage across whole places rather than individual projects. Leicester was chosen because of the breadth of its heritage, and the clear appetite of a range of partners in the city to explore and share that heritage."

**LESLIE OWEN-JONES,
HERITAGE FUND DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER, NATIONAL LOTTERY**

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING
AND WHAT'S THE PLAN?

Exploration and celebration of city Heritage has been central to cultural investment over the last decade including the development of the Story of Leicester online; a network of more than 350 Heritage Panels on the streets and a new, permanent Stories gallery at Leicester Museum and Art Gallery co-curated with local communities. It includes extensive capital investment in Heritage buildings such as Leicester Castle, now home to De Montfort University and the Heritage Action Zone programme that helped re-invigorate the Georgian quarter of the Old Town.

Our Heritage talent and organisational infrastructure is strong including University of Leicester’s recently launched Heritage Hub and a city Heritage Partnership that has been in place for more than a decade and a network of specialist creatives who have all led heritage initiatives that celebrate untold stories.

Recent initiatives include ‘Punks’ by Soft Touch and partners and ‘Rebuilding Lives’ led by Navrang Arts and partners which both won national awards. Serendipity secured one of

the largest Heritage Fund grants ever awarded to a black arts and heritage organisation for ‘Unearthed’ which will archive and celebrate the diversity of African and African Caribbean communities across the Midlands. Metro Boulot Dodo create immersive experiences using VR and projection mapping to redefine heritage storytelling while local creative businesses such as Holovis, Haley Sharpe and Heritage Interactive are leaders in this field.

Diversity distinguishes Leicester and is easily demonstrated. But diversity does not necessarily deliver inclusion, community cohesion and equality. So the proposition for Leicester’s Place programme is ‘Inclusive Heritage’ that specifically promotes these outcomes.

Communities will be supported to identify what heritage means for them and to celebrate it but also to engage others and bring people together. Working in partnership with the Audience Agency, a new city partnership will consult extensively in 2025 to generate a longer-term plan, working with locally recruited community heritage researchers.



“We are fortunate to have such a range of talented people and organisations in our city, and providing outstanding and highly accessible public realm art has become a key part of our strategy.”

**SIMON JENNER,
DIRECTOR, BID LEICESTER**



“Being surrounded by local talent and organisations who share our passion for arts and heritage reminds us daily of the power of storytelling and community. As we grow together, we’re committed to creating spaces where voices from all backgrounds are not only welcomed but celebrated.”

**TARA MONROE,
CEO, OPAL 22**



OUTCOMES

- ✓ New stories and ideas develop prioritised by Leicester communities, based on engagement and co-creation principles
- ✓ Greater mutual appreciation between communities about ‘shared’ heritage themes (food / family / music / sport / stories / places of worship / transport etc)
- ✓ Initiatives that engage and involve everyone regardless of their abilities – All In

CREATIVE CIRCUITS

"The University of Leicester, in partnership with Leicester City Council and the National Space Centre, is transforming the local technology economy at Space City. Home to global space sector leaders, including Rolls Royce, Airbus, Maxar and CGI, the £100m Space Park Leicester will contribute £750m to the economy and create high value employment."

JIM WILLIS, MD, BULB

"Joining the Create Growth Programme was really beneficial to myself and my business. It was great to be alongside so many other creative entrepreneurs / businesses and the peer learning and opportunity to have a dedicated mentor was a game changer."

**YASIN EL ASHRAFI,
MD, HQ FAMILIA**

WHY?

Creative businesses grow faster when they are close to supply chains, can access expertise and skills, develop partnerships, access markets, peer support, premises, finance and inspiration. This is particularly important for freelancers who can't so easily access information and opportunity.

The above is enabled by strong sector networks where businesses share information, set up new collaborations and share promotions and also by co-location in specific premises when informal contacts and conversations are made easier and events bring people together.



WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING
AND WHAT'S THE PLAN?

Leicester is already home to creative hubs such as the LCB Depot and Makers Yard. LCB operates as a creative agency facilitating contacts, conversations and new partnerships. In recent years this has included establishing Leicester Design Season, supporting local artists and makers, hosting seminars about Urbanism, encouraging local networks for the music and film sectors etc. Groups such as Create Leicester and Leicester Startups also support communities of existing and aspiring entrepreneurs.

Over the next few years, Canopy at King St will create a new hub for a spectrum of design related businesses and the growth of Space City will do likewise for tech and innovation businesses. Both universities are centrally involved with DMU active across the breadth of the Design sector while the University of Leicester has led the work to develop the space and technology cluster at Space City.

The Plan is to encourage all these networks to be more sustainable, to grow their memberships, develop awareness of business opportunities, create services that benefit their members

and position the city to attract investment. The power and effectiveness of mentoring and of mutual support is central to the approach and especially important to engage the many freelancers who characterise much of the sector. Business support programmes that reflect this approach will be developed over the life of the strategy. There is also an important link here to the ‘Shouting’ strand of the strategy which will position the city nationally as a creative economy.

Resource from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is supporting four sector networks in 2024/25 that cover music in a network led by Familia HQ; socially engaged artists led by Art Reach; creative digital art and film led by Phoenix and a new black arts forum led by Opal Arts. All are intended to kick start and create some momentum for this new approach. The Plan is that whatever replaces UKSPF will continue this approach.

It is vital that support for the creative economy and for business networks is prioritised when other strategies for economic growth are refreshed.

300

Since opening in 2004
more than 300 creative
businesses have been
based at the LCB Depot



OUTCOMES

- ✓ Sector networks extend membership and lever new resources
- ✓ Shared spaces grow networks, build partnerships and identify new business opportunities
- ✓ Other economic strategies and business support programmes have a clear focus on supporting creative industry networks



Image: Canopy - A managed workspace supporting design sector businesses will open in summer 2025

"It used to be the case that to work as an ambitious creative, you had to pack up and head to the capital. This is no longer the case."

GUY BOYLE,
CREATIVE DIRECTOR, GRAFF.IO

"Design and designer fashion was revealed as a continuing strength of Leicester's creative economy... contradicting the impression of decline in employment given in national statistics."

FIFTH SECTOR

VISION FOR GROWTH

"The University of Leicester in partnership with Leicester City Council and the National Space Centre is transforming the local technology economy at Space City. Already home to leading-edge firms such as Airbus, Maxar and CGI, it is already the 2nd largest campus-based cluster with a dedicated space focus in the UK."

**PROFESSOR HENRIETTA O'CONNOR,
DEPUTY VICE CHANCELLOR,
UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER**

"From August 24 Leicester has its Fashion Hub that will bring circularity, ethics and true sustainability. There is no other region in the UK that can combine knitting, dying, printing, garment making, design and all technical support processes such as pattern making and grading like Leicester."

**JENNY HOLLOWAY,
CEO, FASHION ENTER**

WHY?

Alongside bespoke premises and support for sector specific networks, we need a broader plan to drive innovation and investment across the whole creative industry spectrum. This strategy supports the analysis and direction of the [Creative Industry Sector Vision](#), launched by DCMS in June 2023 which sets out both the rationale, the opportunity and many of the specific interventions that are needed.

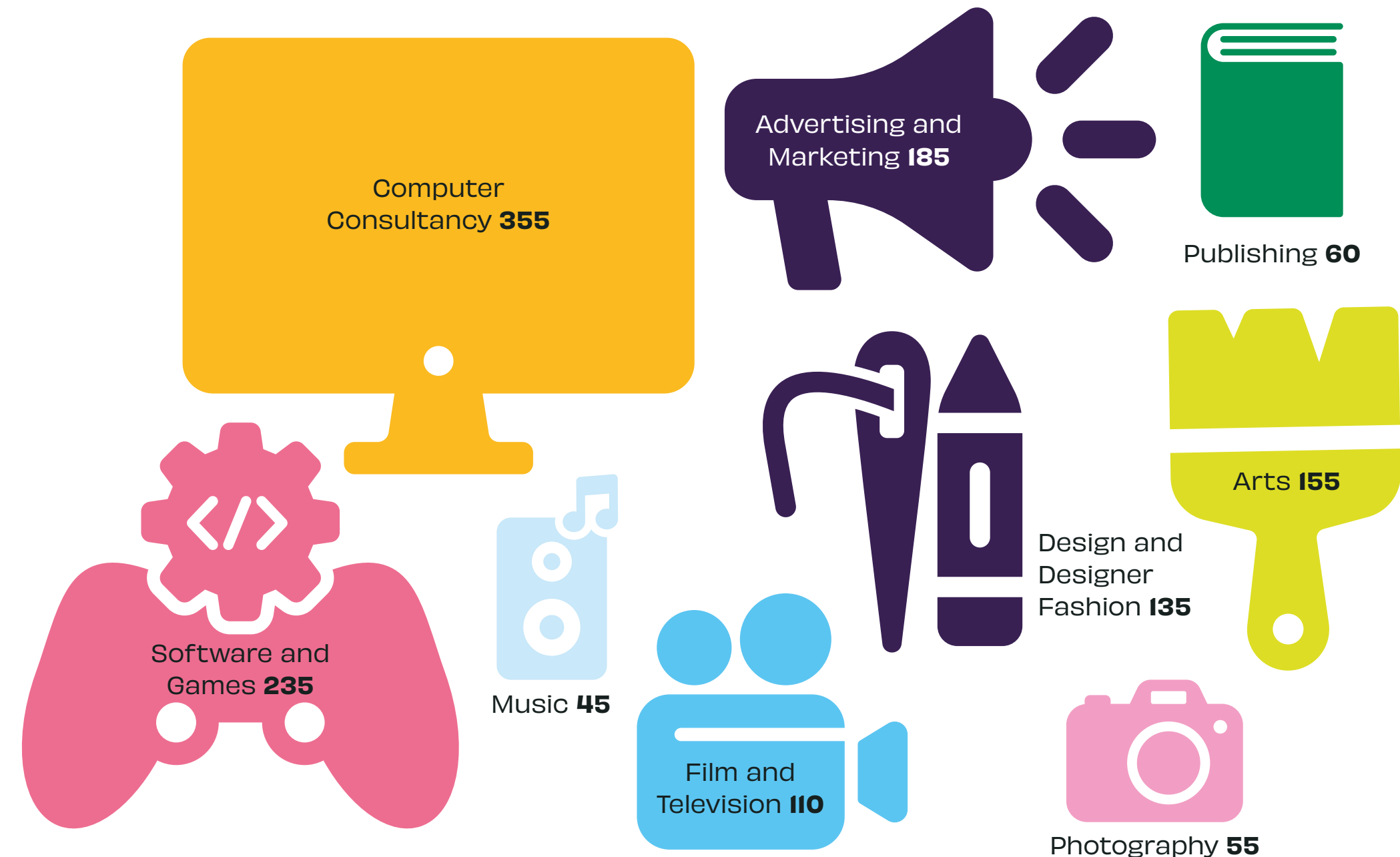
Creative industries have been growing at more than twice the rate of the rest of the economy for many years. Their contribution to the UK economy (now more than £125bn) outstrips the combined value of the life sciences, aerospace and automotive sectors. The new government has an appetite to both reform our skills system (a theme picked up elsewhere in this strategy) and to prioritise creative and vocational subjects in the national curriculum.

Historically, the significance of creative industries has been underplayed. However, Creative Industries have now been identified as one of eight growth sectors in the new Industrial Strategy. There is an increasing consensus that facilitating investment and developing appropriate skills programmes is needed to maintain the UK's global advantage in music, arts, advertising, literature and other parts of the digital economy (such as gaming).

Leicester is a creative and design-enabled economy. Many of our design engaged businesses and workforce are driving successful innovation, productivity and growth not just within the Creative Industries but in other sectors such as manufacturing, engineering and logistics.

The partners to this strategy will actively work together to increase investment in research and innovation, design bespoke business and talent support programmes and maximise opportunities for exporting and international trade.

COUNT OF LEICESTER CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
BUSINESSES, JANUARY 2024 FIFTH SECTOR



"Leicester is at an exciting crossroads. The city's creative sector is thriving and the energy is palpable. With the right strategic investment, the city is positioned to become a beacon of creativity and collaboration."

**STACEY WRAGG,
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
CREATIVE COLLABORATORS**

"Leicester's cultural and creative sectors employed twice as many people as shown in national statistics."

FIFTH SECTOR

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING AND WHAT'S THE PLAN?

Leicester creative businesses with growth potential have already been benefitting from the recent Create Growth programme, designed to help them scale up and become investment ready. The VentureVersity project operated via our three local universities is enabling local creative businesses to benefit from fast tracking the absorption of university generated Intellectual Property.

Our three universities create a strong platform of research and talent needed for sector growth which is both nationally and globally competitive. The new University Civic Partnership has created momentum and a whole team approach working with partners to develop an overarching Innovation Strategy that can drive productivity and innovation throughout the sector. Competition for research and innovation resource is particularly high so our local creative economy needs a clear prospectus.

The universities have strong business partnerships and have been successful in attracting investment from UK Research & Innovation (UKRI) to local projects. Looking forward they will work with partners to develop

a compelling proposition for the Creative Clusters funding opportunity anticipated in spring 2025. Midlands based partnerships have not benefited from investment in previous rounds of the programme. It is likely the bid opportunity will be for circa £5-£10m and will align with our strengths. Previous allocations have proved extremely effective to lever investment and to build stronger links between higher education research and development initiatives and creative businesses that can solve real life business challenges and deliver economic growth. You can find out more about it at creativeindustriescusters.com.

The preparation work for the Creative Clusters bid and the broader Innovation strategy will include a major sector engagement exercise over the autumn and winter of 2024/25 to ensure that both properly reflect the needs, priorities and opportunities of our creative businesses. The legacy of that engagement will be a new partnership that can strengthen collaboration and be an effective advocate for policy and programmes that support the creative sector and unlock investment.



OUTCOMES

- ✓ A new Creative Cluster programme driven by a partnership of Higher Education institutions and creative businesses
- ✓ An Innovation strategy that sets out interventions to drive productivity and investment
- ✓ A new Creative Industries partnership that guides the above and advocates for new policy and programmes that grow the sector



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS, RESOURCES AND TRACKING PROGRESS

Successfully delivering this strategy requires strong strategic partnerships and clarity about who is accountable and how we know if we are on track. Some of this already exists, some needs to be created. For many of our cultural and creative businesses, partnerships already extend far beyond our city boundaries and these too will be vital if we are to keep Leading.

The enthusiasm of both city universities to invest in culture and to support creative businesses generates momentum and supplies talent whilst our freelancers and creatives keep the city at the forefront of innovation in artistic genres and industry applications. The number of Leicester organisations core funded through the Arts Council England’s National Portfolio has tripled since 2017, increasing resources and enabling more work with different communities across a wide range of art forms.

Some of the resources to deliver this strategy, especially for capital investment is already

secured, or as with the Heritage Place programme, is earmarked for Leicester. It is a priority to sustain Arts Council England core funding for the NPO network and to build on it with other initiatives and resources that could help increase engagement. For example the city is one of the largest in England without a Creative People and Places (CPP) programme. We don’t yet know what the new government will propose to replace the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and what other resources may emerge to support innovation, productivity and business growth though we are hopeful that a priority for Creative Industries will be retained.

Creative Industry work for this strategy will be led and championed by our Universities through the mechanisms of their new ‘Civic Agreement’, working closely with the city council and engaging directly with creative industry businesses. Ensuring that other economic and regeneration strategies include a focus on the creative economy and innovation is a key ambition. This

Creative Industry partnership will also help drive work around Talent, including schools, colleges and others responsible for devising and delivering the skills programmes needed to grow our creative economy. Progress will be reviewed annually in the autumn.

Work around Sharing and Shouting, Excellence and Equality and Signature Arts Festival will be facilitated by the city council working with cultural, creative and community organisations and others including Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Specific partnerships with under-represented communities will be developed to deliver the Inclusive Heritage programme and with a broad range of creatives to invent ‘This is Leicester’. Progress against these strands will be reviewed each spring.

Image: [Giulia Mio Millinery](#)

ENDNOTES

- 1 Baseline set by Fifth Sector research 2023.
- 2 Based on [DCMS engagement stats](#) released in October 2024.
- 3 As named by [Adobe Express](#) in May 2024.

IMAGES

All images, unless otherwise indicated, have been provided by Leicester City Council and its partners.



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