# Culture is belonging

## Telford and Wrekin Cultural Strategy 2027-2032

October 2026







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**Quotes** all sourced from stakeholder and public consultations, unless otherwise credited.

Commissioned by

Telford & Wrekin Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest to create a better borough

# Foreword



**Cllr Angela McClements**
Cabinet Member for Culture, Tourism & Leisure

Culture is about how we live – our heritage, behaviours, values and beliefs – and how these are expressed through creative or artistic activity. This can include dance, music, theatre, poetry, fashion, craft, sculpture, visual & digital arts and the creative businesses that make them.

Telford and Wrekin is both new and ancient. Its identity encompasses the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, historic towns and villages, the development of the New Town. We are a borough that continues to rapidly grow and prosper, its strong and connected communities and rich diversity, its significant green architecture, and a place that is continually reinventing itself.

Culture can help link those different stories, change perceptions, connect and revitalise communities, increase access to education, attract and retain young people and bring footfall to our High Streets. I am proud of our existing cultural offer which spans the borough and is delivered not just by the Council but through many partners, Town & Parish Councils, artists and creative businesses – in community venues and spaces embedded in our neighbourhoods.

As a Council we have continued to invest in opportunities for everyone to access cultural activity with over 100,000 pa enjoying our free family Events Programme from Balloon Fiesta, Spring into St Georges and Carnival to Christmas in Southwater. Through Theatre on Tour we are celebrating and animating many of our borough venues and parks and in 2026 for the first time in over 25 years included music, drama, comedy and family productions in the refurbished Town Park Amphitheatre.

This investment underpins our partnership Vision 2032 and Council priorities. It is creating a place where all residents including our children and young people can prosper regardless of their background, knowledge, skills, needs or experience; supporting collaboration; celebrating our heritage and innovation – telling the story of Telford's historical significance from the Industrial Revolution to a hub for advanced manufacturing and enhancing health and wellbeing and quality of life for all residents.

I want to thank the hundreds of stakeholders and residents who have contributed their time and energy both to the work we are already doing and developing this Strategy. We are ambitious for our Borough and want to build on our growing reputation with partners like Arts Council and the commitment of partners and residents to do more together. This Strategy has been shaped by the voices of communities, young people and the cultural sector. Their collective view is captured in comments like *'culture is a fundamental part of everyone's DNA…' 'its about belonging…' 'we've got a big story to tell'.*

This Strategy establishes a collective framework for collaboration in cultural development and as we look forward to celebrating Telford's 60th birthday in 2028 and the opening of our new Theatre we are committed to working with the new Cultural Partnership to sustain and grow the positive contribution cultural activity can make to everyone's lives.

Telford & Wrekin Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest to create a better borough

# Executive summary

> *"Telford was respectfully designed around existing communities, so they could retain their own identities.* ***Telford is a place of cultures, plural.****"*
>
> Stakeholder consultee

The **Telford and Wrekin Cultural Strategy** outlines a roadmap for strengthening the cultural offer by fostering more collaboration between communities, cultural practitioners, and partners. New investments are building on strong foundations, helping to develop venues, established events programmes, public places and spaces. The National Trust will play a huge role in how heritage and culture work together to tell the story of Telford for new generations.

A period of research, **consultation and engagement** with public and stakeholders alike has revealed a shared vision, and a set of ambitions for the borough as a whole and the towns that make up Telford. This common purpose provides a solid foundation for the strategy.

The strategy aims to position Telford as an exemplar for cultural innovation, sustainable growth and community participation that creates opportunities for all to enjoy, celebrate and participate, and enhances a shared sense of place. The ultimate aims of the strategy are to drive creative, social, economic and environmental impact through cultural development initiatives that tap into all the energy and skills of Telford and its partners. The **vision** is clear: Culture will be woven into everyday life across Telford and Wrekin. Culture creates **belonging** throughout our 'town of towns', empowering people to exchange, learn and innovate together to shape thriving communities and a growing cultural economy.

The **strategic priorities** focus on a number of connected areas where Telford can build on success to date, and continue to be ambitious. These are: **local communities, opportunity & creativity, young people, our shared cultural narrative, and our relationship with our landscape**.

This strategy has a five-year lifespan, which will set the tone for working together for the long-term. In that time it aims to drive **real and lasting change** in how people see and engage with culture. New investments will increase cultural consumption and participation. But the programmes that connect these venues through important milestones like **Telford's 60th anniversary** will also see communities shaping the cultural services. They will influence the cultural offer and the opportunities they bring where they live and across the borough as a whole.

A new way of working together will build on these investments, creating opportunities for cultural activity to make real and **lasting contributions to the place agendas** that are most important – especially health, education, careers, skills and social confidence and mobility.

This collaborative way of working will take shape through an **independent cultural partnership**, working with but not through the Council to bring new opportunities to Telford and Wrekin as a whole and across its diverse towns – a strategy that truly delivers for a 'town of towns'.



The Little Theatre Donnington

## Spotlight
# Community Venues Network

A network of community-led venues support grassroots activity, participation, and social connection to where people live.

Venues such as The Belfry in Wellington, Donnington Little Theatre and The Anstice in Madeley are important and valued by their communities. And they do everything! Concerts, dances, artist studios, exhibitions, creative workspace, amateur performance, providing opportunities for artists and residents to create and share. They listen and offer activities that are familiar and in demand, whilst still finding space to experiment and try new things.

## Spotlight
# National Trust

From Spring 2026 the National Trust has taken on the care and management of the places that represent the birthplace of the industrial revolution within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site. A globally-important UNESCO World Heritage site, the ten museum sites within the Gorge are a huge part of Telford's identity.

The Trust has a clear goal – to grow the number of people that visit Ironbridge Gorge's sites, tackle the barriers that often prevent people from engaging with heritage and continue and deepen the site's strong appeal for families through events, programming and storytelling that bring its unique history to life. The Trust is already becoming an invaluable partner in cultural heritage storytelling and engagement for Telford.



Museum of Iron © National Trust / Paul Harris


New Telford Theatre

## Spotlight
# Telford Theatre

Telford & Wrekin Council secured funding from government to remodel and expand Telford Theatre @ Oakengates. After 60 years, it was time for an upgrade, but not just in the facilities, but the ambition of its activity as a modern theatre. Upgraded state-of-the-art facilities will include a separate studio theatre, rehearsal rooms and other community-facing spaces, turning Telford Theatre into a true cultural and social hub.

By drawing more people to Oakengates, the theatre will boost both daytime and evening economic activity, participation in culture and stimulate further investment to support the visitor economy.

## Spotlight
# Telford Theatre on Tour

Working with Arts Alive, the programme supports community venues to host professional live performances and film through local partnerships.

Theatre on Tour takes cultural experiences directly into neighbourhoods through local halls, community spaces, parks and outdoor locations. These familiar and easy-to-access places have helped to broaden audiences. The return of Telford Town Park Amphitheatre is a further illustration of investing in spaces where people can discover culture. It's not all about the traditional venues. Culture can engage new audiences in all sorts of places and spaces. Theatre on Tour will connect with the new theatre to continue to increase accessibility and support the ambition that all communities can access and participate in cultural experiences close to where they live.


Wind In The Willows

1.0

# Context



Harmony Singing Madeley

# 1.1
# The opportunity for Telford and Wrekin

> *"People are drawn here because there's a culture…**growing our own communities**…It's not a disparate group of towns but a rich inheritance of caring for each other. You can feel it underfoot."*

Stakeholder consultee

## Telford's cultural context

New towns come in all shapes and sizes. Telford and Wrekin is both new and ancient, and at its best when all its towns and villages come together, from Newport to Ironbridge. There is an opportunity to combine the best of both worlds – rich in heritage and contemporary in its culture and communities. As Telford prepares to celebrate its 60th birthday, we can continue to build confidence in what we can achieve as a cultural place.

Telford is investing in its creativity. Leading this cultural regeneration the new Telford Theatre, soon to open its doors and building on a successful touring programme. The National Trust is now a major new custodian of its world-famous industrial heritage. Wellington's Market and Orbit, animating new public squares, taking culture into local neighbourhoods like Sutton Hill Community Hub, embedding culture into Pride in Place plans in South Telford. The list goes on… This strategy responds to the needs of those who live and work here. It also builds on the evolving national cultural policy landscape.

## Who culture is for – and how it can work

Telford is a place that is growing. As the population grows (young and older) it is becoming more diverse. Just as with transport, health or education, culture needs to adapt as a living part of every community. Telford has recently been designated a Priority Place for cultural development (Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England), creating opportunities to attract more investment to increase and connect activity and accessibility for all residents.

The cultural strategy connects place, people and communities – a vision that's relevant to everyone. Culture as a part of identity, education, experience, everyday life.

## Belonging – an opportunity and a responsibility

Telford has earned the right to be culturally proud and optimistic. Culture can help to shape where Telford goes next – in partnership as a town of towns. Culture can use its networks, ideas and innovation to support, grow and sustain great work across the borough.

Telford has the ability to decide who it is and how it wants to celebrate, protect and develop its culture. This strategy will direct an action plan shaped and delivered by Telford's cultural partners – local and regional. This strategy **belongs** to everyone. Over time, this will become a strong, independent cultural partnership. Telford can respond to the challenges we face with one voice and one strategy.

# 1.2 An insights-led approach

> *"Everyone is **part of the Telford family**, irrespective of background, but respectful of background."*

Stakeholder consultee

> *The word 'new' is great. But we're not anymore, we're 60 years old - but we are **green and contemporary**. The first Industrial Revolution was visionary. So being contemporary and always being visionary is something that Telford could hang its hat on.*

Stakeholder consultee

A comprehensive Insights Report has informed this strategy. This section is a concise summary of its main findings, based in large part on a detailed programme of consultation and engagement with over **150 organisations, stakeholders and members of the public**, including young people. The strategy development also took the opportunity to capture perspectives from a productive UK Town of Culture 2028 application.

### Cultural participation and production

- Despite growing engagement, Telford and Wrekin has lower than national average cultural participation.
- There are relatively few cultural organisations operating locally.
- There is a good number of cultural & creative professionals, but a low number of creative businesses. Creative professionals may be living locally, but working elsewhere.
- The Youth Music service is excellent, alongside other strong provision in cultural education.
- Production should encourage co-production – enfranchising residents (especially young people) with the means to create and share cultural activity.

### The glue that binds our culture together

- Telford and Wrekin's cultural assets starts with its buildings, most often its community centres and libraries. The principle of embedding culture in places people use for other social purposes is a great fit for Telford as a 'town of towns'.
- Telford and Wrekin lacks built cultural assets, especially for a town of its size. Whilst the new Telford Theatre and next phase of Wellington Orbit will go some way to addressing this, there remains a gap in supply of music venues and artist studios / makerspaces.
- There is also more to add in the supply chain e.g. sound recording studios, rehearsal spaces, digital suites.
- A balance of nurturing existing cultural assets should be complemented by improving the 'connections' between them.

### Funding & investment

- The inward investment from strategic national funders is lower than average, which could be addressed with a more collective approach.
- Telford and Wrekin has been designated as a Priority Place for cultural investment by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport.

# 1.2

> *For every pound of council funding, **community groups** raise four or five more.*

Stakeholder consultee

> *Feels like Telford's just on the **cusp of something**. Just at that tipping point.*

Stakeholder consultee

— Telford and Wrekin should further leverage Council investment in culture to attract more inward investment. In turn, this could increase both cultural participation and cultural enterprise.
— Telford and Wrekin should seek to attract and grow creative enterprise, to boost cultural vibrancy within the borough.
— Culture should be seen as an embedded part of cross-cutting local priorities – health, wellbeing, education, economic development and community cohesion. Councils can be at the vanguard of this by designing their plans and programmes accordingly.

**Developing governance & leadership**

— To reach the next stage of cultural development, Telford and Wrekin must establish a place-based cultural governance vehicle. This could take the form of a Cultural Compact, a Place Partnership, or similar model.
— Such an organisation will need a host or accountable body. Options for the most appropriate home will be explored, working with major funding bodies.
— Any such cultural partnership model should hardwire the voice of local communities, including young people, into its design, creating opportunities to shape culture and not just participate or consume it.

**Emerging opportunity areas**

A strategy is about making choices – setting priorities. These 'opportunities' will need to be assessed with the realities of ambition and achievability in mind.

— Community-led programming.
— Participation-led regeneration.
— Informal participation models.
— Better local communications of cultural offer.
— Cross-sector partnerships.
— Confidence-building – to participate in and create cultural activity.
— Place positioning.
— Walking / storytelling assets.
— Green + culture integration.
— Authentic heritage interpretation.
— Civic space activation.
— Cultural tourism (connecting with heritage tourism).
— Building profile and positioning for Telford nationally through a confident, culture-rich narrative.

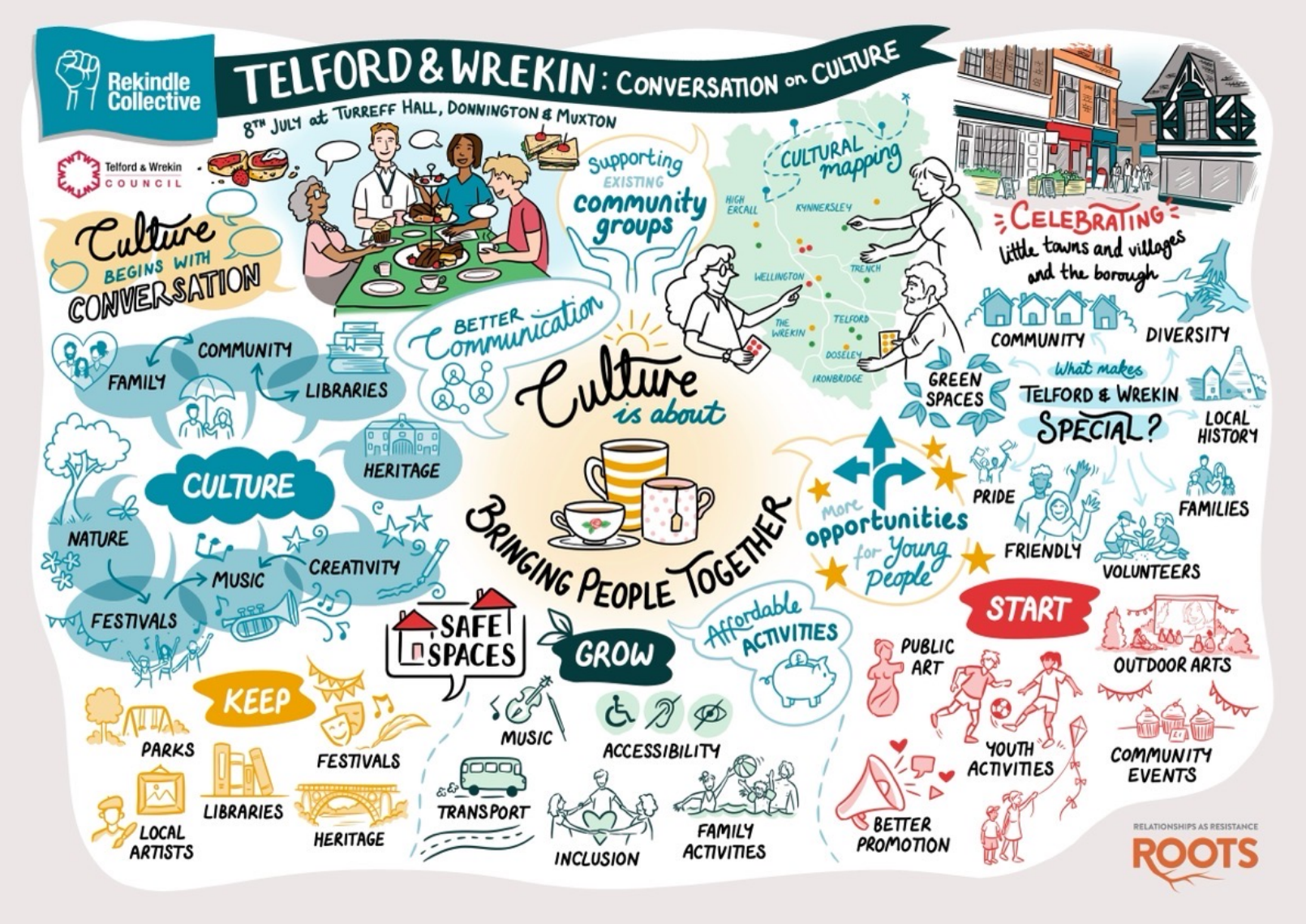
# 1.2




**Public engagement** was delivered across the borough. Residents and young people participated directly across a Youth Vision Day and two Community Conversations. 440+ organisations and residents were invited to take part. Engagement took place across the borough. Young people were mentored and supported as co-facilitators, embedding youth representation throughout the engagement process.

These graphics provided a summary of these sessions, and connect with the strategic priorities. The illustrated minutes were produced by an artist-illustrator.

# 1.2




**Public engagement** revealed five key takeaways that supported the parallel stakeholder engagement and consultation.

These were:

1. Culture already exists everywhere
2. Accessibility determines participation
3. Young people want ownership, not simply provision
4. Residents want to build on existing strengths
5. Culture is fundamental to community wellbeing

Hundreds of ideas were collected, informing one shared vision.

# 1.2




**Youth Vision Day**
**16 June 2026**

***"Young people should help shape culture, not just take part in it."***

***"Give us more opportunities to be creative."***

Young people consultees

Young people have some specific views and needs:

- Safe spaces to gather and create.
- Opportunities to try new things and develop creative skills and work experience pathways.
- Don't just be consulted, but have a voice in cultural planning.

And residents of all ages were clear what they wanted to see next.

- Local people prioritised across all engagement activities.
- More inclusive and accessible cultural opportunities.
- Better promoted local activities.
- Improved evening transport, connections communities.
- Continued support for grassroots organisations and local artists.
- Celebration of Telford's unique identity and distinct towns.
- Opportunities for communities to create culture together.

# 1.3
# A definition of culture for Telford and Wrekin

> *Telford has a twin-track history. It's both **ancient and modern**.*
>
> Stakeholder consultee

> *It's incredibly easy to live here. It was designed with purpose and an understanding of **work-life balance**. Culture is an important part of that.*
>
> Stakeholder consultee

## Our definition of culture

'Culture' means many things to many people and is often used to refer to food, sport, religion and heritage. Culture should be understood broadly. It includes the arts, heritage, museums, libraries, music, theatre, dance, visual arts, festivals, events, film, literature, craft, design, digital creativity and the creative industries. But culture in Telford is also found in communities, traditions, stories, landscapes, neighbourhoods, public spaces and the ways people come together.

This Cultural Strategy deliberately moves beyond framing culture just through its arts venues and events, to include social and community networks, the digital world, learning and skills.

This broader understanding matters. A place's culture is what its people think it is. It happens everywhere - in libraries, parks, schools, high streets and community centres. It happens through festivals, walking routes, local heritage, creative businesses, voluntary activity and informal networks. It happens wherever people make, participate, perform, celebrate, learn, share stories or express the identity of their community.

## Our definition of creativity

'Creativity' is the process through which people apply their knowledge, skill and intuition to imagine, conceive, express or make something that wasn't there before. In other words, how we use our imagination. Creativity is present in all areas of life. In this Strategy we can think about the process of making, producing and participating in 'culture'. We also see the traditional boundaries blur as new technologies and other societal changes alter the ways in which many artists, curators, librarians and other practitioners work, as well as how culture is made and shared.

We're excited by these changes, which we expect to accelerate over the next decade – and in response, we will become more flexible about the range and type of cultural activities that we support over the years to come.

> **Culture is both something people experience and something people create.**
>
> Stakeholder consultee




## Spotlight
# Wellington Orbit – community-led cultural place-making

The Orbit is a community-run 63-seat cinema, café and arts venue in the heart of Wellington. It provides access to film and cultural experiences, creating opportunities for people to connect, volunteer and participate in local life. The project emerged from a long-term ambition to strengthen Wellington's cultural and evening economy. Alongside film screenings, the venue provides space for events, participation and social connection. The latest phase will bring the upper floors into use – flexible spaces for exhibitions, performance, rehearsal, and community outreach.

## Spotlight
# Events in Ironbridge Gorge

Ironbridge shows exactly how festivals and events can animate heritage and local identity. For example, the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Festival brings together arts, crafts, heritage activity, music, open studios and community events across the Gorge, creating opportunities to experience local culture in historic settings and public spaces. And most famously, hosts the Coracle Regatta! The Ironbridge Gorge Brass Band Festival transforms the Museum of Iron into an accessible open-air performance space. Inspired by the landscape, Embers Fire Festival celebrates fire-based cooking with world-class chefs and family-friendly activities.

These events show how culture activates places and creates new connections between people and heritage that remains relevant, accessible and embedded within everyday life.


Embers Fire Festival


Ironbridge Gorge Heritage Festival



Telford Balloon Fiesta

## Spotlight
# Free events – spectacle & community

There is perhaps no better example of Telford's commitment to free events for residents and visitors than the Ballon Fiesta.

Staged across a summer weekend, it lights up the night sky and attracts thousands of people to the town centre to enjoy the balloons and a host of family-friendly activities. Each year sees new additions to the programme, which brings music, food, parades and art together under the night sky. The weekend culminates in Telford Carnival, celebrating the diversity of our communities.

## Spotlight
# Free events – investing in culture

The Town Park offers many spaces for creative and cultural activity. One of the most interesting is the waterside amphitheatre, now fully refurbished.

As an outdoor venue is can host any many forms of performance – spoken word, comedy, choral, local bands, theatre… Summer 2026 saw it stage open-air theatre productions as diverse as *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Jeeves & Wooster*, and *Peter Rabbit*, alongside showcasing local bands, to over 7,800 total visitors.


Town Park Amphitheatre

## 2.0
# Strategy



McFly in Town Park

## 2.1
# Vision

Culture will be woven into everyday life across Telford and Wrekin. Culture creates **belonging** throughout our 'town of towns', empowering people to exchange, learn and innovate together to shape thriving communities and a growing cultural economy.



# 2.2
# Principles - How will we deliver together?



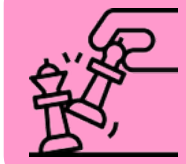
**EXCHANGE**
network, share knowledge, develop skills, incubate



**EXHIBIT**
communicate, show, perform, sell, storytelling, access



**EXPLORE**
communicate, advocate, listen, measure, debate research, data-inspired



**ENERGISE**
celebrate, promote, disrupt, surprise, challenge



**EXPORT**
ideas, partnerships, talent, programmes, best practice



**ELEVATE**
develop, practise, rehearse, meet, connect talent

**Why do we need shared principles?**

When we have common purpose, and feel inspired, we're happier and more productive. This can help shape partnerships, approaches, funding bids. Shared principles help to set the tone for Telford's cultural development, and align with values expressed by Telford & Wrekin Council, especially openness, ownership and involvement.

These **Principles** have come directly from the many conversations that have informed this strategy.

They will act as the founding principles of how we want to work together to deliver this strategy and build a cultural partnership that lasts.

These principles were a spontaneous and direct output from the community consultation days.

## 2.3
# Priorities
## for a culturally–powered place

> *I am struck both by the ambition of the strategy and by the emphasis on **belonging as a foundation for change**. The vision that culture means belonging feels **particularly powerful and has resonance** with a number of areas of work currently taking place across the borough.*
>
> Stakeholder consultee

Built on the strong foundations of the vision, stakeholder commentary, co-working principles and an action plan, the strategy has 5 thematic areas of focus – its **Priorities**.

We live in fast-moving times – national policy, funding landscape, social and technological change. So these will be reviewed at regular intervals to maintain relevance and impact, tracking progress and adjusting course where needed, and also tap into new ideas and opportunities.

This Cultural Strategy is owned by its many and varied stakeholders. It is everyone's to support and work with – an invitation and a responsibility.

This strategy can then be part of wider place-based plans, starting with every part of Telford & Wrekin Council, but quickly extending across our network to include cross-sector partners as diverse as schools, the National Trust and local community charities.

Between 2027-2032 we want to:

1. Create a **cultural partnership** model through which everyone works together to improve cultural practice – creating opportunities to support local creativity, build our collective skills, align goals, and build a joint case for further investment in culture.
2. Maximise the potential of capital **cultural investments**, most notably the new Telford Theatre.
3. Continue to build a programme of **cultural development** – growing confidence and resilience, from local community projects to signature events, including Telford at 60 in 2028.
4. Support the delivery of **place strategies**[1], embedding the role of culture and encouraging creativity in their delivery in key social and economic agendas, including improving health & wellbeing outcomes, and tackling inequality. Work proactively with cultural and community organisations to build our **collective capacity**.
5. Make Telford's **landscape and public realm** ever more accessible, welcoming and creating places for artists and residents alike.

*1 Strategies including but not only: Child Friendly, Safer & Stronger Communities, Library & Residents Hubs, Destination Management, Local Cultural Education Partnership, Pride In Our High Streets, Skills, Harper Adams Partnership, National Trust, Local Transport, Cycling & Walking, Health & Wellbeing, Local Nature Recovery.*

## 2.3
# Priorities

> *Sharing **different cultures** and that for me is very much what a new town should be about.*
>
> Public consultee

> *[We want] events and activities that invite people from across **communities** to meet and build **connections**.*
>
> Public consultee

## 1 Belonging to our communities

**Culture helps build connections across Telford's communities.** This means creating ways for people to participate close to home and being aware of everything going on; maximising use of our already busy community spaces; supporting communities to develop their own cultural activity; removing participation barriers.

**Belonging through…**

1. Expanding Telford Theatre on Tour to more venues, with more community-embedded programming.
2. A venue network (shared digital platform) to create sustainability and growth of venues independently programming, and cross-promotion of venues and grassroots events.
3. More programming in non-traditional venues, e.g. libraries, parks, civic and faith centres.
4. Supporting community festivals / events, including the Telford at 60 grant scheme to develop events, engagement and physical legacy.
5. Supporting ongoing development of Telford Day, rotating activity around the borough.
6. Mapping community spaces for creative use.
7. Creating shared evaluation metrics to enhance monitoring and planning.
8. Create a shared evaluation framework for cultural activity to enable monitoring, evaluation and programme development.



**Telford Carnival**

## 2.3
# Priorities

> *You've got to have a **bold ambition** and then find the funding... You have to believe that you can find the funding if the ambition is good enough.*
>
> Stakeholder consultee

> *A future where people from a range of backgrounds build their **skills & careers** in the arts.*
>
> Stakeholder consultee

**2 Belonging through opportunity & creativity**

**Culture is also an economic opportunity.** Telford's history is one of innovation, making and reinvention. The strategy seeks to translate that spirit into opportunities for contemporary creative talent and enterprise. Its ambitions include embedding culture within place-making and regeneration, developing creative careers and skills, providing spaces for making and rehearsal, supporting creative entrepreneurship and start-ups, and connecting local talent with wider opportunities.

**Belonging through...**

1. Embedding cultural place-making in regeneration and capital investment planning.
2. Building a national reputation for the new Telford Theatre through all its programmes.
3. Supporting creative sector growth through Invest Telford, working with The Quad's Incubator Units.
4. With external funding sources, piloting creative business incubators with grant funding.
5. Delivering the borough-wide TF Festival in 2027 – building local partnerships towards Telford at 60.
6. Skills bootcamps for locally-based creatives.
7. Boosting rehearsal / makerspace provision.
8. Establishing national creative partnerships with institutions to develop talent locally.
9. Using the new Local Plan to update planning policy for use of public realm – events and festivals.



CultureKind Chinese Community

## 2.3
# Priorities

> *It's got pockets of very old communities. But it's very **young culturally**.*

Stakeholder consultee

> *We want our **voices** to count in every decision that affects us… young people bring **energy**, **resilience** & **creativity** to our communities.*

Teenage consultee

3 **Belonging to the next generation**

**Telford is a young place with a growing population**. Children and young people should not simply be audiences; they should help create their cultural future. The strategy therefore seeks greater youth leadership and agency, including youth involvement in cultural governance, spaces in which young people feel welcome, young producer programmes and opportunities for emerging creative practitioners.

**Belonging through…**

1. Youth representation in the cultural partnership.
2. Youth co-ownership of place & space activation – building welcome and participation.
3. A young producers' programme, e.g. summer school kickstarter, capacity / capability-building initiatives.
4. Seeking funding to set up young creative programme (theatre / college co-design / delivery).
5. Supporting small festivals & gig nights to showcase emerging talent and build young audiences.
6. Explore opportunities to access seed funding to support strategy-aligned proposals.
7. Assess viability of empty (high street and other) properties as meanwhile creative spaces.
8. Embedding culture and creative industries in a skills hub; using the new Theatre and venues network to develop creative career paths for young people (with further & higher education partners).



## 2.3
# Priorities

> Culture helps us remember that there was something here before the new town. That gets often forgotten.
>
> Stakeholder consultee

> *We need a **big statement** here of what Telford is and where it's going. It's industrial in a new modern way. It is **forward thinking**.*
>
> Stakeholder consultee

**4** **Belonging through our shared story**

**Telford has an extraordinary story, but heritage is not only about preserving the past.** The Cultural Strategy sees heritage as a source of identity, creativity, learning and innovation. It seeks stronger connections between heritage and contemporary culture, more opportunities for residents to explore the borough, and a more coherent cultural tourism offer.

**Belonging through…**

1. A cultural passport app – linked to active travel – for residents to enable access to cultural experiences.
2. Delivering on the potential of music and outdoor arts, raising the profile of grassroots venues and connecting people to them including through Telford's new public spaces and squares and the Town Park.
3. Co-designing oral histories and digital heritage programmes between culture and heritage partners.
4. Seek innovation funding to enhance heritage crafts and skills apprenticeships.
5. Revising Telford's cultural heritage narrative (with National Trust), linked to borough-wide visitor offer.
6. Embedding cultural heritage context and content for Telford at 60.
7. Developing a cultural infrastructure masterplan & 'investment prospectus' as a legacy of Telford at 60.
8. Building regional cultural development partnerships.



The Anstice

## 2.3
# Priorities

> *"Telford has a lot to offer in that regard in terms of the **natural beauty** and affordability."*

Stakeholder consultee

> *It's (**nature**) a really easy thread to pull with Telford because of the number of trees and the way that it was created. It's actually at the heart of its **DNA**, isn't it? ...I think it's really easy to tease that out and **develop** it.*

Stakeholder consultee

## 5 Belonging to our landscape & environment

**Telford's parks, countryside, waterways, agricultural landscapes and green spaces are part of its cultural identity.** The strategy envisages cultural activity increasingly taking place outdoors, stronger partnerships between cultural and environmental organisations, active travel initiatives, environmentally responsible events, and projects connecting creativity, nature, health and wellbeing.

### Belonging through...

1. Remapping and renewing the interpretation of all the public art and art trails in the borough, enabling a holistic approach to public art commissions.
2. Investing further in existing walking & cycling trails, outdoor festivals and land art.
3. Formalising the cultural, wellbeing and conservation partnership with local partners, including charitable, academic, NGOs / agencies.
4. Developing and publishing a green cultural events toolkit to raise standards in design, compliance, conservation and accessibility.
5. Developing cultural initiatives (temporary and potentially permanent) to celebrate Telford Tree City of the World status, connecting with and as a legacy from Telford at 60.
6. Supporting community growing and reuse programmes with creative partners.



Coracle Regatta



Wellington Community Art Gallery

## Spotlight
# Artists' collectives

In Ironbridge, Maws Craft Centre supports an established community of crafters, artists and makers alongside a programme of creative courses and workshops for adults and children. Fusion provides artist studio space and is home to Footprint Gallery and its changing exhibitions programme, while Green Wood Centre combines studio provision with specialist craft and skills development opportunities. In Wellington, Wellington Community Art Gallery supports local artists through exhibitions and events, while new space at The Orbit complements the existing artist studios and creative activity at The Belfry Arts Centre.

## Spotlight
# Community Libraries

The borough's Community Library network demonstrates how investment can strengthen access to culture, learning and social connection. Facilitated by Telford & Wrekin Council and local Town & Parish Councils and their local partners, the library network is an important civic space at the heart of our towns. The newest is at Oakengates, helping to set new standards in community engagement.

Recent funding secured through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England's Libraries Improvement Fund have enabled modernisation and new services like children's areas, meeting rooms and better accessibility, for example at Newport Community Library. The changing role of libraries as flexible community spaces now support culture, creativity, digital inclusion and wellbeing alongside their traditional role in reading and information.



Newport Community Library


Telford Carnival

## Spotlight
# Grassroots cultural diversity

Telford and Wrekin's local organisations provide connection between communities, using culture, shared experience and support to create stronger relationships across the borough. By creating welcoming spaces, supporting volunteering and enabling people from all backgrounds to work together through programmes like Telford Carnival, they demonstrate how community-led thinking can contribute to inclusion, wellbeing and a stronger sense of belonging. Community hubs create accessible spaces where people can access support and develop activities that respond to local needs. They provide facilities for community activity and opportunities for collaboration between cultural organisations, local residents, faith groups and voluntary organisations.

## Spotlight
# Abraham Darby Music School & Telford Youth Music

**With Telford & Wrekin Music and The Music Partnership**

Music education is a longstanding strength within Telford and Wrekin and continues to provide opportunities for young people to develop skills, confidence and ambition through high-quality creative experiences. Haberdashers' Abraham Darby has established a national reputation. Through sustained investment in instrumental tuition, extracurricular activity and ensemble performance, they've developed programmes that support participation at every level — from beginner musicians through to nationally-recognised ensembles. With subsidised tuition, a Saturday music college and over 10 ensembles, they create pathways for young people to access high-quality music opportunities regardless of prior experience.

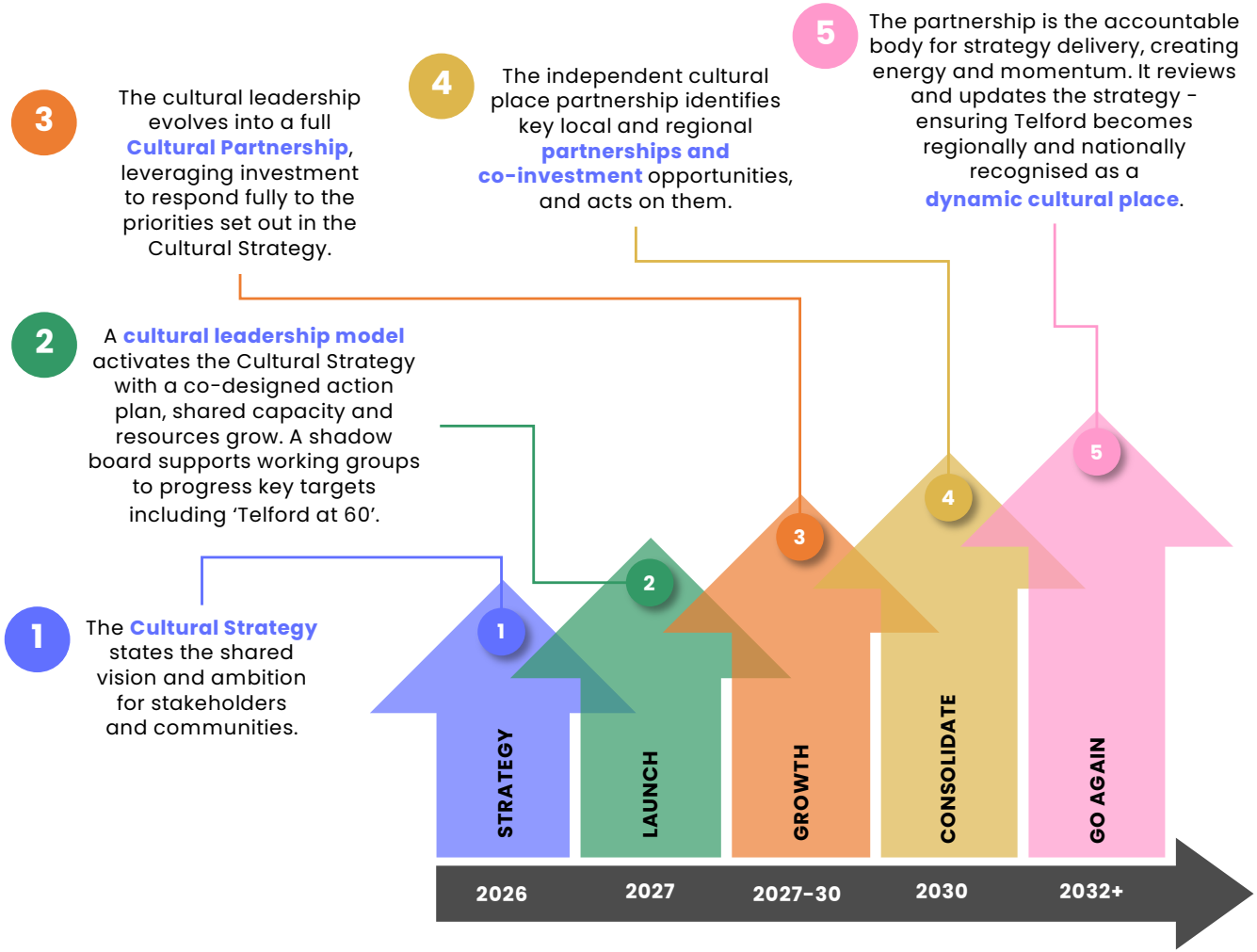

Haberdashers' Abraham Darby

## 3.0
# Delivery




Telford Balloon Fiesta. Image: Dave Atkinson

## 3.1
# Leadership through partnership




To achieve Telford's cultural ambitions there needs to be clear **place-based cultural leadership**. Historically, Telford & Wrekin Council has provided much of this leadership, but there is a need for a more collaborative and sustainable way to build capacity, investment, partnerships and shared ownership as we deliver Telford's long-term cultural ambitions.

As delivery cannot be put on hold while this model is developed, it will be phased in. Throughout each phase, governance will be collaborative, to enable networks, ideas and new joint projects to flourish. A full **Cultural Place Partnership** will be the result, with the ability to lead, secure investment, and work with the Council as a proactive partner.

This means the **Council's** role will increasingly be one of partner, enabler, investor, commissioner, and connector, alongside its role as a direct provider of some cultural services.

***GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP.***
*This strategy provides the road map to deliver positive and sustainable impacts for Telford and Wrekin's communities, artists and creatives.*

## 3.2
# Monitoring success

> *An outcome of this programme should be that there is some sort of **homegrown production company**, dance company, theatre company, whatever, from people that have participated in some sort of programme and you know, they start up their company and hopefully in 10 years' time look at something like becoming an NPO.*

Stakeholder consultee

### Developing the right metrics

The strategy targets a range of outcomes, requiring a range of measures to track how well the strategy is delivering over time, including :

- Participation
- Demographic and geographic data
- Opportunity for young people and local creatives
- Attraction and retention of creative talent
- Increased collaboration
- New investment
- New or improved cultural spaces
- Environmental and educational outcomes
- Skills development
- Qualitative feedback from participants and communities.

The Cultural Strategy describes a trajectory from awareness of culture, to ultimately embedding it within the daily life of Telford and Wrekin. The right measures will enable the strategy to be effectively monitored.

### Action planning

The Action Plan is the primary tool to respond to the vision and goals of the Strategy. To be established within the next 6 months it will cover an initial 24-month period, with (bi-) annual reviews through the lifetime of the strategy.

At the start of this strategic 5-year period, regional and national funding policies and programmes are under review and often changing rapidly. The action plan will need to be revised to respond to this – focused on delivery but also evolving as it is informed by wider policies, funds and plans, not least that of WMCA and ACE.

This Action Plan will be a trackable, operational guide for progress in delivering the Strategy, with clear performance indicators and regular review points.

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