



Barnsley Culture Strategy **2026-36**



BARNSELY
Metropolitan Borough Council



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WELCOME



We are proud to introduce the Barnsley Culture Strategy. It is a vision that unlocks the potential of the cultural sector, recognises the borough's heritage of making, resilience, and creativity, and responds to opportunities and challenges.

We know that culture is more than something we protect or manage. It's what brings our communities together, gives us hope, keeps us well and shapes Barnsley for future generations. Our Culture Strategy asks everyone to join in. Together, we want culture to be a part of daily life everywhere in our borough, from the busy town centre to our parks and neighbourhoods.

Investing in culture is not just about preserving heritage or promoting the arts; it's about building communities where everyone feels valued. It supports health and wellbeing, grows social connection, and raises aspirations. Culture also contributes directly to economic growth, driving regeneration, supporting employment and inspiring innovation.

Barnsley's cultural ecosystem is alive with potential but requires shared commitment. That's why this strategy calls for a shift in how culture is delivered – encouraging shared leadership across the sector.

Speaking to many people across Barnsley, the things that matter most is local pride, shared traditions, intergenerational connection, and the chance to be seen and heard. People want more hands-on opportunities to create, perform, celebrate and participate.

This strategy will deliver exactly that. It will amplify existing cultural communities and make them thrive. Through six key objectives, the Culture Strategy will provide the right structures, funding and drive to realise the ambitious possibilities of Barnsley's cultural sector. Now is our time to rethink what culture can do. With shared leadership, big ambitions, and belief in Barnsley, we will build a future where creativity brings equitable pride, success, wellbeing and connection to all who live here.

The strategy has a 10-year timeframe to ensure the ambitions outlined are delivered and embedded across the Borough, however the strategy will be regularly reviewed and updated, and a major refresh will take place after 5 years.



**Barnsley's
culture is full
of possibilities.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In times of change and uncertainty, culture serves as a bridge connecting individuals across backgrounds, generations, and beliefs. Through shared stories, traditions, heritage and creative expression, culture nurtures understanding, empathy and a sense of belonging. Investing in culture is not merely about preserving heritage or promoting the arts; culture is about building resilient communities where everyone feels seen, heard and valued.

It supports mental and physical wellbeing, fosters social cohesion, and raises aspirations. Culture also contributes directly to economic growth, driving regeneration, supporting employment and inspiring innovation. As we look ahead, embracing culture as a tool for unity and ambition is essential to strengthening the social fabric that holds Barnsley together.

This moment is pivotal. Barnsley's cultural ecosystem is alive with potential but unlocking that potential requires leadership and shared commitment. With national and regional funding routes evolving, rising local momentum, and widespread appetite for inclusive creativity, Barnsley is in a rare position to step forward confidently. What happens now will shape not just the cultural offer, but the borough's identity, wellbeing and economic future. That is why this strategy calls for a shift in how culture is delivered, from individual efforts to collective

action, and from top-down models to shared leadership across the sector.

This strategy sets out a confident, coordinated and forward-looking vision for culture in Barnsley. It recognises the borough's rich heritage of making, resilience, and creativity, while responding to new opportunities and long-standing challenges. It places local communities at the centre and positions culture as a driver of health, learning, local pride and inclusive economic renewal.

Looking out, Barnsley stands to benefit from national momentum around the growing recognition of place-based renewal, and investment opportunities through the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority. Across the UK, culture is playing a pivotal role in helping towns address inequality, disconnected youth, civic disengagement and economic transition, all highly relevant to Barnsley's future.

Looking in, Barnsley has already invested in cultural regeneration and is home to a growing, diverse creative sector. Local leadership supports culture as a tool for wellbeing and transformation. But residents continue to face barriers including cost, confidence, access and awareness. There is a strong appetite for more equitable, inclusive, community-rooted culture that reflects Barnsley's identity and reaches people where they are.

Through extensive engagement across the borough Barnsley residents have told us that matters most to them: local pride, shared traditions, intergenerational connection, and the chance to be seen and heard. People want more hands-on opportunities to create, perform, celebrate and participate, especially through music, digital platforms, workshops and festivals. The strategy answers this call with a robust framework to enable the sector to thrive and for all local people to be directly involved.

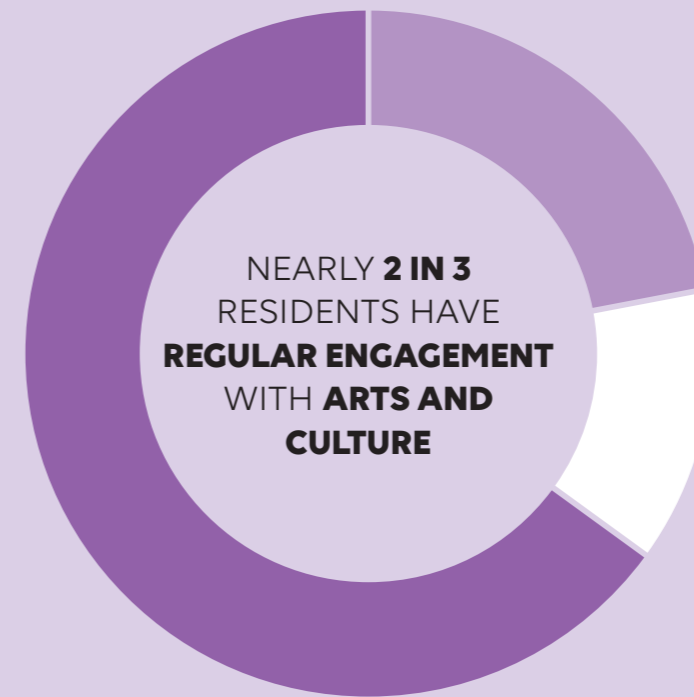
Culture is the thread that weaves together the diverse fabric of our communities.



HEARING FROM BARNLSLEY'S PEOPLE

A culture strategy should begin with listening, and nearly **1,000 residents** across Barnsley have helped shape this one. From town centre shoppers to community leaders, from young creatives to older volunteers, a cross-section of Barnsley's residents have been reached.

1,000 residents and their engagement with arts and culture



65% Often **36%** have a health problem or long-term disability

13% Rarely/Never

22% Sometimes

KEY SECTORS

Young creatives

Community leaders

Older volunteers

Town centre shoppers

WHO ARE THEY?

Gender		
♀ Female		69%
♂ Male		26%
♂ Other		5%
Age		
Under 24		10%
Aged 25-34		10%
Aged 35-44		12%
Aged 45-54		20%
Ages 55-64		22%
Aged 65-74		19%
Aged 75+		6%

Public consultation led by Flying Geese Consultancy and contributions from Collective Sense, LUNG (voice of children and young people), Bosedo Olawoye (on behalf of Global Majority communities), arts & culture organisations and freelancers across Barnsley.



WHAT MAKES BARNLSLEY, BARNLSLEY?



Belonging

Community spirit is the top reason people love where they live. Many also expressed pride in Barnsley's heritage, green spaces, and shared traditions, such as brass bands and village galas. There was a strong desire to see working-class creativity and maker identity honoured and carried forward.



The analysis of this extensive engagement has allowed us to identify the issues of most importance to our communities.

Creativity

Cultural engagement in Barnsley is hands-on, social, and local with strong interest in music, film, crafts and theatre. It often happens in everyday spaces. Young people are drawn to digital, gaming and spoken word, but these are under-supported. Many residents do not know what is on or how to take part, with skills and access gaps, especially in digitally excluded areas.

Access

Cost is the biggest barrier to cultural access, followed by transport, confidence, and lack of awareness. People want culture to come to them, with family-friendly events, flexible hours, and activity rooted in communities. The issue is not a lack of cultural offer, but visibility. There is a clear opportunity to close the promotion gap, as seen by the new website Visit Barnsley.

Aspiration

Residents want more live music, festivals, workshops, and spaces, to create and connect with stronger intergenerational activity and culture in every Principal Town, especially Goldthorpe, Royston and Cudworth. There is also a clear desire for Barnsley to tell its story better and share its creativity beyond the borough, both nationally and internationally.

Insight

Young people want to lead, not be tokenized. Global Majority residents seek real representation and face added barriers like cost and safety. Older adults value routine but welcome sociable, local activity. Each Principal Town has its own cultural rhythm, from Penistone's heritage focus to the Dearne's pride in festivals.

BARNLSLEY'S CULTURE

Barnsley's culture does not need reinvention, it needs recognition. Across its towns, estates, hills and high streets, **creativity is already happening**. The role of the Culture Strategy is to amplify what is here and make it thrive.

Barnsley has always made things and still does! "We've got talent in our hands – always have".

From sewing and crafting to woodwork, ceramics and textiles, making is part of everyday life. It's passed down, reinvented and proudly worn. This is creativity with roots, with purpose and with pride.

Community pride runs deep in Barnsley, in its working men's clubs, youth groups, choirs and charities.

The opportunity now is to extend that spirit of belonging to new and emerging communities, building a cultural life that is welcoming, inclusive and shared.

From the sound of brass bands to the smell of home-cooked food, Barnsley's festivals bring people together.

They're vibrant expressions of place, heritage and music, mixing the iconic with the everyday and celebrating who we are.

Barnsley is defined not just by its buildings, but by its green spaces, woodlands and edge of peak landscapes.

From walking trails to open air performances, there's huge potential to connect culture with the natural environment, supporting wellbeing and wider access.

Barnsley tells it straight and tells it well.

Through museums, memory projects, community theatre and storytelling, this is a place that knows how to honour the past while speaking to the present. The stories are honest, powerful and lasting.

This is a borough that's overcome hardship with creativity, humour and grit.

Now, with new energy and growing confidence, Barnsley's cultural scene is ready to lead, not just survive, but thrive.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

This strategy comprises **six bold objectives**, with tangible performance measures that will shape the future of culture in Barnsley. The objectives are shaped by a vision rooted in Barnsley's personality.

Vision: Barnsley's cultural identity is powered by the passion of its people, where creativity is lived, shared, and celebrated across every community

The six objectives

<p>1</p> <p>Creative identity and enterprise</p> <p>Position Barnsley as a town of makers and a hub for creative enterprise.</p> <p>Performance measures</p> <p>Short term (1-3 years) Active makers/creatives registered in network.</p> <p>Long term (5-10 years) Creative workspaces opened or repurposed.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Celebration and festivals</p> <p>Put festivals back on the streets to ignite pride and connection.</p> <p>Performance measures</p> <p>Short term (1-3 years) Community-led events across Principal Towns (per year).</p> <p>Long term (5-10 years) Audience diversity (index vs borough demographics).</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Storytelling and cultural voice</p> <p>Tell Barnsley stories that stick, locally and nationally.</p> <p>Performance measures</p> <p>Short term (1-3 years) Original stories commissioned (digital/live).</p> <p>Long term (5-10 years) External media mentions (regional and national).</p>
<p>4</p> <p>Place and wellbeing</p> <p>Boost civic pride and improve health through culture in everyday life.</p> <p>Performance measures</p> <p>Short term (1-3 years) Place-based commissions delivered (per year).</p> <p>Long term (5-10 years) Residents reporting increased pride/belonging (survey).</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Inclusive and accessible spaces</p> <p>Create opportunities in urban centres and green spaces.</p> <p>Performance measures</p> <p>Short term (1-3 years) Free/low cost activities in parks, libraries, high streets.</p> <p>Long term (5-10 years) Participation from low-income wards (attendance rate).</p>	<p>6</p> <p>Sector resilience and leadership</p> <p>Support resilience and fuel ambition, to create a confident, collaborative sector.</p> <p>Performance measures</p> <p>Short term (1-3 years) Organisations and freelancers accessing training/peer networks.</p> <p>Long term (5-10 years) External investment secured.</p>

CREATIVE IDENTITY AND ENTERPRISE

Position Barnsley as a town of makers and a hub for creative enterprise.

Where have we come from?	Where are we today?	Success criteria
<p>Barnsley's roots lie in making, from mining and glassblowing to textiles and metalwork.</p> <p>Its economy was built on craft, graft and innovation, and that hands-on heritage still lives on in its people and places.</p>	<p>Barnsley's creative scene is growing, with strong appetite across design, craft and enterprise.</p> <p>However, access to space, support and visibility is uneven. Makers need more backing to thrive and drive the local economy.</p>	<p>Creative makers will be visible, supported and recognised as central to Barnsley's identity and economy.</p> <p>They will be showcased through events and digital platforms, have access to workspaces, and be empowered through enterprise support.</p>
Our goals	Performance measures	Roles
<p>Short term (1-3 years)</p> <p>Develop a visible, well-connected network, with support hubs, shared studios, local showcases, and promotional campaigns that profile Barnsley's makers borough-wide.</p> <p>Long term (5-10 years)</p> <p>Establish Barnsley as a nationally recognised hub for creative enterprise, where making is supported at every level, from grassroots to growth, and integrated into the identity and economy of the town.</p>	<p>Short term (1-3 years)</p> <p>Active makers/creatives registered in network.</p> <p>Baseline: Registry in year 1.</p> <p>Target: +25% by year 3.</p> <p>Long term (5-10 years)</p> <p>Creative workspaces opened or repurposed.</p> <p>Baseline: Current stock.</p> <p>Target: +10 spaces by year 5.</p>	<p>Barnsley Council</p> <p>Unlock council-owned spaces, streamline permissions, and connect makers to enterprise support.</p> <p>NPOs/Venues</p> <p>Provide space, mentoring, and visibility through exhibitions, shops, residencies, and partnerships.</p> <p>Smaller organisations</p> <p>Deliver community-based programmes, skill shares, and showcases linking local talent to opportunities.</p> <p>Grassroots creatives</p> <p>Lead peer networks, co-create public showcases, and shape Barnsley's maker identity from the ground up.</p>

CELEBRATION AND FESTIVALS

Put festivals back on the streets to ignite pride and connection.

Where have we come from?	Where are we today?	Success criteria
<p>Barnsley has a proud tradition of music and celebrations, from brass bands to parades and galas.</p> <p>Festivals once brought joy, identity, and connection to local life.</p>	<p>The spirit of celebration lives on in galas, community events and local music. Creatives, young people and neighbourhoods are ready to revive festivals in fresh, inclusive ways.</p> <p>Core Cultural Event programme provides accessible high quality outdoor arts and events.</p> <p>With the right support, Barnsley can lead a new culture of celebration.</p>	<p>Barnsley will host an expanded vibrant, inclusive calendar of festivals rooted in local pride.</p> <p>Events will take place in towns and neighbourhoods across the Borough, shaped by creatives, young people and communities, reigniting celebration and connection.</p>
Our goals	Performance measures	Roles
<p>Short term (1-3 years)</p> <p>Support community-led and inspirational festivals across the borough, backed by shared resources, music partnerships, and joined-up promotion.</p> <p>Long term (5-10 years)</p> <p>Build a year-round Barnsley Festival Calendar with local and borough-wide events rooted in place, sound, and community pride.</p>	<p>Short term (1-3 years)</p> <p>Community-led events across Principal Towns.</p> <p>Baseline: Audit in year 1.</p> <p>Target: >2 events per Principal Town by year 3.</p> <p>Long term (5-10 years)</p> <p>Audience diversity (index vs borough demographics).</p> <p>Baseline: Audience survey.</p> <p>Target: Parity by year 5.</p>	<p>Barnsley Council</p> <p>Sustained delivery of established core signature events and festivals providing catalyst/inspiration for change. Simplify event processes, provide infrastructure, and connect organisers to partners. Work with regional and national partners.</p> <p>NPOs/Venues/Established festival</p> <p>Co-produce events with local creatives. Increase commissioning opportunities within the local sector.</p> <p>Smaller organisations</p> <p>Run hyper-local celebrations with schools, youth groups, and residents.</p> <p>Grassroots creatives</p> <p>Empowered to create projects, and develop participatory content and engaging signature events and festivals.</p>

STORYTELLING AND CULTURAL VOICE

Tell Barnsley stories that stick – locally and nationally.

Where have we come from?	Where are we today?	Success criteria
<p>Barnsley has a rich cultural voice from Ian McMillan's poetry to club comedy, folk music and colliery heritage.</p> <p>Barnsley stories are shaped by resilience, pride, humour, and protest.</p>	<p>Barnsley holds rich, untold stories from young voices to migrant and LGBTQ+ communities.</p> <p>Interest in storytelling is growing across podcasts, performance and digital media. Talent is here; it just needs amplifying.</p>	<p>More people will share Barnsley's stories in more ways, through performance, exhibitions, digital media and more.</p> <p>Diverse voices will be elevated, and the borough's creative identity will be recognized well beyond South Yorkshire.</p>
Our goals	Performance measures	Roles
<p>Short term (1–3 years) Invest in platforms, programmes and training that help more people tell local stories through film, writing, museums, performance and digital media.</p> <p>Long term (5–10 years) Build a recognised culture of storytelling that defines Barnsley's identity, shared locally, celebrated nationally, and co-owned by its communities.</p>	<p>Short term (1–3 years) Original stories commissioned (digital and live). Baseline: To be established. Target: 30 commissions per annum by year 3.</p> <p>Long term (5–10 years) External media mentions, regional and national. Baseline: To be established. Target: 50 regional and 10 national mentions by year 5.</p>	<p>Barnsley Council Co-ordinate a listening and story capturing programme. Commission storytellers and use museums, archives, events and other council platforms to amplify diverse voices.</p> <p>NPOs/Venues Host residencies, performances, and exhibitions rooted in local stories.</p> <p>Smaller organisations Run workshops, oral histories, and co-creation in schools and communities.</p> <p>Grassroots creatives Lead storytelling through zines, podcasts, poetry, and community media.</p>

PLACE AND WELLBEING

Boost civic pride and improve health through culture and heritage in everyday life.

Where have we come from?	Where are we today?	Success criteria
<p>Barnsley's identity is shaped by working-class pride, solidarity and local tradition from the pits to the pitch.</p> <p>Communities have found strength and improved wellbeing in shared stories, music and everyday acts of care.</p>	<p>Barnsley's pride runs deep, rooted in strong local ties, but there is a risk of growing disconnection – from each other, from local cultural opportunities, and from the shared spaces and traditions that once brought communities together.</p> <p>Culture can help rebuild these connections, improve the health of the Borough, spark shared experiences, and celebrate what makes Barnsley unique.</p>	<p>Cultural projects will reflect the unique character of the area, with residents actively shaping and celebrating their places.</p> <p>Culture will improve health and wellbeing, help people feel more connected, proud, and represented in the life of their communities.</p>
Our goals	Performance measures	Roles
<p>Short term (1–3 years) Deliver creative programmes that celebrate local identity and heritage, build intergenerational pride, improve wellbeing and bring people together through shared experience.</p> <p>Long term (5–10 years) Embed culture as a tool for civic connections helping every neighbourhood in Barnsley feel visible, proud and healthier.</p> <p>Become a centre of excellence for creative health nationally, evidence the impact of creative health on community health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>Short term (1–3 years) Place-based commissions delivered (per year). Baseline: To be established. Target: 40 commissions by year 3.</p> <p>Long term (5–10 years) Residents reporting increased pride/belonging (via survey). Baseline: Year 1. Target: +10pp pride increase by year 5.</p>	<p>Barnsley Council Support ward-level cultural planning, and through the Barnsley Creative Health Partnership facilitate the strengthening of the borough's creative health offer, and health and creativity pathways.</p> <p>NPOs/Venues Co-create exhibitions, festivals, creative health programmes and heritage projects with communities.</p> <p>Smaller organisations Deliver initiatives that connect people through place-based creativity.</p> <p>Grassroots creatives Lead hyperlocal storytelling, creative health and pride-building activity.</p>

INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE SPACES

Create opportunities in urban centres and green spaces.

Where have we come from?	Where are we today?	Success criteria
<p>Barnsley's landscapes, from parks and town centres to woods and walking routes, have always been places for gathering, play and pride.</p> <p>Culture once lived in the streets, fields, and working men's clubs, woven into everyday life.</p>	<p>Barnsley's parks and high streets are full of creative potential.</p> <p>Interest in outdoor art and green wellbeing is growing. With the right support, culture can become part of everyday life, rooted in local places.</p>	<p>Creativity will be accessible and equitable in everyday spaces, from parks, heritage buildings and libraries to high streets and green spaces.</p> <p>Cultural activity will be embedded in regeneration and placemaking, bringing the arts closer to daily life, contributing to improved health and wellbeing.</p>
Our goals	Performance measures	Roles
<p>Short term (1–3 years)</p> <p>Deliver pop-up arts, murals, outdoor events, creative health programmes and temporary commissions in neighbourhoods, parks, and high streets that are co-created with local artists and communities.</p> <p>Long term (5–10 years)</p> <p>Make culture a defining part of Barnsley's public realm with long-term commissions, creative walking routes, and community-designed environments.</p>	<p>Short term (1–3 years)</p> <p>Free/low cost activities in parks, libraries, high streets.</p> <p>Baseline: To be established.</p> <p>Target: 150 activities per annum by year 3.</p> <p>Long term (5–10 years)</p> <p>Participation from low-income wards (attendance rate).</p> <p>Baseline: Year 1.</p> <p>Target: +20% participation by year 5.</p>	<p>Barnsley Council</p> <p>Embed cultural briefs in public spaces, prioritise artist/community-led work, and encourage outdoor access and local creative health initiatives.</p> <p>NPOs/Venues</p> <p>Commission and support outdoor art, site-specific work, and mobile creative health programmes.</p> <p>Smaller organisations</p> <p>Run creative activities in parks, markets and public spaces.</p> <p>Grassroots creatives</p> <p>Lead murals, performances, and workshops in everyday places.</p>

SECTOR RESILIENCE AND LEADERSHIP

Support resilience and fuel ambition, to create a confident, collaborative cultural sector.

Where have we come from?	Where are we today?	Success criteria
<p>Barnsley's cultural life has long been powered by its people, built through care, creativity, and commitment, often without formal support.</p> <p>That spirit remains a defining strength.</p>	<p>The cultural sector is energised but under pressure.</p> <p>Small organisations and freelancers face funding gaps and burnout, yet new partnerships are emerging, with real potential for growth if backed with ambition.</p>	<p>Barnsley's cultural sector will be confident, collaborative, resilient and ready to grow.</p> <p>Creatives will access funding and leadership opportunities, and culture will be embedded across sectors – from health and housing to economy and education.</p>
Our goals	Performance measures	Roles
<p>Short term (1–3 years)</p> <p>Strengthen the foundations with skills development, partnership networks, and better support for small organisations and freelancers.</p> <p>Long term (5–10 years)</p> <p>Build a confident, sustainable cultural ecosystem with secure funding, resilient leadership, and strong infrastructure across the borough.</p>	<p>Short term (1–3 years)</p> <p>Organisations and freelancers accessing training/peer networks.</p> <p>Baseline: To be established.</p> <p>Target: 200 participants per annum by year 3.</p> <p>Long term (5–10 years)</p> <p>External investment secured.</p> <p>Baseline: To be established.</p> <p>Target: £3m cumulative investment by year 5.</p>	<p>Barnsley Council</p> <p>Provide appropriate funding and commissioning opportunities, link culture with council services, and support leadership and training.</p> <p>NPOs/Venues</p> <p>Share resources, mentor others, and build inclusive sector leadership.</p> <p>Smaller organisations</p> <p>Collaborate across networks, pilot models, and feed into borough planning.</p> <p>Grassroots creatives</p> <p>Shape local agendas, test ideas, and champion community-led practice.</p>

HOW WE WILL MAKE THE STRATEGY HAPPEN

Governance
and processes



FINANCING AND FUNDING

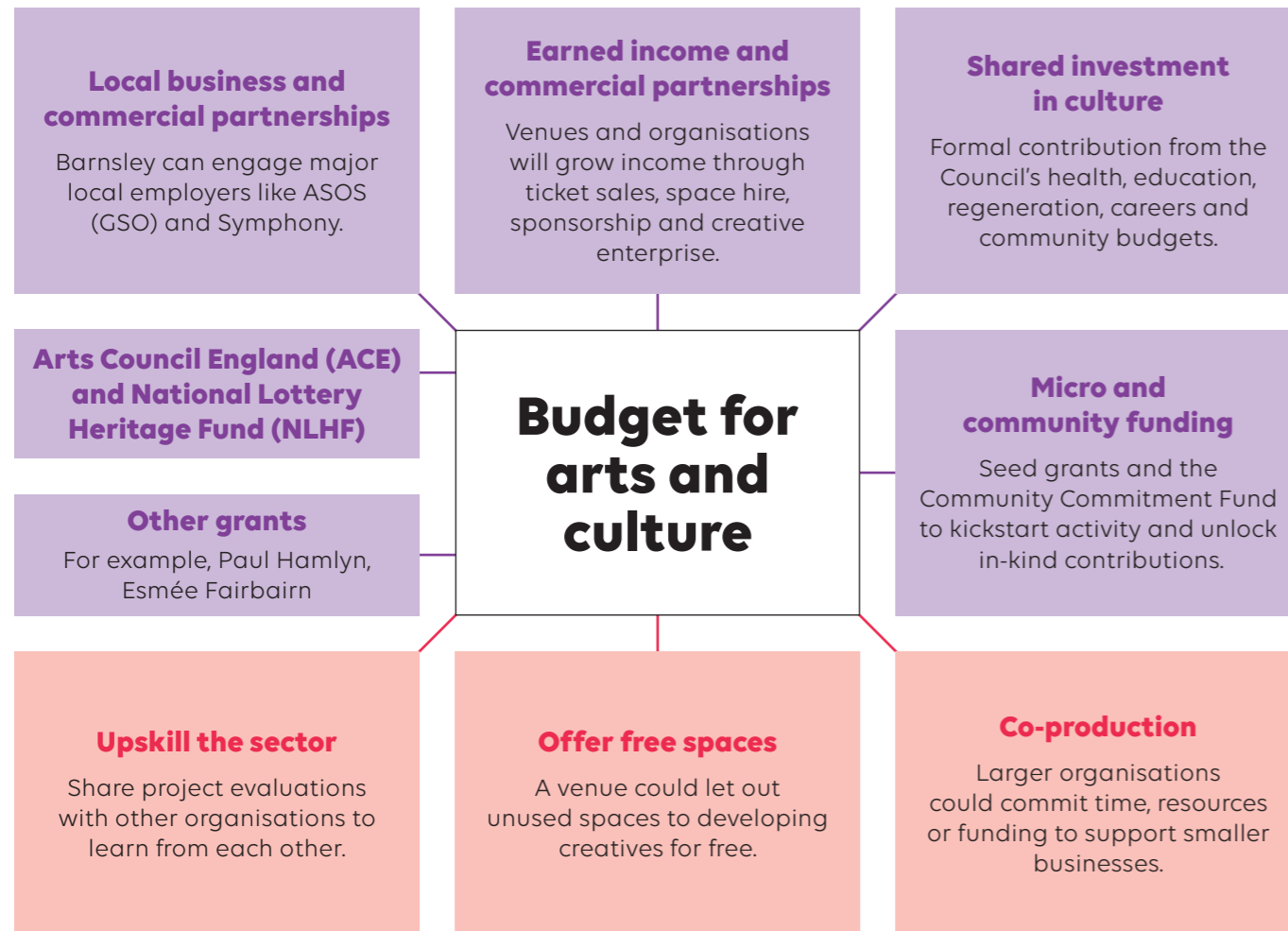
Culture is not a cost, it is an investment in Barnsley's economy, skills, wellbeing and identity. To unlock its full value, we need a funding model that treats culture as an asset, encourages collaboration, and blends public, private and community-led approaches to build a stronger, more resilient cultural sector.

Finance options:

Barnsley's culture strategy will be partly financed through investment from other council budget lines, aligning culture with priorities like health, education, and regeneration. This will be supported by diverse income sources, including national and regional funders (e.g., Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority), trusts, sponsorship, local business, and earned income, creating a more resilient, shared funding base.

Funding priorities:

The strategy will fund projects that build long-term value. This includes backing funding momentum, initiatives that attract match funding, in-kind support, or legacy potential, and funding initiatives that pay forwards generously, by developing talent, sharing resources, activating spaces, and growing sector capacity for the future.



GOVERNANCE

Plans and models will be developed using a four-part cycle that was used in the development of this strategy: consultation, co-curation, co-creation and checking back in (see Appendices for further details on suggested models). This will be led initially by a **Culture Strategy Steering Group**, involving representation from the creative sector, communities, the council and other key partners, ensuring true power-sharing between sectors and communities. This group will also develop an action plan to deliver the ambitions set out in this strategy.

This moment is pivotal. Barnsley's cultural ecosystem is alive with possibility but making that potential real requires a new deal between public institutions and cultural practitioners.



An invitation to all

To Barnsley Council:

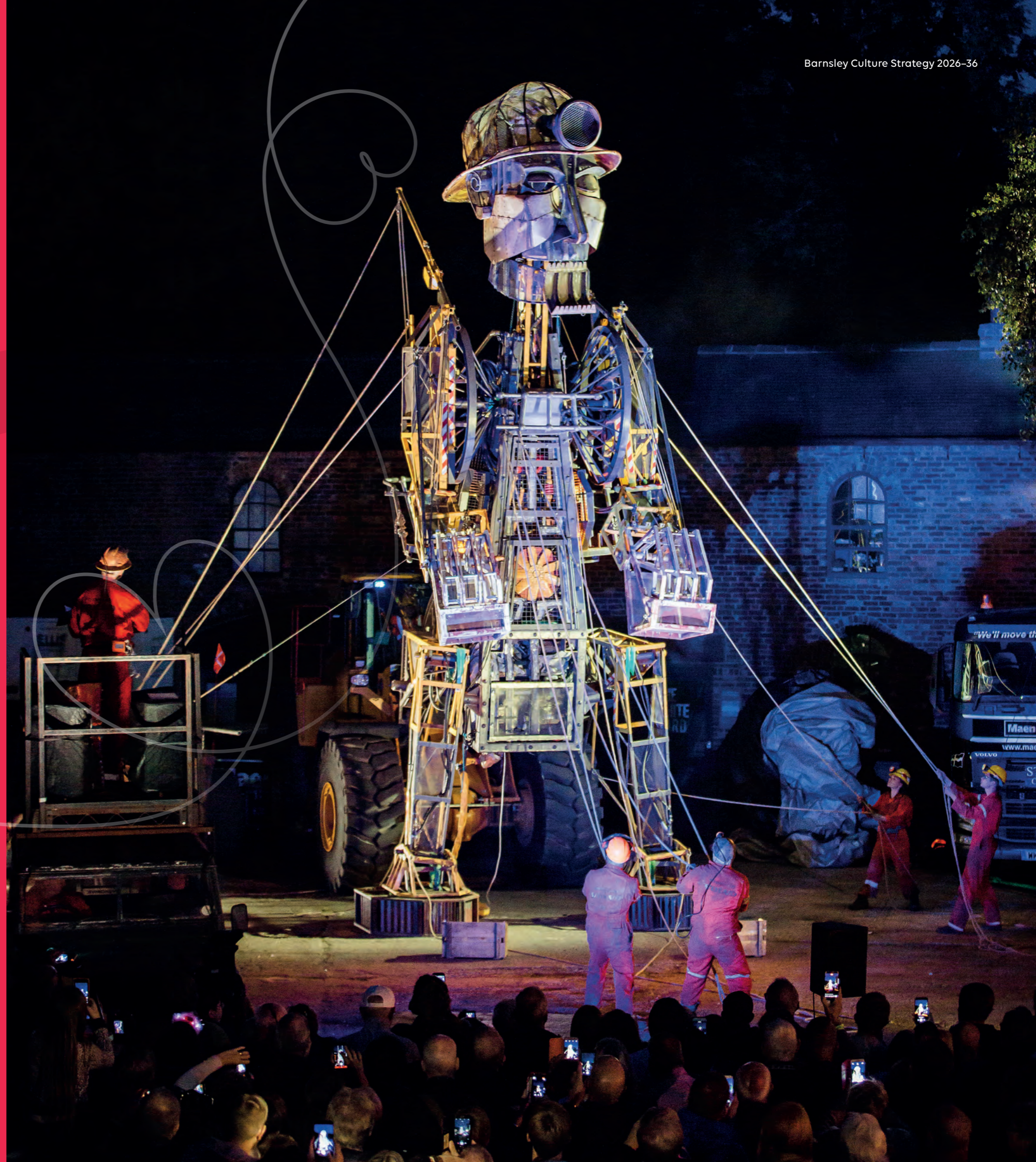
The council has achieved a great deal with limited resources, and its commitment to enabling culture is clear. But with funding and delivery capacity under constant pressure, its most powerful role now is as a connector and facilitator. The council will support organisations to grow, open doors to new partnerships, funding routes, and opportunities. It will build relationships that help others lead. This strategy will only succeed if the council enables others to thrive, not by holding the reins, but by clearing the path.

To the cultural sector:

For years, cultural organisations and practitioners in Barnsley have asked for agency, not just to respond, but to lead. That time is now. Look outwards, share resources, ideas, and opportunities generously, not to protect individual enterprises, but to strengthen the whole. This is about collective ownership, not competition. This ecosystem belongs to all of us. This is Barnsley's future. Let's build it together.

This strategy sets a shared direction. But delivering it requires shared commitment, from every corner of the cultural community.

APPENDICES



HOW THIS STRATEGY ALIGNS WITH BOROUGH PRIORITIES

Barnsley's Culture Strategy has been developed to complement and strengthen the borough's wider strategic ambitions. It aligns closely with **The Great Childhoods Ambition** and the **Digital Barnsley Strategy**, **Inclusive Economic Growth Strategy**, the **Health and Wellbeing Strategy** and the **Children and Young People's Strategy**. Culture is closely tied to economic development goals, helping to grow the visitor economy and animate places across the borough, while delivering wider social, educational, and economic outcomes.

This **Culture Strategy** is not a stand-alone vision; it is a shared tool for delivering Barnsley's broader priorities. By aligning with ambitions for childhood development and digital growth, it helps ensure culture is embedded across the borough's future, not only enriching lives, but helping drive strategic outcomes across place, economy and community.



Great Childhoods Ambition

The **Great Childhoods Ambition** outlines Barnsley's vision for every child to grow up safe, connected, and full of possibility. It is structured around five themes: **Belong**, **Explore**, **Dream**, **Grow**, and **Connect**.

The **Culture Strategy** supports this ambition by:

- **Belong:** Delivering cultural activities that foster a sense of identity, place and connection such as storytelling, community events and intergenerational creativity.
- **Explore and grow:** Providing access to creative learning, workshops, digital skills, and early exposure to creative career pathways.
- **Dream:** Showcasing and celebrating the creative talents of children and young people, inspiring ambition through participation in festivals, exhibitions, and youth-led projects.

Digital Barnsley

The **Digital Barnsley Strategy** sets out the borough's ambition to become a digitally connected, forward-thinking place with technology driving innovation, inclusion and opportunity.

The **Culture Strategy** directly supports this through:

- **Digital access and innovation:** Promoting digital storytelling, online events, and emerging platforms such as gaming and immersive tech to engage wider audiences and support new forms of creativity.
- **Creative infrastructure and place-making:** Aligning with digital infrastructure projects such as The Seam and integrating cultural design and digital installations into public realm and regeneration initiatives.
- **Digital inclusion:** Using cultural venues, such as libraries and museums, to bridge digital divides, offering accessible spaces for learning, participation and community connection.

Inclusive Economic Growth Strategy

Barnsley's **Inclusive Economic Growth Strategy** sets out ambitions for a stronger, fairer economy, creating more good jobs and better businesses while empowering all communities to thrive.

The **Culture Strategy** directly supports this through:

- **Good jobs and business growth:** Opening up creative careers, self-employment, and enterprise opportunities in culture and digital industries.
- **Innovation and entrepreneurialism:** Supporting start-ups and cultural entrepreneurs and embedding creative approaches into wider business growth.
- **Visitor economy:** Growing cultural tourism and events, strengthening Barnsley's profile and attracting inward investment.
- **Digital Town Mission:** Expanding digital creativity and skills to reinforce Barnsley's ambition to be the UK's leading digital town.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Barnsley's **Health and Wellbeing Strategy** aims to reduce inequalities, improve mental and physical health, and create stronger, more connected communities.

The **Culture Strategy** directly supports this through:

- **Creative health:** Embedding arts in health pathways, from social prescribing to mental health support.
- **Prevention and resilience:** Tackling isolation and improving wellbeing through community festivals, choirs, and creative groups.
- **Partnership working:** Linking cultural providers like Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance, with NHS, Public Health, and the South Yorkshire Creative Health Board.
- **Evidence and impact:** Building an evidence base to demonstrate how creativity improves health outcomes.

Children and Young People's Strategy

Barnsley's **Children and Young People's Strategy** focuses on giving every child the best start in life, raising aspirations, and creating safe, supportive environments.

The **Culture Strategy** directly supports this through:

- **Access and inclusion:** Making creative opportunities affordable and accessible for all children, especially from low-income families.
- **Skills and careers:** Developing pathways into creative industries through schools, colleges, and scholarships.
- **Voice and participation:** Giving children and young people a say in shaping cultural programmes.
- **Confidence and aspiration:** Using creativity to build skills, confidence, and pride in place.

BARNLSLEY'S CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM

Barnsley's cultural landscape is layered and evolving, shaped by a blend of major institutions, independent excellence, community spaces, and grassroots creativity. These layers are interconnected yet not always aligned. Understanding how they function together is essential to building a strategy that is inclusive, ambitious, and grounded in place.

Please note that organisations and projects listed below are correct at time of writing and are indicative but not exhaustive or preferential.

Major institutions funded through long-term Arts Council investment		
Layer 1: National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs)	Barnsley's status as a Priority Place has significantly increased investment from Arts Council England. As of 2023, the borough is home to 6 National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) and 2 Investment Principle Support Organisations (IPSOS), bringing in over £2.29m annually.	Barnsley Museums (NPO) Barnsley Libraries (NPO) Barnsley Civic (NPO) Gary Clarke Company (NPO) Invisible Flock (NPO) LUNG (NPO) Brass Bands England (IPSO) Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance (IPSO)
	Some deliver nationally, some are rooted locally, and others – like touring companies – do both. Together, they anchor Barnsley's cultural sector in national strategy and investment.	
National place-based programmes Barnsley has not yet secured		
Layer 2: Missed opportunity	Barnsley remains one of the only areas in South and West Yorkshire yet to benefit from some of the key, large cultural funds.	Creative People and Places Place Partnership UK Town of Culture
	These are designed to support communities with lower levels of cultural engagement building long-term creative infrastructure. Barnsley has not yet unlocked the transformative impact these programmes can. However, funding has been secured from the Cultural Development Fund (CDF) and High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ).	
Self-sustaining, well-established organisations with strong local and national impact		
Layer 3: The independents	These organisations are not regularly funded by Arts Council England but have national reputations and deep community roots. They represent Barnsley's cultural excellence, often built over years of self-reliance and dedication.	Barnsley Youth Choir Grimethorpe Colliery Band Creative Recovery Nova Arts Penistone Arts Week Dearne Community Arts Festival Barnsley Civic Trust
	These organisations bring credibility, reach and inspiration to Barnsley's cultural life.	

Community and volunteer-led spaces that keep culture local and accessible		
Layer 4: Independent venues	These spaces are where culture lives day to day, offering local residents the chance to access films, theatre, heritage and events in familiar, trusted environments. They are often maintained through voluntary effort and community fundraising.	The Dearne Playhouse Penistone Paramount Parkway Cinema The Lamproom Theatre Maurice Dobson Museum Playhouse Theatre Wombwell Cawthorne Museum
	They are part of Barnsley's social infrastructure, connecting place, memory, and creativity.	
Short-term projects, creative experiments and artist collectives often working in partnership		
Layer 5: Collaborations and collectives	This layer is where much of Barnsley's most responsive and community-connected creative activity happens. It includes freelancers, collectives, and community-led partnerships, working with limited resources but deep insight.	Barnsley Heritage Connects Yarn in Tarn Borough Inc Barnsley FOTO Collective 01226 Collective Radi8Arts CODAC
	These projects are often collaborative, agile, and locally grounded bringing creative energy into new spaces and communities.	



WHO MAKES CULTURE HAPPEN?

Culture is not just what happens in buildings, it is shaped by people and communities who lead, participate, and connect.

System leaders

The people and organisations driving the direction, investment and coordination of culture across the borough:

Barnsley Council		
Dual NPO (Museums, Libraries); landlord of key venues; commissioner of this strategy.	Cultural leads across Regeneration, Communities, Public Health and Education.	Playing a growing role in South Yorkshire regional culture discussions.
Arts Council England (ACE)		
Designated Barnsley a Priority Place.	Major funder of NPOs, IPSOs and project grants.	
Culture Strategy Working Group		
Cross-sector leaders guiding this strategy's development.	Includes council staff, NPOs, artists and community.	
Public Health and Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance		
Pioneering cross-sector work around creativity and wellbeing.		

Cultural creators and connectors

Those shaping cultural content, activating spaces, and mentoring others:

Artistic directors, producers and curators	Festival organisers and event volunteers
From Barnsley Civic to Invisible Flock to Museum leads.	Behind local galas, light trails, craft fairs, library takeovers.
Teaching artists and youth workers	Choir directors, band leaders, dance tutors
Running workshops in schools, libraries and community centres.	Embedding music and movement into everyday life.

Cultural communities and grassroots creatives

Those shaping cultural content, activating spaces, and mentoring others:

Makers and crafters	▶ often informal, local and multigenerational
Choir families	▶ entire households engaged in performance and volunteering
Global majority residents	▶ creative, underrepresented, ready to lead
Young creatives	▶ exploring digital, spoken word, fashion, and film
Older residents	▶ crucial audiences and carriers of cultural memory
Disabled and neurodiverse residents	▶ advocating for access and inclusion
Mental health and social action groups	▶ using creativity as connection

People missing from the picture (for now)

Those shaping cultural content, activating spaces, and mentoring others:

People who don't know what's on	▶ a communication and confidence challenge
Freelancers and micro-organisations	▶ creative but needing more support
Rural and estate-based creative	▶ often working alone or invisibly
Young people with ideas but limited pathways	▶ especially outside central wards

Culture lives in all of Barnsley's people, from those who lead it, those who create it, and those who enjoy and absorb it. But the priorities and the role that each group of people play differs.

Engagement with Barnsley's residents has identified the different roles and priorities of each group.

WHERE DOES CULTURE HAPPEN?

Culture in Barnsley lives in galleries and green spaces, high streets and heritage sites, libraries and living rooms. This layer maps what is already here, funded, and informal, to better understand where we grow from.



Anchors and infrastructure

The borough's core institutions – long-standing, widely accessed, and public-facing:

Barnsley Museums	Experience Barnsley, Barnsley Archives & Local Studies, Cannon Hall Museum, Park and Gardens, Cooper Gallery, Elsecar Heritage Centre, Worsbrough Mill and Country Park
Barnsley Libraries	Including Library @ the Lightbox and 14 staffed libraries across the borough in addition to Priory Library offering a self-service option
Venues, theatres and cinemas	Barnsley Civic, Lamproom Theatre, The Dearne Playhouse, Thurnscoe Little Theatre, Parkway Cinema, Penistone Paramount
Community centres	From Monk Bretton and New Lodge to Dodworth Miners Welfare and Goldthorpe Parish Hall
Fusion – Barnsley's Local Cultural Education Partnership	Funded via Barnsley Museums, Barnsley Council, Arts Council England



Funded programmes and organisations

Cultural activity receiving sustained or project-based investment:

National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) & Investment Principles Support Organisations (IPSO)	Barnsley Museums, Barnsley Libraries, Barnsley Civic, Brass Bands England, Culture Health & Wellbeing Alliance, Gary Clarke Company, Invisible Flock, LUNG
Arts Council England Project Grants (including Cultural Development Fund)	Over 35 projects including Barnsley Bright Nights, Festival of Joy, Creepy Campfire Tales, Storying Barnsley, A Miner's Life, and Feels Like Home
National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) Heritage Projects	Including Up the Swanee, Capturing Barnsley's Mining Stories, Oxspring Iron Age Dig, and Monk Bretton Priory at the Heart



Making, craft and everyday creativity

The creative heartbeat of the borough — informal, hands-on, and deeply rooted:

Studios and spaces	Digital Media Centre, Barnsley Civic, The Curiosity Cabinet, Cooper Gallery, Regent Street spaces, The Pit @ The Dearne Playhouse
Community craft and art groups	Knit and Natter groups, Creative Stitches, Heart of Handmade, Silkstone Craft Group, Crafty Chat, Make Do and Mend, Yarn in Tarn
Markets and retail	Barnsley Markets, Artisan markets at Elsecar Heritage Centre, Lightbox exhibitions, Christmas craft fairs, Barnsley Zine Fair



Culture and the environment

Where arts and nature meet — using green space as canvas and catalyst:

Outdoor events	Worsbrough Live, Picnic in the Park, Goldthorpe Gala, Wildflower Poetry Trails
Nature and heritage venues	RSPB Old Moor, Penistone Greenway, Cannon Hall Museum, Park and Gardens, Trans Pennine Trail, Wortley Top Forge, Wentworth Castle Gardens, Worsbrough Mill and Country Park
Creative programmes	The Earthbound, Guardians of Bird Island, Barnsley Libraries Green Week initiatives



Music, performance and participation

From international brass to garage bands — and everything in between:

Choirs and bands	Barnsley Youth Choir, Strata Brass, Penistone Ladies Choir, Local Vocals, Barnsley Metropolitan Band, Grimethorpe Colliery Band, Thurnscoe Harmonic Male Voice Choir
Productions, performance and dance	Markmark Productions, Red Robin Productions, Wombwell Thespians, Limelight Theatrix, The Kim Frost School of Dance, Take 2
Youth and community	The Lamproom Theatre LYTES, Barnsley Youth Theatre, school festivals, Lightbox engagement, The Dearne Playhouse, Cross The Sky Theatre group, Stagecoach, Starstruck

What the **who** and **where** tells us...

Barnsley's cultural ecosystem is:

- Wide-ranging and well-rooted in place
- Strong in craft, participation, and performance
- Rich in public infrastructure
- Growing in ambition and capability

But it is also:

- Dependent on a small number of core organisations
- Unevenly distributed across the borough
- Under-leveraged when it comes to environment, digital and cross-sector collaboration



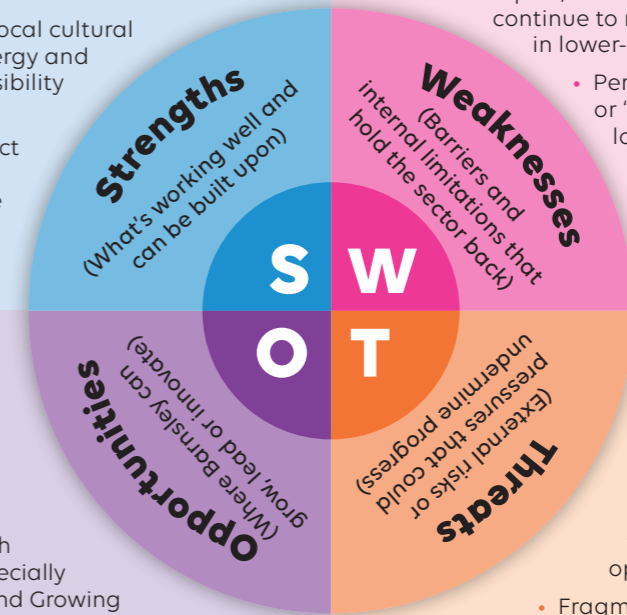
SWOT ANALYSIS

An analysis of the existing cultural sector and creative ecology of the borough.

- Significant increase in Arts Council England investment with NPO/IPSO increase from 2 to 8.
- Independent organisations like Barnsley Youth Choir and Grimethorpe Colliery Band with international reach and strong community roots.
- Revitalised town centre infrastructure including The Glass Works, Library @ the Lightbox, and Barnsley Civic.
- Wide network of community-led venues sustaining cultural access across the borough (e.g., Dearne Playhouse, Penistone Paramount).
- Rich cultural identity shaped by brass bands, heritage storytelling, and craft traditions.
- Strong recent practice of co-creation and public engagement, helping shift institutional culture.
- Emerging leadership from local cultural practitioners, signalling energy and appetite for shared responsibility in strategy and delivery.
- Culture has a positive impact on health and wellbeing through dedicated Creative Health Lead for Barnsley.

- Renewed, community-led applications for CPP and Place Partnership funding.
- Positioning Barnsley as a distinctive contributor to the South Yorkshire Cultural Investment Framework.
- Aligning cultural activity with Barnsley 2030 priorities, especially around Healthy, Learning, and Growing Barnsley.
- Culture as a driver of social cohesion, pride of place and civic confidence – especially in times of political and economic uncertainty.
- Supporting the next generation of artists and creatives, especially in underserved neighbourhoods.
- Showcasing Barnsley's making heritage – from textiles and pottery to sewing and crafting – as part of a contemporary creative economy.
- Harnessing the energy and agency of local cultural leaders – many of whom are ready to co-lead on delivery, governance and strategy.
- Innovating with digital creativity, storytelling, and community commissions to blend tradition and technology.

- Lower cultural participation rates compared to regional averages – especially in 'formal' or 'high art' contexts.
- Yet to secure (although in development) Creative People & Places or Place Partnership funding.
- Underdevelopment of a "middle tier" of artists and organisations between community activity and NPO level.
- Uneven access across the borough, with some wards – especially in Dearne and North East – facing persistent structural barriers.
- Some NPOs/IPSOs operate without deep local visibility, limiting impact of new investment.
 - Transport, cost and confidence barriers continue to restrict attendance, especially in lower-income areas.
 - Perceptions of culture as elitist or "not for us" still influence some local audiences.



- Cost-of-living crisis further reducing disposable income and participation.
- Competition from better-resourced neighbouring cities and regions (Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield), though this could be considered an opportunity if utilised well.
- Fragmentation between local, regional and combined authority agendas, risking duplication or disconnect.
- Capacity limits in both the council and cultural sector to absorb or deliver new funding streams at pace.
- Shift in political sentiment in parts of Barnsley, reflecting deeper issues of trust, inequality and belonging.
- Cultural activity becoming too town centre-focused, excluding Principal Towns and rural areas if not actively addressed.
- Concerns regarding ACE's capacity to engage with Priority Place locations.

SWOT analysis undertaken by Flying Geese Consultancy in Spring 2025.

HOW WE WILL MAKE THE STRATEGY HAPPEN?

GOVERNANCE AND PROCESSES

Making investment more open, equitable and strategic

The Culture Strategy Steering Group will develop a model, working with the creative sector, to ensure an appropriate funding framework to deliver the strategy. This will involve conversations with key national partners, such as Arts Council England, Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, as well as regional partners such as the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority. Based on the feedback received during the development of the strategy, a proposed approach is below:

Small grants: micro-commissions and seed funding

Small grants (e.g., £500–£5,000) offered to freelancers, emerging artists, and grassroots organisations. These will allow new ideas to flourish and bring more people into the cultural ecosystem.

Larger grants: thematic and place-based calls

Larger rounds of investment framed around the objectives of this strategy.

Medium-sized grants: empowering communities and cultural partners

Pilot a Community Commitment Fund, a simple, accessible grant programme open to any cultural organisation, venue or practitioner.

Skills gap fund: development and support infrastructure

A funding opportunity that supports capacity building and upskilling alongside addressing the skills gap in Barnsley, particularly around communication, promotion, and marketing.

Commissioning: resident involvement in commissioning

Panels will include residents, especially young people and those from underrepresented communities. These citizens will assess applications and determine how funding is allocated.

COORDINATION

Delivering this strategy must rely on strong coordination across the borough. To support this, a series of dedicated groups are recommended, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds, sectors and communities. These groups will help guide delivery, share insight, align efforts, and ensure that Barnsley's cultural development is shaped by a broad cross-section of voices. In the first instance, a Culture Strategy Steering Group will be set up to work with the cultural sector, council, local communities and other partners to identify the appropriate structure and develop an action to deliver the strategy. A suggested structure is included below.

Strategy steering group

A cross-sector group made up of cultural sector organisations, grassroots creatives, the council and residents will meet regularly to monitor progress, share learning, and drive joined-up action. It will function as the strategy's engine room, supporting collaboration and accountability.

Area teams

Area Cultural Champions, who attend Area Team meetings, connect culture to local priorities, promote culture as a tool for growth, and link local needs with borough-wide opportunities.

Priority and policy group

A group of council officers and members working across Barnsley 2030 priorities and key strategies. Meeting to ensure culture supports wider goals, align policy, and embed culture in borough-wide outcomes.

Borough-wide cultural forums

Open forums, such as the Barnsley Creative Health Partnership, where the strategy's steering groups share updates with the wider cultural sector. These sessions keep those not involved in formal groups informed, connected, and able to feed in ideas, challenges, and opportunities.

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- **Our local communities**

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