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Cambridge Cultural Plan

Insights Report

December 2025



Contents

SECTION A INTRODUCTION

1 Setting the scene	3
2 Methodology	5
3 Key insights – executive summary	6

SECTION B RESEARCH & CONSULTATION

1 Mapping & data analysis	14
1.1 Primary research	15
1.2 Secondary research	29
2 Stakeholder consultations: recurring themes & insights	49
3 Artist & freelance engagement (ongoing)	52
4 Stakeholder workshops	59
5 Consultation themes: compare & contrast	62
6 Alignments: policy & partners	66
7 Cultural place wheel™	69

SECTION C THE 'NEW' BRIEF AND NEXT STEPS

1 Unlocking transformational potential	75
2 Leadership, governance & delivery	77
3 Focus areas	79
3.1 Focus 1: Connective tissue & a liveable artist ecology	79
3.2 Focus 2: Rewiring the funding model	79
3.3 Focus 3: Strategic integration with tech & innovation	81
3.4 Focus 4: Planning, growth & civic decision-making	82

SECTION D ADDENDUM

1 Statement on the use of AI in producing this report	85
2 List of organisations consulted	86
3 Selected bibliography	88
4 Definition of culture	92
5 Detailed artist engagement report	93
6 Stakeholder workshop provocation sheets	99
7 Cultural place wheel™ – a guide to scoring	103
8 Global models & features that Cambridge could adopt	107

Quotes included in this report are verbatim comments from interview consultations and workshops. Cover image courtesy Cambridge Junction. Produced for Create Cambridge by CTConsults, The Intelligence Agency, Fringe Consulting and Metal Culture.

A. Introduction

A.1 Setting the scene

We are writing this Insights Report at a vital moment in the Cultural Plan process, just as the detailed engagement and evidence gathering stage of this piece of work starts to come to a close.

Before outlining the Insights Report in detail, it is important to restate that our bid submission analysis identified the following opening diagnosis of Cambridge's cultural ecosystem in our tender documentation:

'...the city's relative stability, the quiet conservatism of the University's cultural influence, and lack of civic cultural leadership have made Cambridge all too easy for major cultural investors to overlook. Others have simply offered more energy and compelling ideas.

As a result, Cambridge remains 'less than the sum of its parts.' As a creative coalition for cultural growth and innovation, it has been overtaken by cities with greater urgency and strategic ambition. This process must change that trajectory – and the mindsets behind it.'

Since being commissioned, we have sought to generate detailed evidence on the character and trajectory of Cambridge's cultural and creative economy. With that aim in mind, it is important to note what this report is, and isn't. This Insights Report is not a draft Cultural Plan document. We are

not making recommendations, or offering up potential versions of purpose and ambition statements, agreed concept definitions, or suggested action plans. We will be working with you on all these elements in the final stage of the process in the new year, after you have had a chance to absorb the findings of this Insights Report.

Rather the central aim of the report is to transparently share with all the key stakeholders a full empirical account (both quantitative and qualitative) of what we have found in our analysis and engagement work so far.

Why do this at this stage? The facts and the evidence matter. We cannot effectively co-create a Cultural Plan with key partners unless it is rooted in a shared analysis of Cambridge's cultural reality, and that all the key stakeholders understand that reality and are committed to act upon it.

Working to those ends, we have empirically validated two truths that are uneasily co-existing in Cambridge's cultural ecosystem. The first inspiring truth, is that all the key stakeholders are yearning for *'the vision thing'* and believe that the city's existing assets can be better combined to achieve a much greater impact than is currently being achieved. Your request to us as your consultancy partner is to work with you to create an ambitious 'north star' vision that is capable of pulling everyone into strong strategic alignment such that you can all

confidently commit to a Cultural Plan that demands new ways of working and more open productive partnerships.

The other less palatable truth revealed by our work is that our analysis at the tender stage - that the city does not have a functional or effective coalition fostering cultural growth and innovation - has proved to be emphatically true.

Indeed, a key centre of gravity in our stakeholder interviews is that Cambridge is a city with an international research and business innovation reputation that is still run like 'a market town,' beset by small 'p' politics, and a lack of civic cultural ambition and action.

Our analysis shows that by acting and thinking differently, **the cultural potential of the city is extraordinary.**

A2. Methodology

Since our appointment in late May 2025, we have undertaken a number of primary and secondary research programmes, looking at qualitative and quantitative data. Our mixed methodology and multidisciplinary consultancy team has generated both breadth and depth of insight into Cambridge's cultural landscape. The result is a thorough situational analysis, evaluating current performance, capacity, and capability within the context of future needs and aspirations.

What have we done?

- Area familiarisation visiting principal places to gain an understanding of Cambridge's cultural experience for residents and visitors e.g. Junction Arts, Museum of Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, Raspberry Pi, Cambridge Room and the Grafton Centre, a walking tour, Kings College Chapel, Whipple Museum, Cambridge Contemporary Crafts, Cambridge University Hospitals, Makespace and more.
- Consultations with 42 stakeholders (from over 28 organisations and groups) in the form of online and in-person conversations.
- A dedicated programme of artist engagement and consultation, engaging 29 artists to date (22 consulted and 7 engaged for paid commissions). A further 2 workshops, 3 open advice sessions and 2 commissions programmed to take place through November onwards.

- 3 x stakeholder workshops attended by c.70 people.
- A development workshop on cultural leadership and governance for the Create Cambridge Management Board.
- Review of existing available data sources, reports, plans, strategies, evaluations, reviews and more.
- Online sentiment analysis.
- Primary research to digitally map cultural activity across the borough.
- Secondary research to conduct a longitudinal analysis of strategic funding into the Cambridge cultural sector.

The Addendum includes a list of organisations who responded to the invitation to participate either via consultation or workshop. A bibliography of documents and websites we have researched is also included in the addendum.

The artist and freelance creative practitioner engagement strand is ongoing, and will continue to inform and influence the development of the Cultural Plan. A **full report** on this engagement strand will be produced as a standalone document once it is concluded, and will highlight in what ways artist consultation directly informed the Plan.

A3. Key insights – executive summary

The Executive Summary of key data insights that follows below, is focused on Sections B.1 – B.6.

We have not attempted to provide an executive summary of Section B.7. (The Cultural Place Wheel™) as it is a highly visual segment of our analysis, which does not lend itself to short paragraph summation. We suggest you read that separately.

We have also not provided a summary of Section C – entitled ‘*The New Brief and Next Steps*’ – as it is succinctly written, and more importantly that section presents the suggested key foundations of the next stage of our collective work together, and we therefore recommend that you read Section C in full before we come together again as a group in January 2026.

In providing an Executive Summary of key data insights (Sections B.1 – B.6), we have split our initial presentation of the data below into three ‘reporting’ sections:

1. Our analysis of existing primary and secondary data.
2. Our analysis of wider stakeholder interviews and workshop sessions.
3. And our analysis of the outputs from the standalone artist engagement strand led by Metal.

There are of course overlaps in the points and observations made by the artists in the Metal facilitated strand, and those made by wider stakeholders in their interviews and in the workshop sessions, and we summarise those overlaps in this Executive Summary.

But we thought it important in reporting these headline data insights to make those ‘source distinctions’ clear in this summary presentation of the evidence.

A3.1 ANALYSIS OF EXISTING PRIMARY & SECONDARY DATA

- The volume of Cambridge’s cultural activity is both exciting, expansive and difficult to navigate.
- Cambridge receives a comparatively high amount of funding from Arts Council England (67.2% of county total funding from Arts Council England).
- Funding from the Arts Council is decreasing, and the same organisations are being funded on a repeat basis.
- Diversifying the pool of successful applications to ACE should be a priority to develop the cultural ecology.
- Cambridge’s population is highly engaged in cultural activity, with all indicators being significantly above both the regional and national averages – some extraordinarily so. This will mean Cambridge is classed as ‘low cultural need’ amongst strategic cultural development bodies and funders, and is therefore disadvantaged when it comes to accessing some strategic and transformational funds for culture.
- There is little to no correlation between funders we analysed – meaning that strategic funders are not working collaboratively to leverage funding. A more goal focused conversation to coordinate public funder action, alongside other strategic funders (such as the

- County Council, Combined Authority, and others) will benefit both the funders and the recipients.
- The creative economy is thriving, but the cultural economy is lagging behind.
- Statistically the cultural and creative industries appear to be thriving in Cambridge – though this does not reflect the experiences ‘on the ground’ as reflected in the challenges and frustrations expressed by the consultation and workshop participants. This can be attributed to the statistics combining the cultural and creative industries, whereas the consultation participants largely came from the cultural sector. The success of the creative industries is masking the challenges in the cultural industries.
- Online presence is fragmented and reflects the lack of shared infrastructure. This prevents the compilation of aggregated data which could be used as evidence of cultural impact.
- Development is required for ‘what’s on’ listings to ensure that they are compelling, structured, connected, optimised, bookable, and easy to administer/publish
- Digital maturity is low and must be improved to future-proof organisations. Data shows that organisations are not keeping pace with consumer expectations and behaviour. Improvements in areas such as online presence, digital marketing, e-commerce, and online booking systems would greatly increase accessibility, audience engagement, and revenue potential.
- A digital engagement plan with shared infrastructure and a joined-up, best-practice approach for the whole cultural / tourism offer would be very useful.

- Developing these digital capabilities will be a key driver of growth and modernisation for the cultural sector, for both visitor and resident markets. This will only become increasingly needed, and urgent, as Cambridge’s population and catchment area grows.
- Currently the majority of cultural events target adult audiences, with only 6% of targeting children and babies, and 5% targeting teenagers. As Cambridge grows and attracts new families to live there, this could be a target focus for cultural programming in the city.

A3.2 ANALYSIS OF STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS & WORKSHOP SESSIONS – DOMINANT THEMES

- **Identity & visibility:** Cambridge’s global reputation masks a more complex local reality. Participants described a city that’s “*known for the brain, not the heart.*” The cultural offer is diverse but hidden, scattered and siloed – and lacking a shared narrative.

There is tension between Cambridge as a global brand and as a lived city. The story is dominated by the university – “*if the university tells the story, everyone else is a footnote.*” The need emerged for a more civic, collective identity that celebrates local creativity and the “everyday” culture beyond college walls.

- **Inclusion, access & inequality:** Concerns about inequality and exclusion appear in almost every conversation. Participants stressed that cultural success must be measured not only by artistic quality but by

reach and representation – including in governance models and decision-making.

Many communities do not see themselves in the city's cultural offer. Accessibility is still treated as an add-on, not a baseline expectation. Cost, geography, and confidence were recurring barriers.

- **Youth & education:** Young people are both the future audience and the missing voice. Opportunities are centralised, while schools cut back on arts education, and the Local Cultural Education Partnership has closed. Participants called for youth-led decision-making, mentorship linking schools and creative organisations, and investment in spaces where young people can make and lead cultural activity. The proposed new iteration of the LCEP programme holds merit as a pilot scheme, and will go some way to addressing this issue.
- **Innovation & creative sectors:** Cambridge's reputation for innovation creates opportunities to link culture, science, and technology more closely. Participants described a shared ambition for creative experimentation but expressed concern about uneven support across the region.
- **Cambridge as an engineered creative ecosystem:** Connectivity between organisations emerged as a recurring priority. Respondents see potential in building a coherent and sustainable cultural ecosystem, but there are concerns about how that is engineered, governed and where the power lies.

- **Funding & sustainability:** Almost all contributors mentioned funding pressures. Limited and competitive funding systems risk undermining cooperation, and a lack of shared ambition and strategic leveraging of funds has further inhibited this.
- **Spaces & infrastructure:** Physical space emerged as a defining pressure point. *"Space is the biggest barrier."* Studios are lost to development; affordable rehearsal and exhibition spaces are rare. City-centre venues are booked by major institutions, leaving little access for independent groups. The outcome is that Cambridge has very limited affordable, usable places to make and share work.
- **Planning & place-making:** Culture was described as an afterthought in local development. *"We plan for buildings, not for belonging."* Section 106 funding mechanisms feel disconnected from cultural & community needs, and there is frustration with recent public art commissioning which is perceived as a wasted opportunity to invest in cultural infrastructure, and address the pressing need for creative spaces.

"How do we get culture to the table of investment planning?" was a common question. Participants argued for embedding culture in planning from the outset, not retrofitting it later: culture must be treated as essential infrastructure, not decoration.
- **Skills & careers:** Cambridge's creative ecology trains people well – and then loses them. *"We train people to*

leave.” There’s a shortage of early, mid-career and leadership opportunities, and freelancers are isolated without collective representation or shared space. This issue is compounded by a lack of ‘churn’ or staff turnover within cultural organisations, with individuals staying in their roles for many years. This creates a very static cultural landscape. Mentoring, peer learning, and more structured professional support were identified as essential to build long-term capacity.

- **Partnerships & collaboration:** Cambridge has plenty of partnerships, but they tend to form around familiar faces. *“Who convenes the conveners?”* Participants felt collaboration was siloed, lacking neutral spaces or shared goals. *“It’s easy to collaborate within your tribe – harder across boundaries.”*

While goodwill exists, the city lacks what one participant called *“collaboration infrastructure.”* There is limited capacity and few incentives for collaboration across sectors. Many joint projects dissolve when funding ends. Participants wanted a broker or civic platform that can connect sectors – culture, tech, academia, community – for long-term alignment rather than ad hoc, project-based cooperation.

- **Lack of shared ambition & cultural leadership:** There is a vacuum of visible cultural leadership at civic level, especially given Cambridge’s national and international profile. Whilst Cambridge as a whole has been growing exponentially, and is a global leader in innovation, the cultural sector has failed to keep pace – even with

nearby towns and cities. An absence of shared strategy, vision and leadership has damaged Cambridge’s ability to develop a cultural sector of the size, scale, impact or ambition one might expect of a city of Cambridge’s international standing. Relatedly, there is limited dedicated capacity to drive cross-sector work forward, with over-reliance on people who already hold full-time roles elsewhere.

- **A collective action problem:** Many contributors questioned whether Cambridge sometimes relies too heavily on its reputation for excellence, rather than pursuing new, risk-taking approaches. Consultations highlighted a general desire for collaboration, but little impetus or incentive to make this happen. Those that benefit from the status quo are reluctant to disrupt it, and whilst Cambridge has strong individual institutions there are too few spaces where leaders are incentivised to think and act for “Greater Cambridge” as a whole.
- **Closed-door power cultures:** Stakeholders frequently described Cambridge as a place where influence is exercised through informal, opaque, and often exclusive networks. Many spoke of decisions happening “behind closed doors,” with power concentrated in small circles that are difficult for organisations – particularly independents, smaller charities, and newer entrants – to access or understand. This lack of transparency fuels mistrust, reinforces siloed behaviours, and makes it challenging to mobilise collective action or progress shared priorities.

A3.3 ANALYSIS OF THE OUTPUTS FROM THE ARTIST ENGAGEMENT STRAND – DOMINANT THEMES

Artists talked about the city's strengths and potential, how Cambridge already has so much going for it, and how exciting it could be if those different parts connected more. There was a real sense of pride in what the city achieves, but also a feeling that things aren't quite joined up yet. Artists identified longstanding structural issues and a strong desire to reshape the city's creative ecology, through fairness, visibility and collaboration. Some key insights below:

- **Diversity:** Commitment to inclusion and representation. Celebrating and embracing diversity in Cambridge was highlighted, especially international students seeking connection, and the barriers they face accessing spaces to connect with like-minded creatives, highlighting an opportunity for a more inclusive creative community.
- **Collaboration & leadership:** There was a strong call for more collaboration and less hierarchy, or to break down traditional hierarchical structures / ways of working. To move away from competition for small pots of funding and towards shared, long-term, and meaningful ways of working.

Connection across sectors was important, with practical ideas about activating unused high-street spaces for creative use.

- **Education & knowledge exchange:** The artists involved emphasised the potential to cross collaborate with academics, and science and utilising the knowledge and assets that Cambridge has or is known for. They shared excitement over the potential of building bridges between these sectors / disciplines and how to involve them as partners, audience and or collaborators.
- **Risk & experimentation:** Importance of embracing failure and creative risk-taking.

They noted how experimentation and "research and development" are deeply valued within science – and questioned what it would mean if creative processes were understood and supported in the same way.

They also used the analogy of Cambridge being known as 'high achieving' and of excellence in science and research and wondered what might happen if the city also celebrated experimentation, risk-taking, and even failure, as essential parts of innovation in both art and science.

- **Education & young people:** Strong support for young people and artist development; stronger links between artists, organisations, and infrastructure and how they can work together.

Artists spoke about the importance of nurturing the next generation of creatives, recognising that the children and young people in Cambridge today are the artists, innovators, and thinkers of tomorrow. They raised

concerns about the challenges facing arts education nationally, from limited curriculum to reduced access in schools, and felt that Cambridge could be a leader in reimagining creative education.

- **Creating conversation spaces:** Desire for more joint working, ongoing networking and collaboration opportunities. Alongside shared spaces for open dialogue which is non-hierarchical.
- **Funding & resources:** Interest in rethinking how development and infrastructure funds are distributed – exploring models such as paying artists to live and create within communities. This is alongside affordable fit-for-purpose creative spaces.
- **Leadership & agency:** Artists want greater influence and recognition as leaders; they want to have their voice as part of strategic and city decision making. Participants called for greater recognition of what artists already bring to the city, their ideas, networks, and lived experiences as vital assets in shaping Cambridge's cultural future.
- **Access to space & transparency:** Access to space came up repeatedly. Artists and freelancers emphasised the lack of accessible, affordable creative space and the absence of clear pathways into funding and accessing venues. Artists shared there was a sense that access exists, but with no knowledge about "how to get in" held by a few rather than shared openly.

- **Valuing creative knowledge:** Many felt creative knowledge is often undervalued compared to academic or research-based expertise. Artists also called for genuine collaboration rooted in shared purpose, not just 'book and research knowledge,' but recognition of 'creative knowledge' as equally valuable.
- **Financial precarity:** Participants spoke about the expectation to contribute to the city's cultural life, often for low pay or unpaid time, with Cambridge described as a "financially ruinous place for creatives." Many felt that the true picture of what it takes to survive as an artist in Cambridge is often hidden and needs to be surfaced.
- **Improved working conditions and ways of working for freelancers & artists:** Participants highlighted the importance of greater recognition and fair, industry-standard pay rates, as well as more structured support for freelancers who contribute to leadership or decision-making forums.

A3.4 HIGH-LEVEL OVERVIEW OF KEY QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS

Across the three strands (stakeholder consultations, artist / freelancer engagement, and stakeholder workshops), the same core issues surface again and again:

- Fragmented leadership and no shared cultural ambition.
- Inequality, exclusion, and unbalanced power dynamics;
- Space scarcity and infrastructure challenges.
- Weak collaboration structures and siloed working;

- Funding imbalance, precarity, and unstrategic investment.
- A desire for Cambridge to better connect creativity, innovation, and civic identity.
- A desire for openness, connection, and collective identity.

Together, these core issues paint a clear picture: **Cambridge is asset rich but lacks the structures, culture, and connective tissue to turn potential into a coherent, inclusive creative ecosystem.**

Across all of the qualitative work strands, participants expressed a clear appetite for a cultural ecosystem that is more connected, transparent, and capable of acting with shared purpose.

While Cambridge has no shortage of creative energy or visionary thinking, stakeholders highlighted that progress is consistently hindered by fragmented leadership, opaque power structures, and an execution gap that leaves promising ideas stuck in circular conversation.

They described a need for cultural infrastructure that intentionally knits the city's many assets together – bridging the divides between institutions, communities, independent creatives, students, tourists, and the innovation economy. Stakeholders want a strategy that links creativity and innovation across disciplines; strengthens participation and representation; and establishes governance models that are open, accountable, and capable of turning ambition into delivery.

They emphasised that Cambridge's cultural future depends not only on artistic excellence, but on the ability to build equitable relationships, share power, and create the civic connective tissue that enables collaboration to happen by design rather than by chance.

A3.5 OUR REVIEW OF THE LOCAL & REGIONAL POLICY LANDSCAPE

We analysed policies and plans across the local area and the wider region, drawing on published strategies, spatial frameworks, economic development plans, and inviting conversations with civic, cultural and regional stakeholders.

Key insights from the research and consultation include:

- The new Local Growth Plan will shortly define regional “opportunity zones”, shaping investment and sector development, including tourism and heritage.
- The region is establishing a Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) with a new Destination Management Plan (DMP) currently in procurement.
 - The LVEP will be chaired at mayoral level and involve senior figures across transport, heritage, business and education.
- The Combined Authority is participating in the Culture Commons / DCMS devolution pilot, exploring new models for cultural investment and strategic oversight.
- The Mayor's priorities emphasise “healthier, wealthier, happier” outcomes, prioritising visible regional impact, particularly through heritage, tourism and community access.

Crucially, regional policy leaders emphasised that Cambridge cannot achieve the level of cultural impact or system change it seeks without operating at the scale of the wider region, where the powers around economic development, innovation, sector growth, and the visitor economy now reside.

This has significant implications for the Cultural Plan. The challenge around “connective tissue” is not *only relational within* Cambridge’s cultural ecosystem but *structural*, reflecting a civic ecology not yet engineered for regional alignment and partnership from a culture perspective.

A3.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR THIS PLAN

Taken together, the published evidence and consultation insights show that:

1. Cambridge lacks a regionally connected cultural strategy, despite regional systems increasingly determining success conditions.
2. Though green shoots are now appearing, Culture remains fragmented across innovation, growth, spatial, skills and visitor-economy policies, with no structural mechanism for unifying these.
3. The Combined Authority’s LVEP and DMP will shape regional identity and visitor engagement, and must be aligned with this Plan.
4. This Plan must therefore establish:
 - culture and creativity as system-level contributors, and a governance model capable of engaging effectively with regional partners and decision-making structures.

B. Research & consultation

This section evidences the deep and thorough research and consultation processes undertaken by the consultancy team to date. This work is ongoing and iterative; nevertheless, we have provided a detailed evidence base upon which we will continue to develop our insights and recommendations.

B1. Mapping & data analysis

Headlines

- The volume of Cambridge's cultural activity is both exciting, expansive, and difficult to navigate.
- Online presence is fragmented and reflects the lack of shared infrastructure. This prevents aggregation of data which could be used as evidence of cultural impact.
- Digital maturity is low and must be improved to future-proof organisations.
- Cambridge receives a comparatively high amount of funding from Arts Council England.
- Funding from the Arts Council is decreasing, and the same organisations are being funded on a repeat basis.
- Funding is not being strategically leveraged.
- The creative economy is thriving, but the cultural economy is lagging behind.

BI.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH

Context & methodology

Cambridge is rich in reports and data. Significant data and analysis of Cambridge's cultural infrastructure, cultural and creative workforce, and audiences already exists. Although not in the public domain, the consultancy team has received privileged access to the draft Greater Cambridge Cultural Infrastructure Strategy, as well as existing reports and datasets. We focused our mapping and data analysis on areas with little or outdated existing work.

We have undertaken primary research to map 4,504 cultural assets across Cambridge. This dataset combines information from the following sources:

- Organisations and individuals funded by Arts Council England (2018–present).
- Organisations funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (2018–present).
- Cultural organisations funded by Cambridge City Council.
- Events listed on the websites of Visit Cambridge, Cambridge Live, CB Travel Guide, University of Cambridge 'what's on' pages (2018–present).¹²

¹ These data sources were chosen as they were the listings sources which most frequently appeared when searching for 'what's on in Cambridge' or 'things to do in Cambridge'. We made the decision to draw these parameters, since this data set already represented circa 10 times the amount of data we would

It is important to note that this data set contains circa 10 times the amount of data that we would normally analyse in a place, and does not contain all the 'what's on' sources available in Cambridge.

This implies:

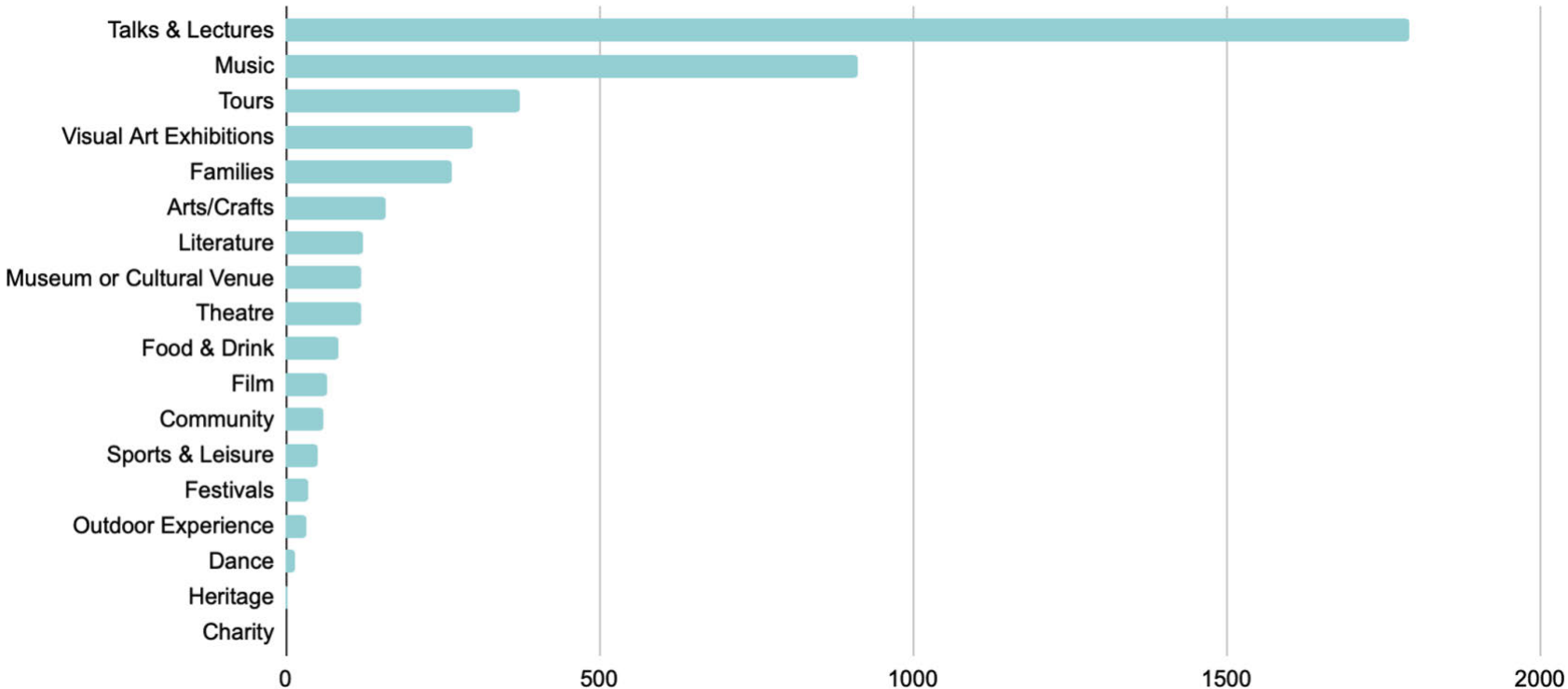
- The volume of Cambridge's activity and event provision is both exciting and difficult to navigate.
- There are multiple places to find out what's going on, but very little connectivity between channels.
- The offer is fragmented, effort is replicated, and there is no single source of truth.
- Audiences struggle to know where to look to find what is of interest to them.
- Venues and organisers are missing out on business / visitors.
- Data cannot be aggregated / consolidated in order to evidence the combined impact of cultural activity in the city.

normally map and analyse in a project of this type and size and represented a significant resource investment from our team.

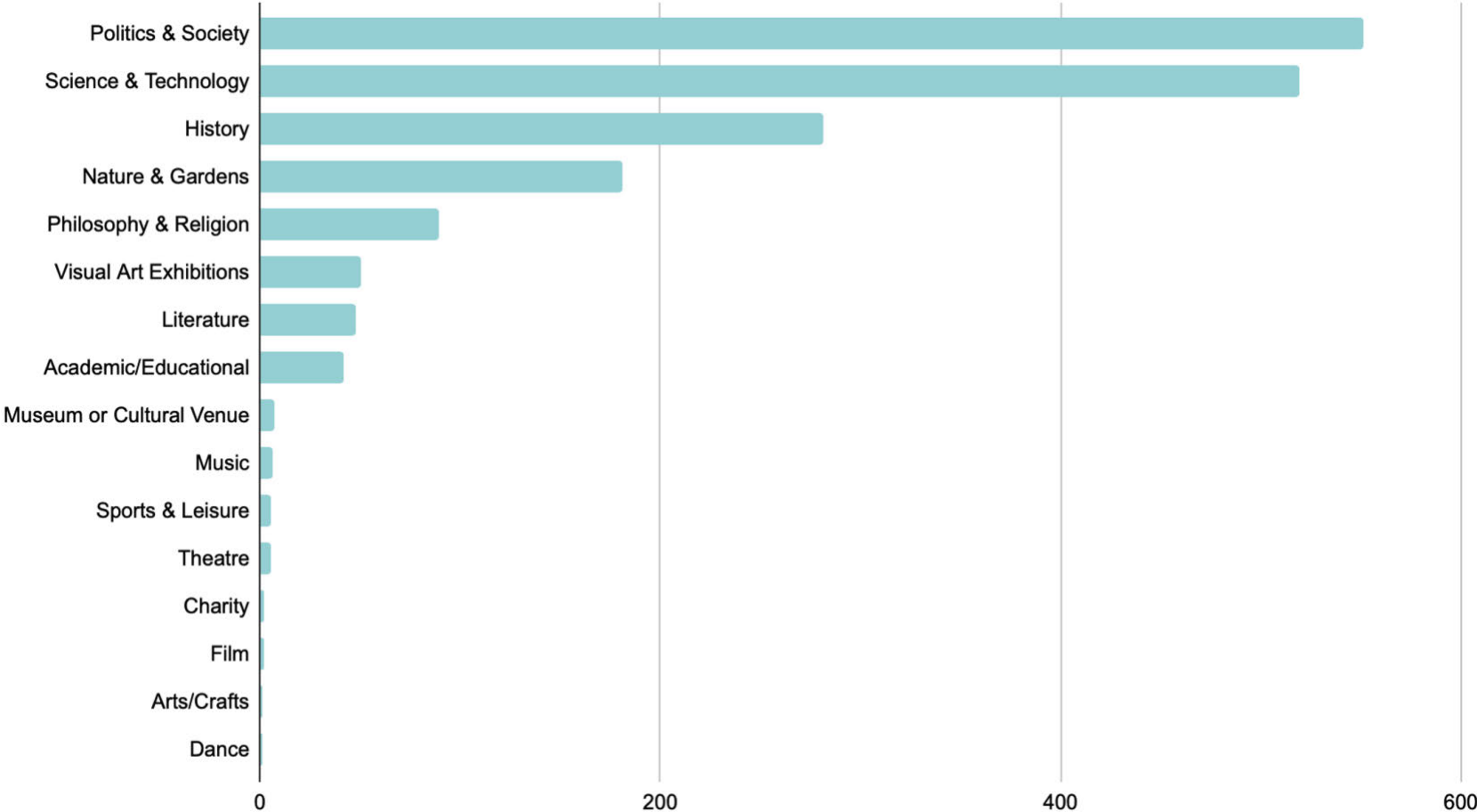
²Event count by data source: Cambridge Live 147; CB Travel Guide 420; University of Cambridge 3,794; Visit Cambridge 143.

Events by type, audience, seasonality

What kind of events has Cambridge hosted since 2018?



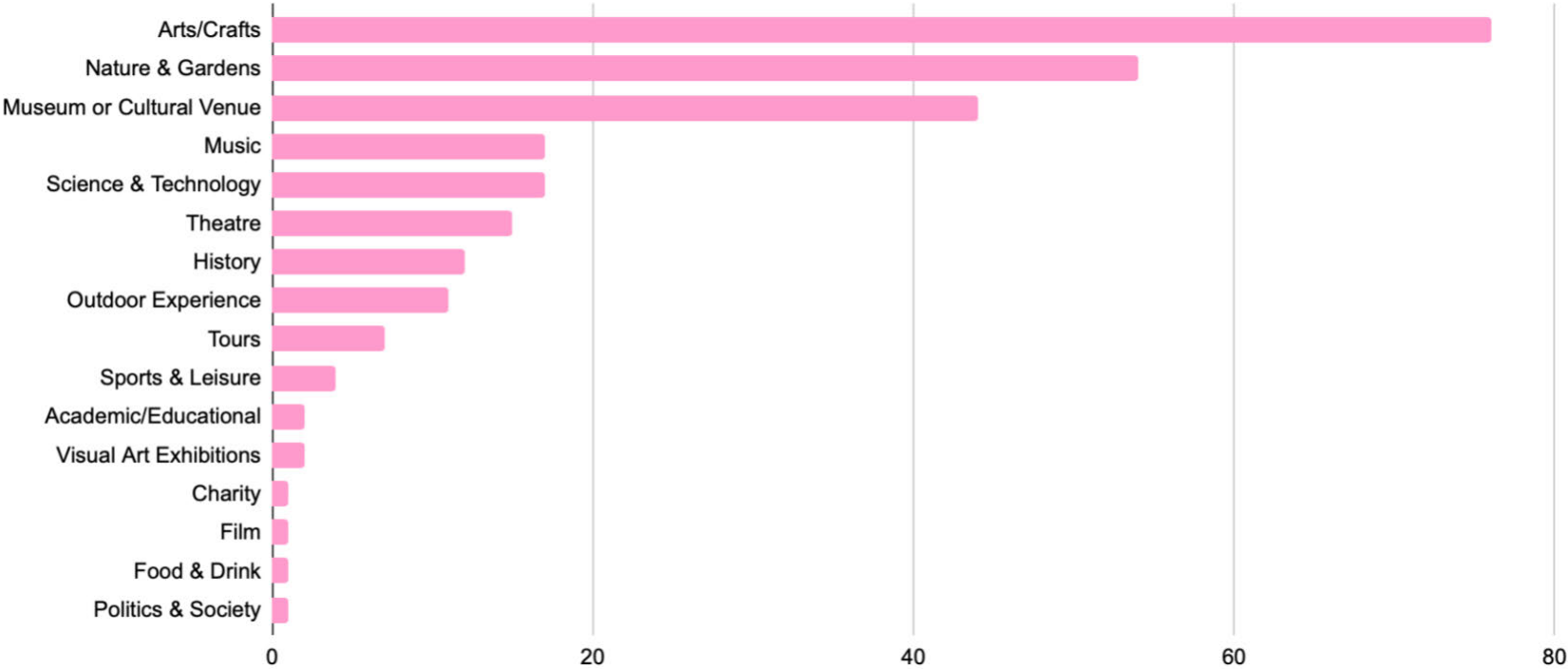
What kind of talks and lectures can the public attend?



Talks and lectures comprise almost 40% of all events, again indicating the dominance of academia and learning as a cultural activity / pastime in Cambridge. Music represents 20% of provision, reflecting the volume of choral performances and concerts given by University colleges and societies, alongside a more contemporary offer from the likes of the Junction and Corn Exchange.

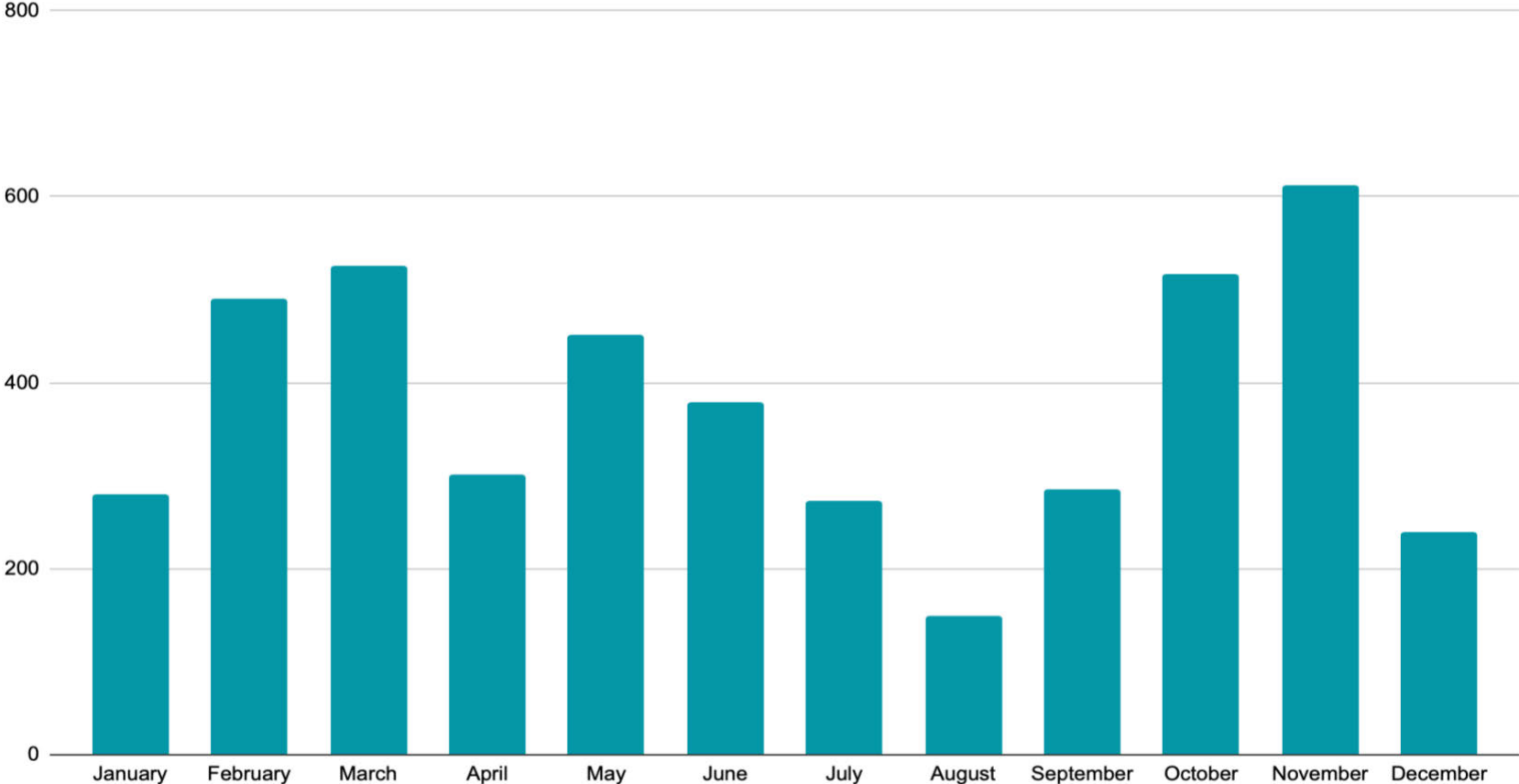
Given the dominance of talks and lectures, it is unsurprising to see that the majority of events target an adult audience. **Only 6% of events target children and babies, and 5% target teenagers. As Cambridge grows and attracts new families to live there, this could be a target focus for cultural programming in the city.**

What kind of activities were on offer for families in Cambridge?



As a thriving tourism destination, Cambridge might expect to see a surge in events taking place in the summer months with activity targeted at visitors. However, due to the dominance of the University as a cultural provider, academic terms dictate the dispersal of cultural activity across the calendar year.

Distribution of events across the year (aggregate)

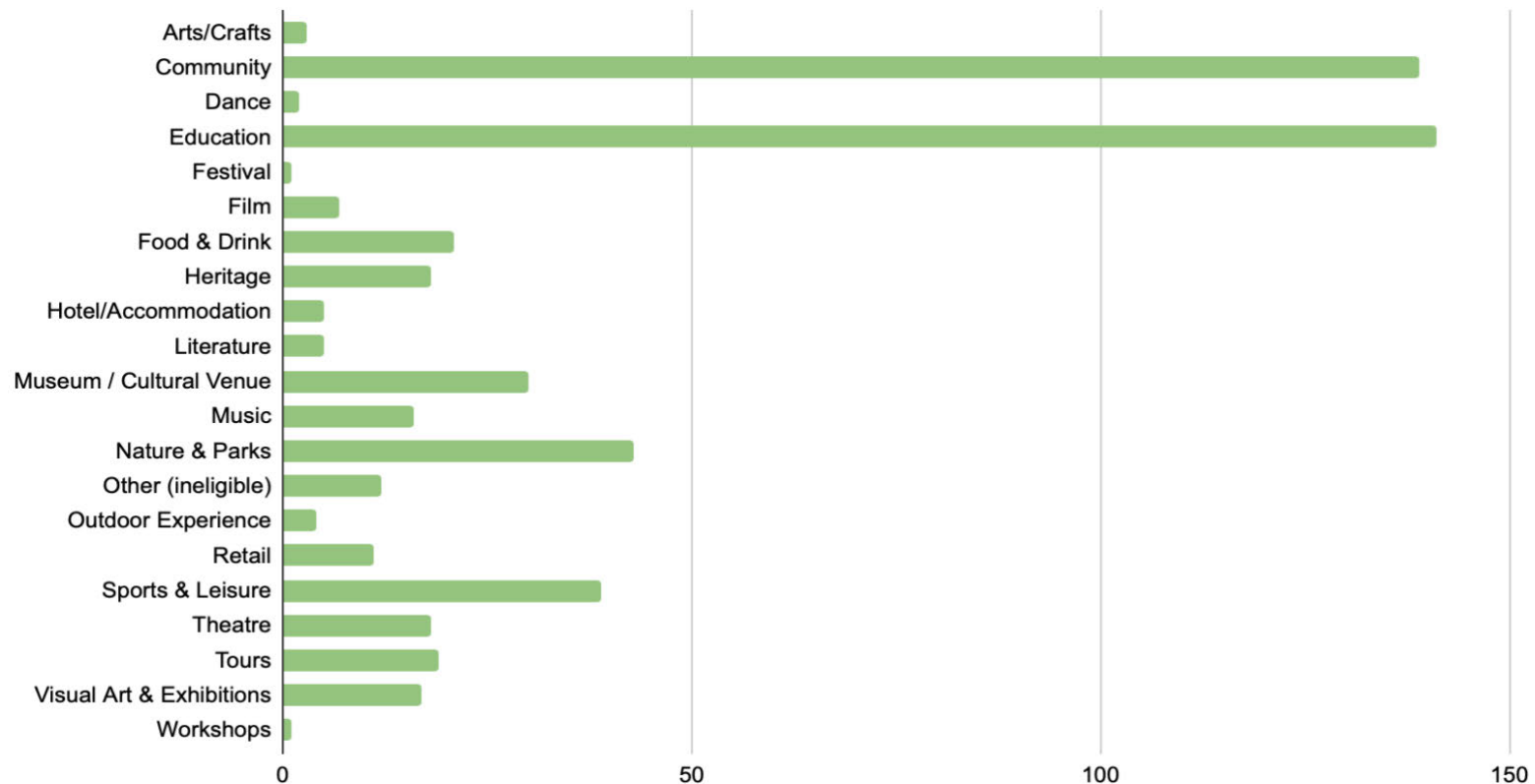


Venues by type

In contrast to Cambridge's events programme, cultural venues represent a much more diverse and balanced offer. Whilst education venues are the most frequently occurring, this is only just ahead of community venues. This reinforces the point that

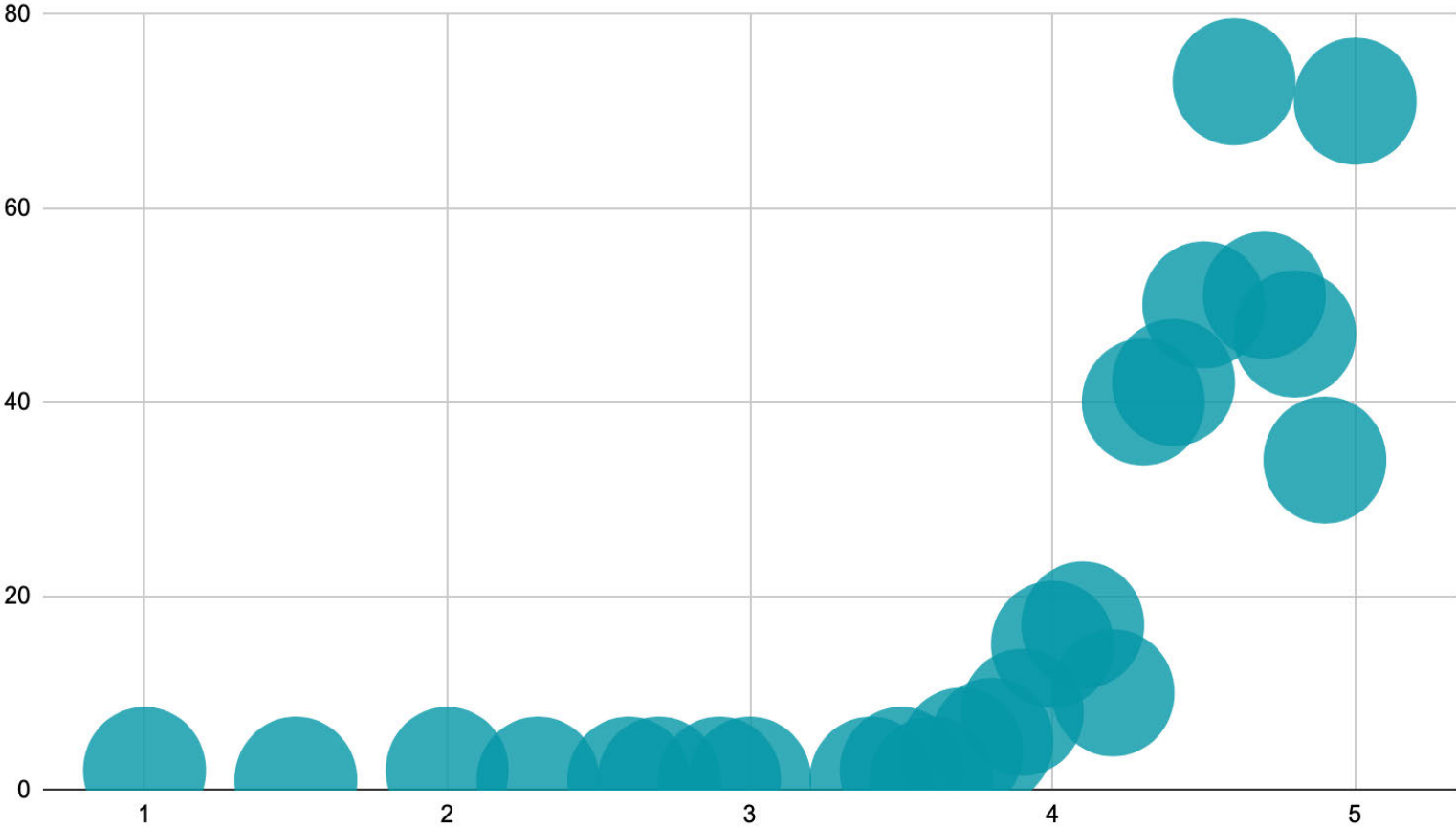
the education venues are providing the majority of programming, and/or that other **venues are lacking in digital visibility and discoverability** (see below). It is positive to see the range of venues includes 'non-traditional' spaces such as parks, outdoor experiences, retail, and hotels.

What type of venues and organisations host events and activities in Cambridge?



We also analysed Google reviews for the venues, which show a high level of audience satisfaction, with only 31 venues scoring below 4 stars. (Sample: 552 venues. 481 had Google reviews.)

How highly rated are Cambridge's cultural venues?



Digital maturity & bookability

The digital transformation of experience marketing has accelerated post-pandemic and continues to change at pace. Therefore in understanding the current performance of cultural activities, we also assess aspects of digital maturity and bookability to establish how visible they are, and how effectively they engage online with audiences and visitors. The graphic [below](#) sets out the key pillars.

The digital maturity mapping for Cambridge is only preliminary – using a light-touch evaluation of businesses’ digital presence, bookability, and online booking system adoption. This assessment helps inform high-level planning and supports the identification of needs and opportunities in the next stage.

Digital Maturity refers to the level of adoption and integration of digital tools, technologies, and strategies within a business’s operations.

Key areas influenced by digital maturity include:



Online Reach & Visibility: The extent to which a business can be discovered online through websites, social media, and search engine optimisation (SEO).



Booking & Sales Processes: The efficiency of online booking systems, mobile-friendly interfaces, and secure payment processing to drive conversions.



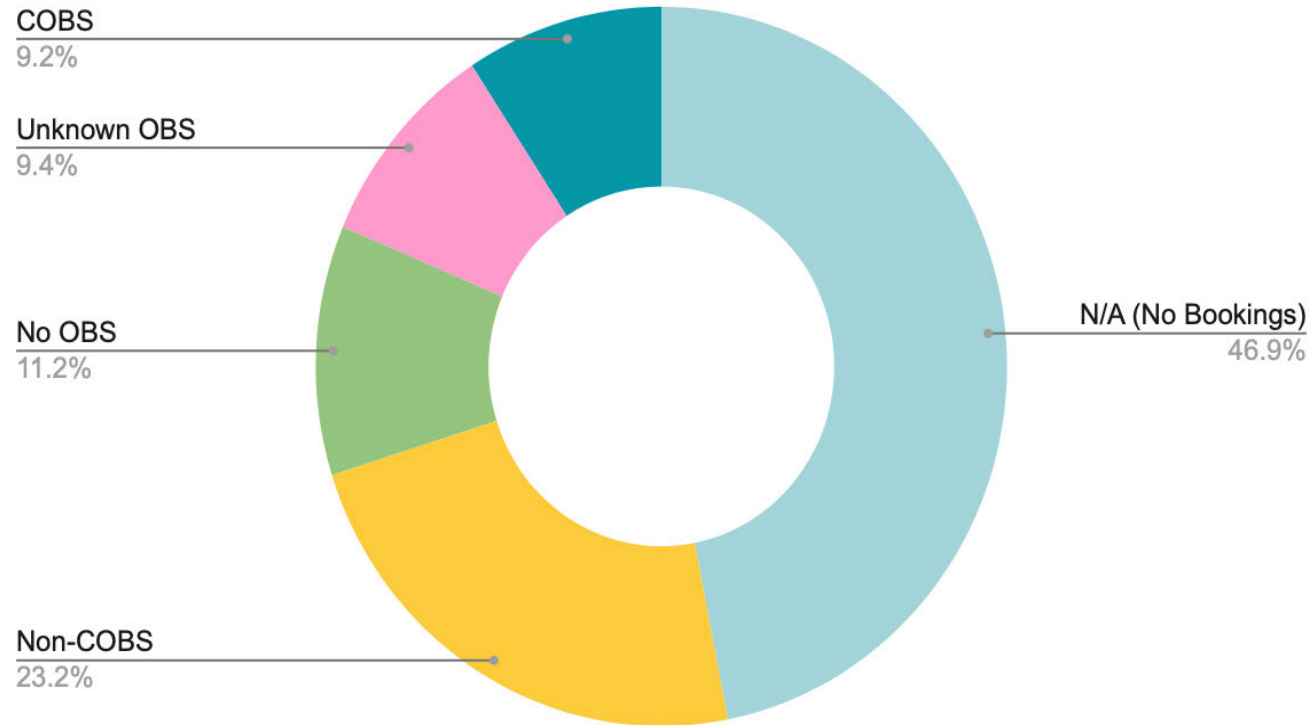
Customer Engagement: How a business interacts with and nurtures its audience via digital marketing, content creation, and online review management.



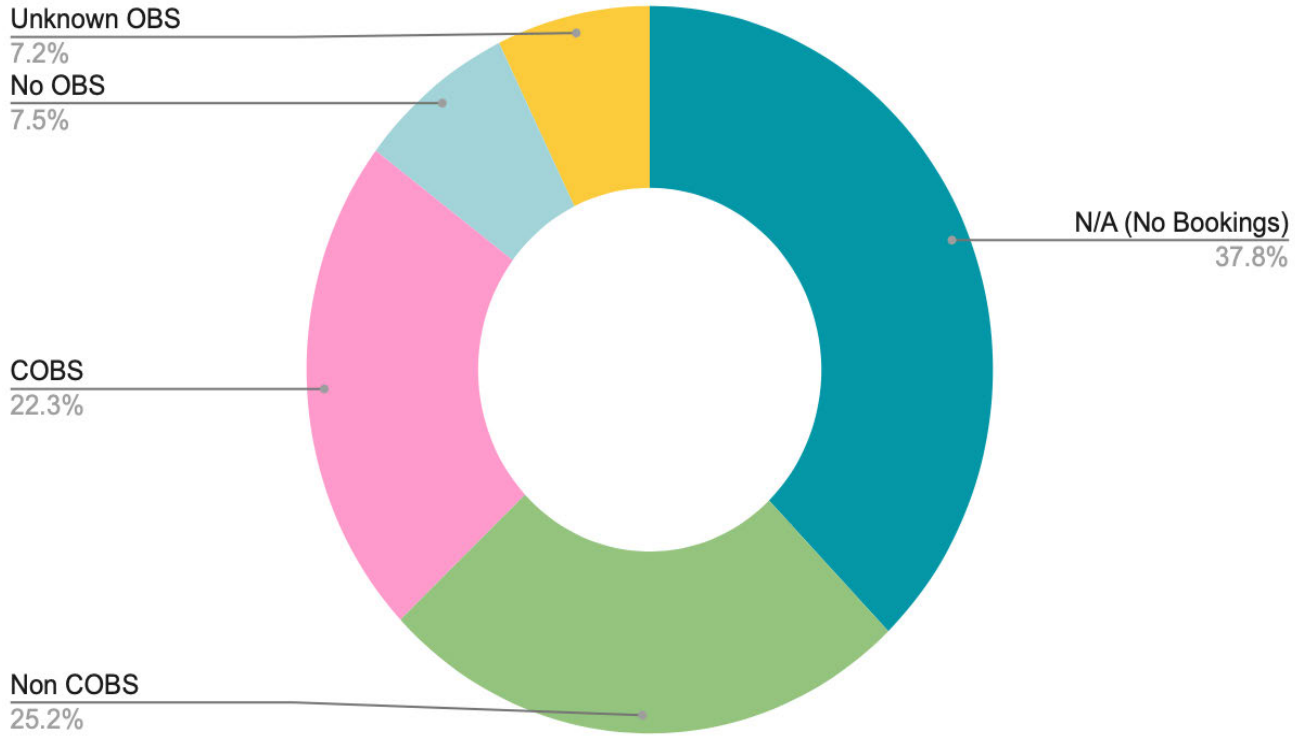
Operational Efficiency: The use of CRM systems, analytics, automation, and connected distribution tools to streamline processes and improve decision-making.

A **digitally mature** business leverages technology not just as a tool, but as an integrated part of their overall business strategy – helping them to streamline operations, improve customer experience, and ultimately drive growth.

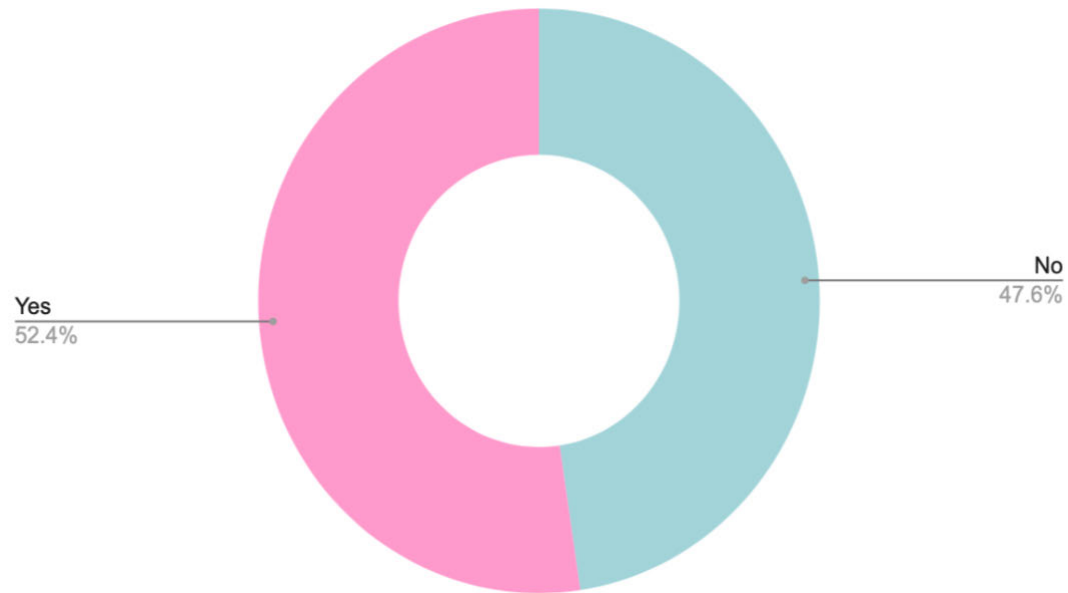
Do venues use connected online booking systems (COBS)?



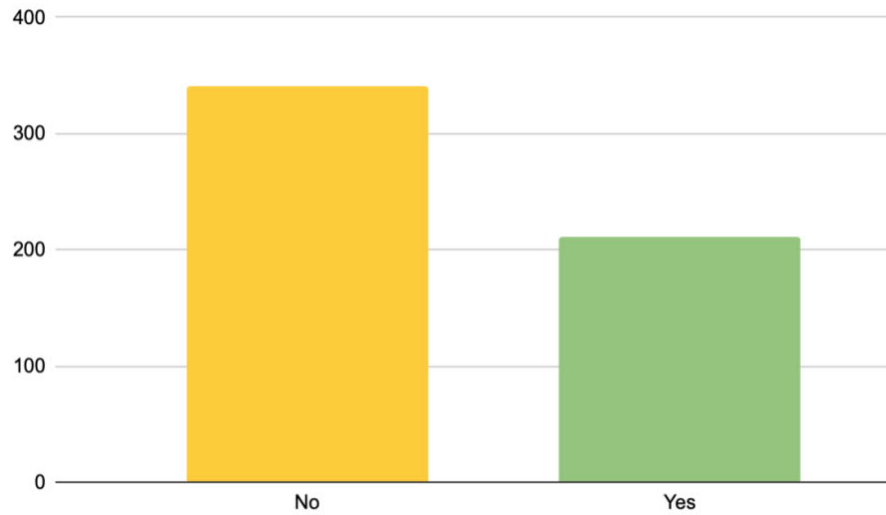
Are events bookable online through a connected booking system?



Are events bookable in advance?



Do venues or organisations offer paid experiences?



Our research examined the digital maturity and bookability of cultural organisations and groups in Cambridge. The findings above reveal significant opportunities to enhance the digital assets of these organisations and groups. The data shows that organisations are not keeping pace with consumer expectations and behaviour. Improvements in areas such as online presence, digital marketing, e-commerce, and online booking systems would greatly increase accessibility, audience engagement, and revenue potential.

The consultancy team found several 'what's on' channels for Cambridge, though none provide a positive user experience from the perspective of either residents or visitors. Development is required for 'what's on' listings to ensure that they are compelling, structured, connected, optimised, bookable, and easy to administer / publish. An improved, structured listing up-load process will help in all of these areas, and create the opportunity to work as a cluster by publishing the same listings on multiple channels, including those with better reach with different audiences.



Cambridge Live Tickets offers a shared box office service, selling tickets on behalf of other organisations. This sets a precedent for sharing digital infrastructure across cultural venues within Cambridge, and providing functionality that individual organisations could not sustain on their own.

There are existing platforms available with inbuilt capabilities and functionalities that will improve performance across the whole of the cultural and tourism sectors. **A digital engagement plan with shared infrastructure and a joined-up, best-practice approach for the whole cultural / tourism offer would be very useful.** This should form a clear, well-managed programme of digital transformation, easy for a range of organisations to understand and implement. **Developing these digital capabilities will be a key driver of growth and modernisation for the cultural sector, for both visitor and resident markets. This will only become increasingly needed, and urgent, as Cambridge's population and catchment area grows.**

Year	Cambridge Live	CB Travel Guide	University of Cambridge	Visit Cambridge	Total
2018			415		415
2019			607		607
2020			373		373
2021			406		406
2022			485		485
2023			469		469
2024			616	1	617
2025	70	234	418	139	861
2026	77	102	5	3	187
2027		48			38
2028		18			18
2029		18			18
Total	147	420	3,794	143	4,504

This table shows that **University listings data is outdated, and other data sources are limited in their volume / scope**. The majority of University events (including family-focused activities and concerts) do not appear on Visit Cambridge.

“University spaces like gardens and museums were appreciated when accessible, they were frequently perceived to be poorly promoted or mistakenly assumed to be closed to the public. Advertising of services and events was described as inconsistent and overly reliant on personal connections.”³

³ People, Place, Power: Civic priorities for the University of Cambridge, 2025

BI.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH

In addition to our mapping work, we have analysed multiple existing data sources to inform the themes and priorities of this report. This includes insights into cultural participation trends, funding patterns, audience demographics, economic impact, transport and accessibility, and alignment with local, regional, and national strategies. Together, these findings provide a comprehensive evidence base to identify gaps, opportunities, and priorities for the future development of Cambridge's cultural sector.

Funding analysis

Data set: Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund and Cambridge City Council Community Grants 2018–2025.

Key points

- Museums & cultural venues are the only type of cultural asset which received funding from all these three sources, receiving 21% of the total funding.
- The Museum of Cambridge is the only individual organisation to have received funding from all three sources in the past 5 years.
- Cambridge has a high number of organisations repeatedly receiving funding from Arts Council England sources. On average, 68% of grantees had already received funding in the past five years.
- Organisations based in Cambridge received 58.5% of the total funding for Cambridgeshire in 2021–2025, despite only having 21% of the population

(acknowledging that they also serve county / regional audiences as well).

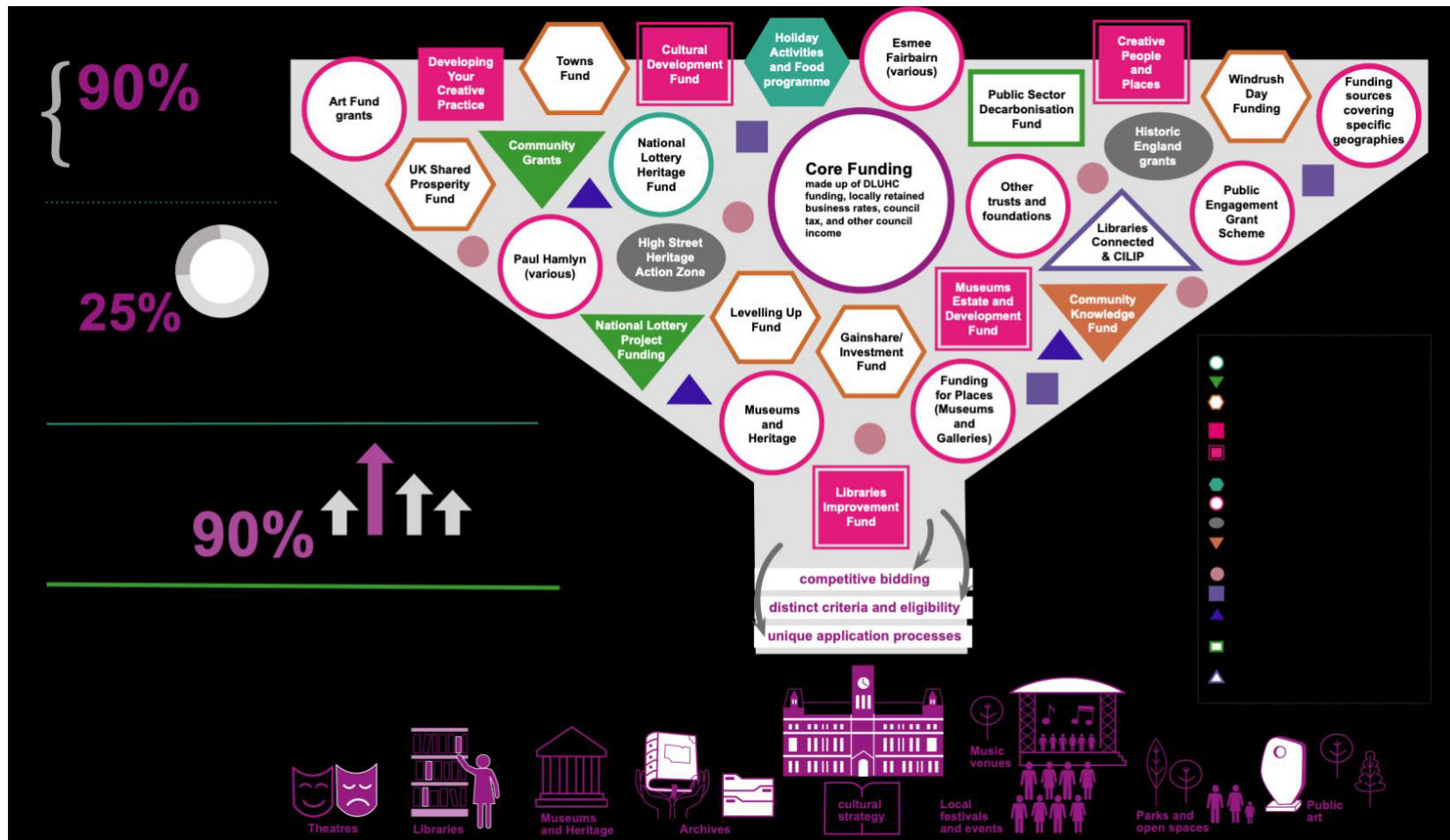
- Cambridge received 12.4% of the county total from the National Heritage Lottery Fund. South Cambridgeshire District Council received the most funding from the National Heritage Lottery Fund.
- In contrast, Cambridge received 67.2% of county total funding from Arts Council England.
- Arts, Culture & Heritage received 20.4% of the total Cambridge City Council Community Grants.

Analysis

Much of the cultural sector operates on grant funding, seeking to maintain a mixed income model (grant income; earned income; contributed income). They deploy that mixed income model to deliver a wider range of cultural, economic and social value, including enhanced health and wellbeing, skills development, and contributions to placemaking and community cohesion.

The Local Government Association has illustrated the cultural funding landscape through a graphic (reproduced below) that highlights its interdependencies and complexities. This underscores the sector's state of flux, fragility, and fragmentation. To address these challenges, strategic support is essential to help cultural organisations access funding, build resilience, and strengthen their ability to contribute to economic sustainability and growth.

The complex landscape of fragmented funding for culture



At time of writing, there is pressure on governments at all levels to reduce their spending. Local government reorganisation and devolution processes further muddy the waters. The Arts Council is undergoing a major DCMS commissioned review. Many independent grant making trusts are either spending out, or pausing their grant making in order to allow for their

endowment to grow. These combined factors inevitably create a vulnerability in the arts funding landscape.

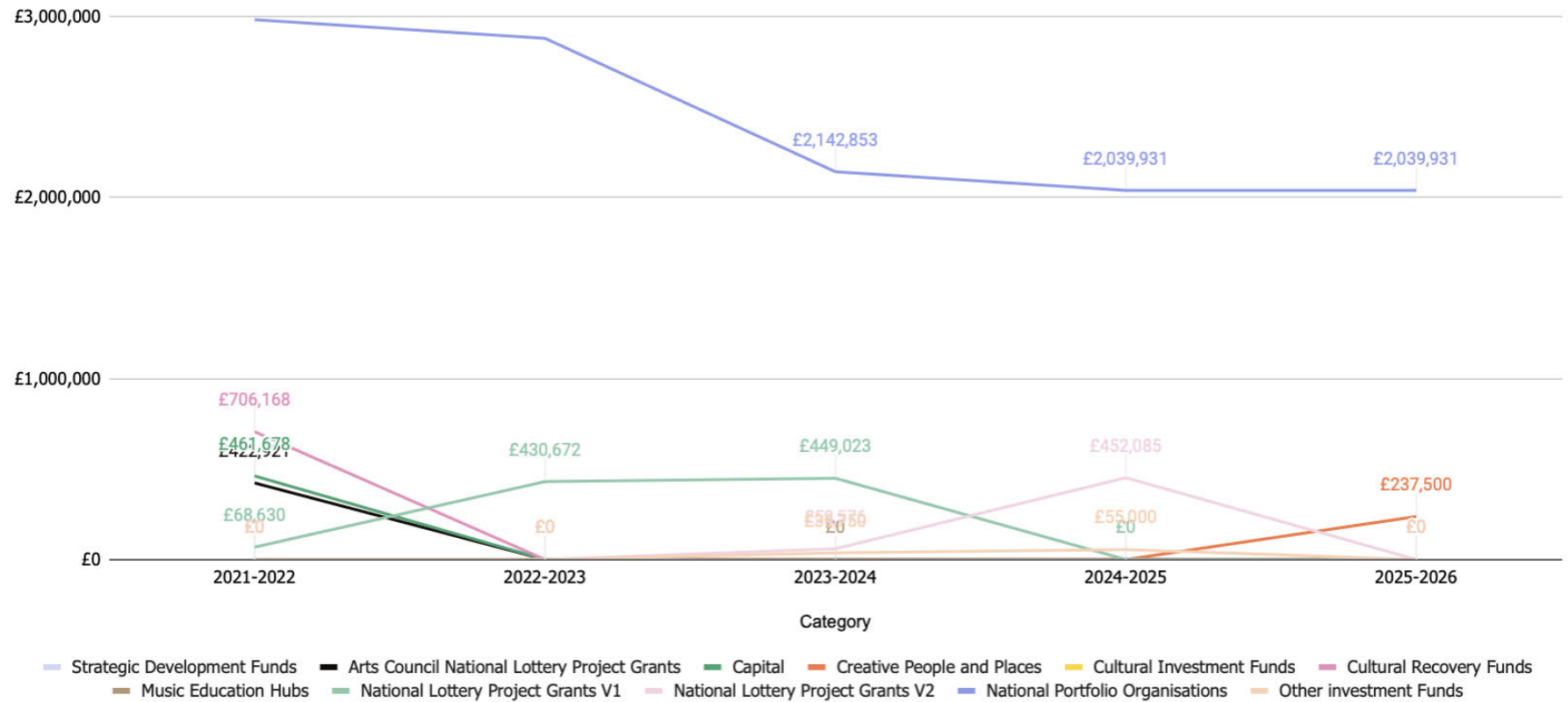
Therefore, **the cultural sector needs to take a serious and urgent look at funding sources, capacities and capabilities.**

Arts Council England funding

Cambridge received £2,643,862 of Arts Council England (ACE) funding in 2024/25, amounting to £17.89 per head. This is a decrease from the £26.72 per head received in Cambridge in 2018/19. This compares to £66.44 per head in Norwich, £27.18 in Ipswich, £10.50 in Luton and £4.84 in Peterborough.

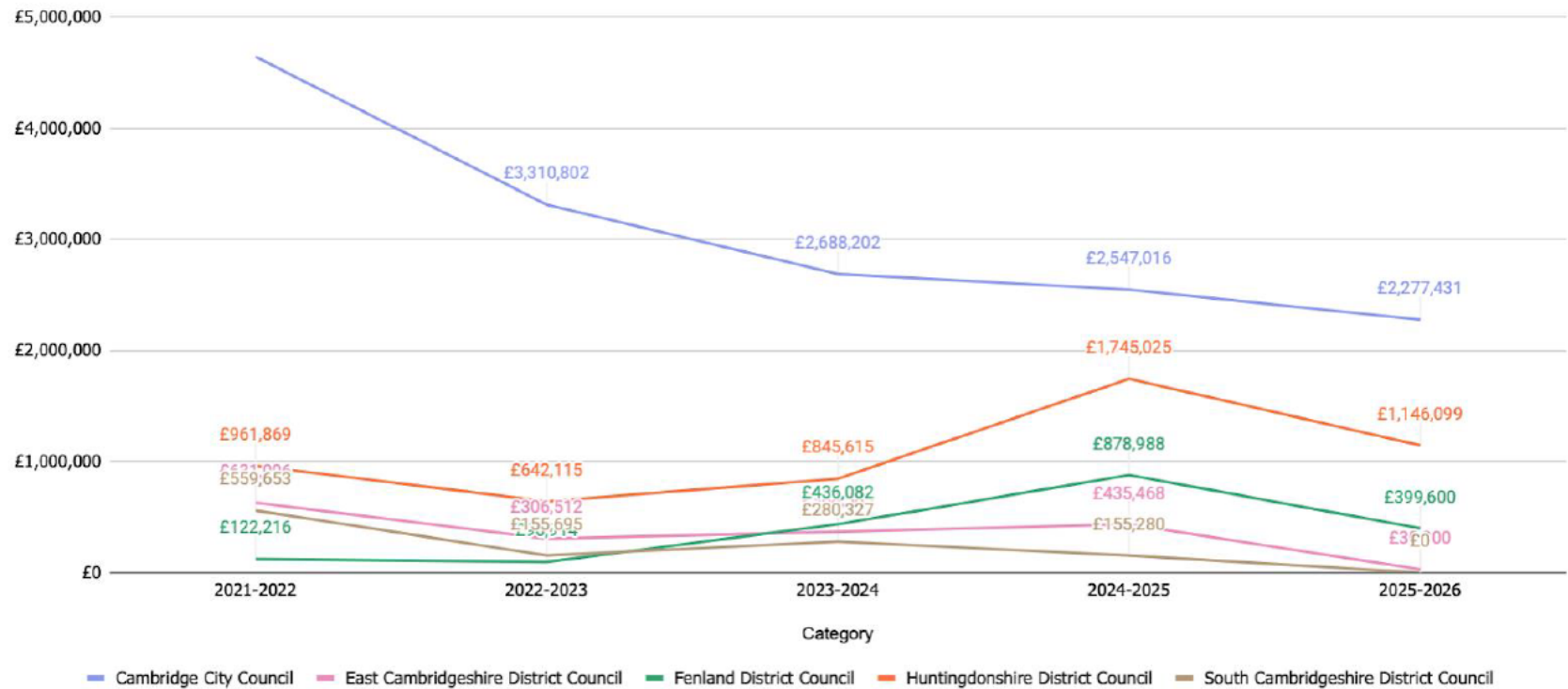
ACE Funding by Category & Year						
Category	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026 YTD	Total ACE Funding
Strategic Development Funds	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
National Lottery Project Grants	£422,921	£0	£0	£0	£0	£422,921
Capital	£461,678	£0	£0	£0	£0	£461,678
Creative People and Places	£0	£0	£0	£0	£237,500	£237,500
Cultural Investment Funds	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Cultural Recovery Funds	£706,168	£0	£0	£0	£0	£706,168
Music Education Hubs	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
National Lottery Project Grants V1	£68,630	£430,672	£449,023	£0	£0	£948,325
National Lottery Project Grants V2	£0	£0	£59,576	£452,085	£0	£511,661
National Portfolio Organisations	£2,983,052	£2,880,130	£2,142,853	£2,039,931	£2,039,931	£12,085,897
Other investment Funds	£0	£0	£36,750	£55,000	£0	£91,750

What do funding patterns reveal about ACE's strategic priorities in Cambridge?



ACE Funding by Local Authority & Year							
Local Authority	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	Total ACE Funding	% Total ACE Funding
Cambridge City Council	£4,642,449	£3,310,802	£2,688,202	£2,547,016	£2,277,431	£15,465,900	60%
East Cambridgeshire District Council	£631,096	£306,512	£368,565	£435,468	£30,000	£1,771,641	7%
Fenland District Council	£122,216	£96,914	£436,082	£878,988	£399,600	£1,933,800	8%
Huntingdonshire District Council	£961,869	£642,115	£845,615	£1,745,025	£1,146,099	£5,340,723	21%
South Cambridgeshire District Council	£559,653	£155,695	£280,327	£155,280	£0	£1,150,955	4%

How does Cambridge's level of ACE grant funding compare to Cambridgeshire districts?

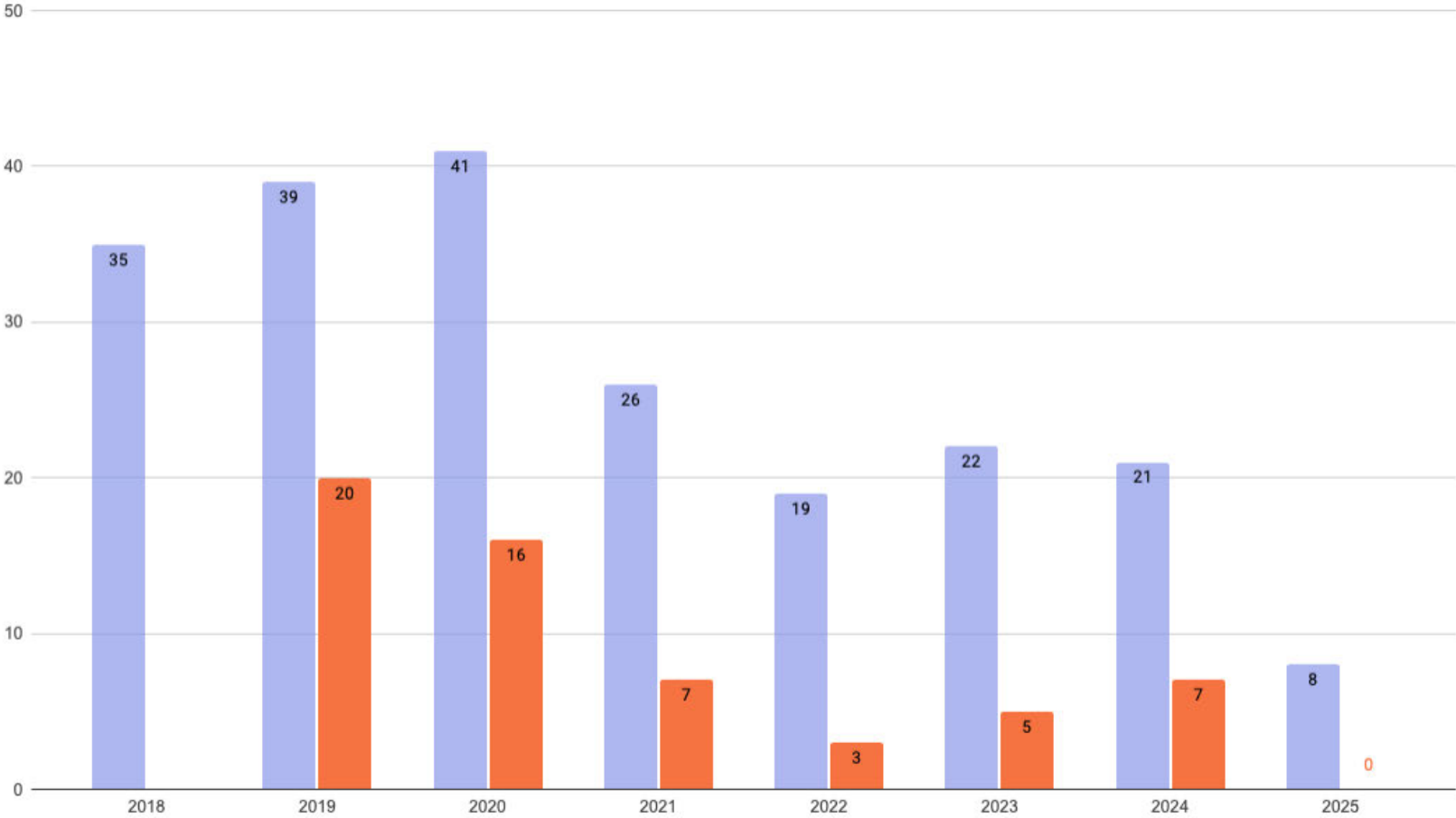


We noted that **there is a high number of organisations receiving funding from ACE in multiple instances**. The Junction was funded 16 times across all funding streams. This suggests a lack of skills development within the sector, with a low number of 'new entrants' making (successful) bids to ACE. **Diversifying the pool of successful applications to ACE should be a priority to develop the cultural ecology.**

New and Total ACE-Funded Recipients in Cambridge by Year			
Year	Total No Orgs & Individuals Funded	Total No of New Orgs & Individuals Funded	% of Total Made Up By New Orgs
2018	35		
2019	39	20	51%
2020	41	16	39%
2021	26	7	27%
2022	19	3	16%
2023	22	5	23%
2024	21	7	33%
2025	8	0	0%

Applicant Type	AVG No Times Funded by ACE
Organisation	4
Individual	2

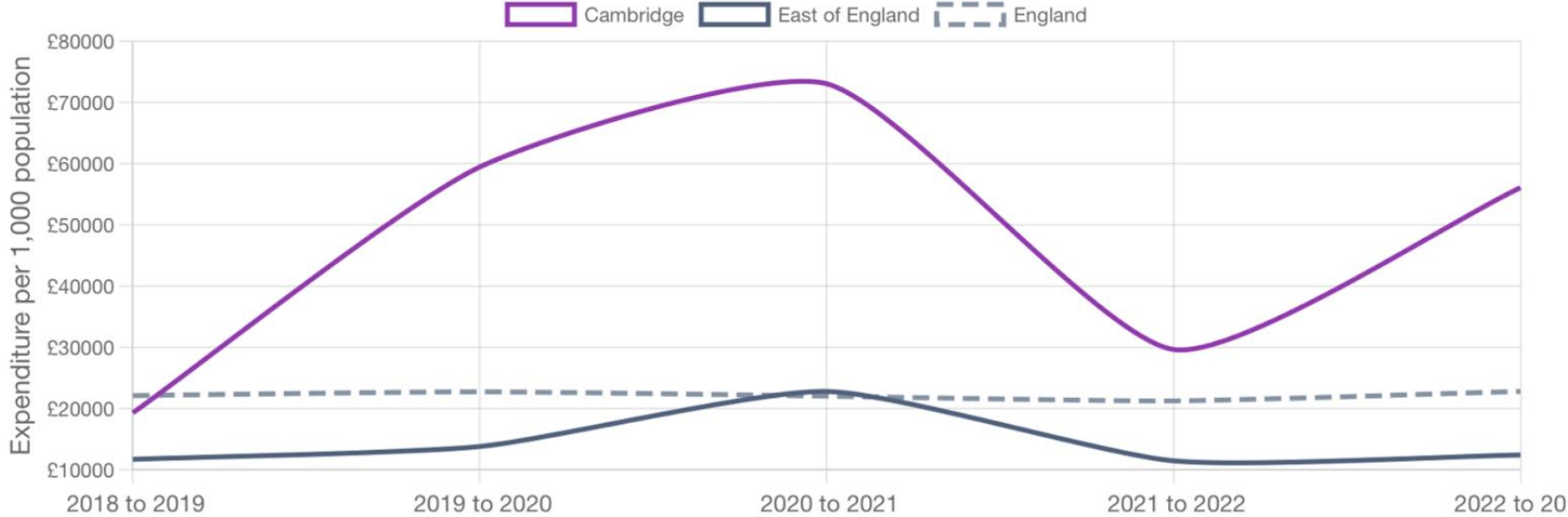
What is the split between new and existing ACE funding recipients in Cambridge by year?



Local authority funding

Cambridge spent approximately £56,104.67 on Cultural and Heritage services per 1,000 population between 2022 to 2023. This is an increase from the £19,347.26 spent in Cambridge per 1,000 population between 2018 to 2019.

Culture and heritage expenditure per 1,000 population



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

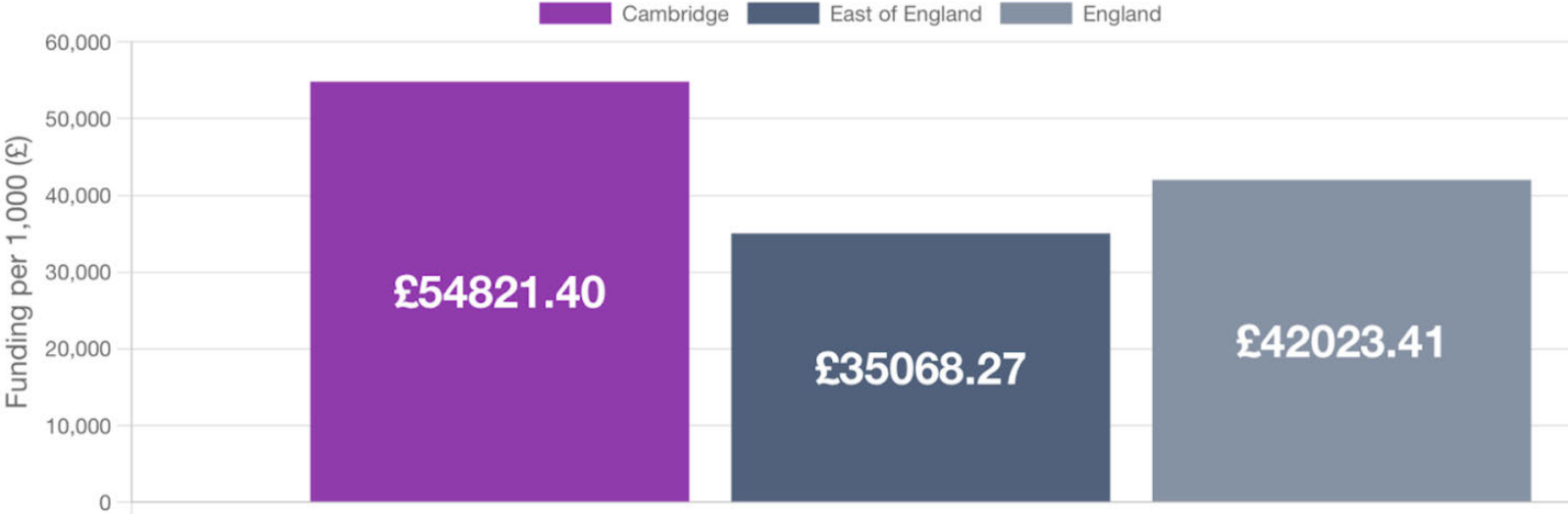
Community Grant Funding by Visitor Experience Category & Year					
Category	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	Total Community Grant Funding	% Total Community Grant Funding
Arts & Crafts	£16,000	£20,830	£23,000	£59,830	2.63%
Charity	£138,185	£164,278	£67,041	£369,504	16.21%
Community	£466,837	£544,758	£204,297	£1,215,892	53.35%
Dance	£0	£0	£0	£0	0.00%
Education Provider	£2,500	£18,227	£11,209	£31,936	1.40%
Festivals & Fairs	£10,000	£20,891	£21,564	£52,455	2.30%
Film & Cinema	£0	£0	£5,000	£5,000	0.22%
Food & Drink	£23,000	£34,500	£35,862	£93,362	4.10%
Heritage Attractions	£0	£0	£1,200	£1,200	0.05%
Literature	£0	£0	£0	£0	0.00%
Museum or Cultural Venue	£45,000	£47,659	£50,919	£143,578	6.30%
Music	£0	£265	£244	£509	0.02%
Not Relevant	£0	£0	£0	£0	0.00%
Outdoor Experience	£15,000	£19,200	£22,200	£56,400	2.47%
Retail & Services	£0	£0	£1,940	£1,940	0.09%
Sports & Leisure	£11,000	£15,558	£23,126	£49,684	2.18%
Theatre	£44,500	£48,906	£59,287	£152,693	6.70%
Visual Arts	£13,500	£18,080	£13,500	£45,080	1.98%

Community Grant Funding by Visitor Experience Category & Year					
Category	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	Total Community Grant Funding	% Total Community Grant Funding
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Theatre	£44,500	£48,906	£59,287	£152,693	6.70%
Visual Arts	£13,500	£18,080	£13,500	£45,080	1.98%

National Lottery Heritage Fund grants

The bar chart below shows the NLHF funding per 1,000 population between April 2013 to October 2023. The amount of funding per 1,000 population during this period in Cambridge is £54,821.40.

National Lottery Heritage Funding per 1,000 population

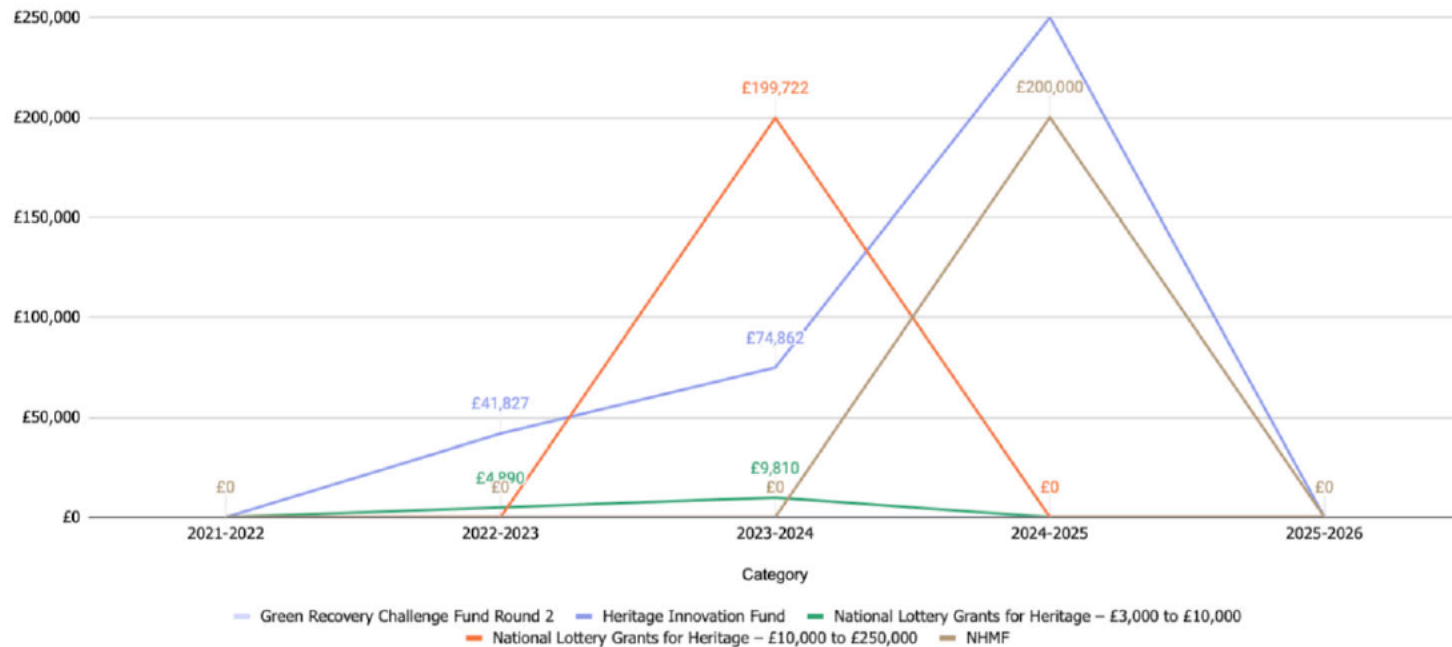


Source: National Lottery Heritage Funding

Grants received by funding stream

NHLF Funding by Category & Year						
Programme	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	Total NHLF Funding
Green Recovery Challenge Fund Round 2	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Heritage Innovation Fund	£0	£41,827	£74,862	£249,951	£0	£366,640
National Lottery Grants for Heritage – £3,000 – £10,000	£0	£4,890	£9,810	£0	£0	£14,700
National Lottery Grants for Heritage – £10,000 – £250,000	£0	£0	£199,722	£0	£0	£199,722
National Heritage Memorial Fund	£0	£0	£0	£200,000	£0	£200,000

How does the National Lottery Heritage Fund allocate its funding across different grant streams in Cambridge?



Comparative funding analysis between all three sources

Total Awarded by Funding Source & Year						
Funding Organisation	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	Total Funding
ACE	£4,642,449	£3,310,802	£2,688,202	£2,547,016	£2,277,431	£7,512,649
NHLF	£0	£46,717	£284,394	£1,099,767	£0	£1,384,161
Community Grant Fund			£785,522	£953,152	£540,389	£2,279,063

Count of Funded Organisations by Funding Source & Year						
Funding Organisation	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	Count Funded
ACE	26	19	21	21	8	110
NHLF	0	3	4	6	0	28
Community Grant Fund			24	50	68	102

Total Funding by Category (All Funding Sources) & Year							
Category	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	Total Funding	% Total Funding
Theatre	£2,108,087	£967,377	£1,251,052	£1,146,121	£1,252,077	£6,724,714	35.88%
Museum or Cultural Venue	£1,235,069	£1,132,147	£1,013,820	£665,193	£668,453	£4,714,682	25.16%
Community	£99,950	£4,890	£466,837	£956,973	£204,297	£1,732,947	9.25%
Visual Arts	£296,107	£327,917	£0	£411,421	£360,607	£1,396,052	7.45%
Music	£418,207	£532,098	£59,750	£145,436	£244	£1,155,735	6.17%
Education Provider	£45,000	£0	£12,310	£455,828	£11,209	£524,347	2.80%
Charity	£0	£0	£138,185	£164,278	£67,041	£369,504	1.97%
Dance	£58,432	£80,066	£70,248	£120,755	£0	£329,501	1.76%
Arts & Crafts	£97,700	£0	£16,000	£20,830	£23,000	£157,530	0.84%
Literature	£27,500	£0	£90,066	£29,000	£0	£146,566	0.78%
Food & Drink	£0	£0	£23,000	£34,500	£35,862	£93,362	0.50%

Outdoor Experience	£0	£0	£15,000	£19,200	£22,200	£56,400	0.30%
Festivals & Fairs	£0	£0	£10,000	£20,891	£21,564	£52,455	0.28%
Sports & Leisure	£0	£0	£11,000	£15,558	£23,126	£49,684	0.27%
Heritage Attractions	£0	£16,927	£0	£0	£1,200	£18,127	0.10%
Film & Cinema	£0	£0	£0	£0	£5,000	£5,000	0.03%
Retail & Services	£239,979	£264,879	£194,862	£393,951	£121,940	£1,215,611	6.49%

Funding by Category & Funding Source					
Category	ACE	NHLF	Community Grant Fund	Total Funding (2023-2026)	% Total Funding
Community	£0	£412,215	£1,215,892	£1,628,107	14.57%
Charity	£0	£0	£369,504	£369,504	3.31%
Theatre	£3,496,557	£0	£152,693	£3,649,250	32.65%
Museum or Cultural Venue	£2,004,166	£199,722	£143,578	£2,347,466	21.00%
Food & Drink	£0	£0	£93,362	£93,362	0.84%
Arts & Crafts	£0	£0	£59,830	£59,830	0.54%
Outdoor Experience	£0	£0	£56,400	£56,400	0.50%
Festivals & Fairs	£0	£0	£52,455	£52,455	0.47%
Sports & Leisure	£0	£0	£49,684	£49,684	0.44%
Visual Arts	£1,112,936	£0	£45,080	£1,158,016	10.36%
Education Provider	£0	£447,411	£31,936	£479,347	4.29%
Film & Cinema	£0	£0	£5,000	£5,000	0.04%
Retail & Services	£384,000	£324,813	£1,940	£710,753	6.36%
Heritage Attractions	£0	£0	£1,200	£1,200	0.01%
Music	£204,921	£0	£509	£205,430	1.84%

Dance	£191,003	£0	£0	£191,003	1.71%
Literature	£119,066	£0	£0	£119,066	1.07%

Condition	Probability (%)	Baseline (%)	Ration	Interpretation
NLHF ACE	3.00%	4.20%	0.71x	ACE recipients are 29% less likely to get NLHF
Community ACE	9.00%	30.80%	0.29x	ACE recipients are 71% LESS likely to get Community
Community NLHF	14.30%	30.80%	0.46x	NLHF recipients are 54% less likely to get Community
ACE Community	5.80%	20.10%	0.29x	Community recipients are 71% less likely to get ACE

What does all this data tell us?

There is little to no correlation between funders we analysed – meaning that strategic funders are not working collaboratively to leverage funding. A goal focused conversation to coordinate this, alongside other strategic funders (such as the County Council, Combined Authority, and others) will benefit both the funders and the recipients.

Demographic analysis

Using a range of data sources, we have explored various aspects of culture and creativity within Cambridge's population.

Cultural Participation

The proportion of people that engaged with the Arts *in person* in the previous 12 months to being surveyed in Cambridge is 93.92%.

Cultural participation

Indicator	Cambridge	East of England	England
Engaged with the arts in person in previous 12 months	93.92%	91.48%	90.42%
Engaged with the arts online in previous 12 months	43.01%	36.56%	36.43%
Visited a public library building or mobile library in person in previous 12 months	36.01%	25.65%	24.99%
Engaged with public library services online in previous 12 months	27.39%	14.84%	14.33%
Visited a heritage site in person in previous 12 months	83.36%	65.53%	66.23%
Engaged with a heritage site online in previous 12 months	34.63%	24.28%	24.72%
Visited a museum or gallery in person in previous 12 months	74.04%	40.73%	43.13%
Engaged with museum services online in previous 12 months	21.07%	13.16%	13.37%

Source: Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Arts Council England (ACE) Participation Survey

What does this tell us?

Cambridge's population is highly engaged in cultural activity, with all indicators being significantly above both the regional and national averages – some extraordinarily so. This will mean **Cambridge is classed as 'low cultural need' amongst strategic cultural development bodies and funders, and is therefore disadvantaged when it comes to accessing some strategic and transformational funds for culture.**

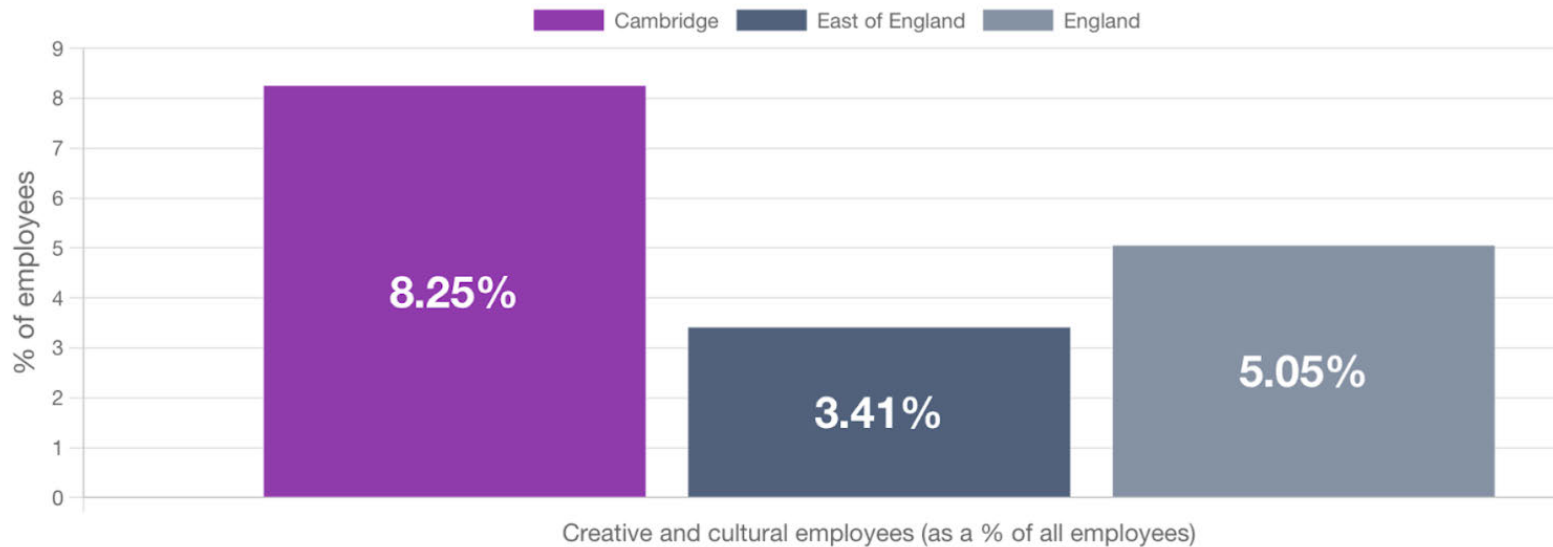
Cultural employment, businesses and GVA

In Cambridge there are a total of 116,000 employees across all sectors – 9,575 of these are in the creative and cultural sectors (8.25%). This is higher than the proportion of creative and cultural employees in the East of England (3.41%) and higher than the proportion in England (5.05%).⁴

⁴ Please note: this employment data does **not** include self-employed or freelancers since a sector breakdown of this data is currently unavailable at local level. National

rates of self-employment in the creative and cultural sector (32%) are more than double the rate of self-employment in the wider UK economy (14%) .

Total creative and cultural employees (as a % of all employees)

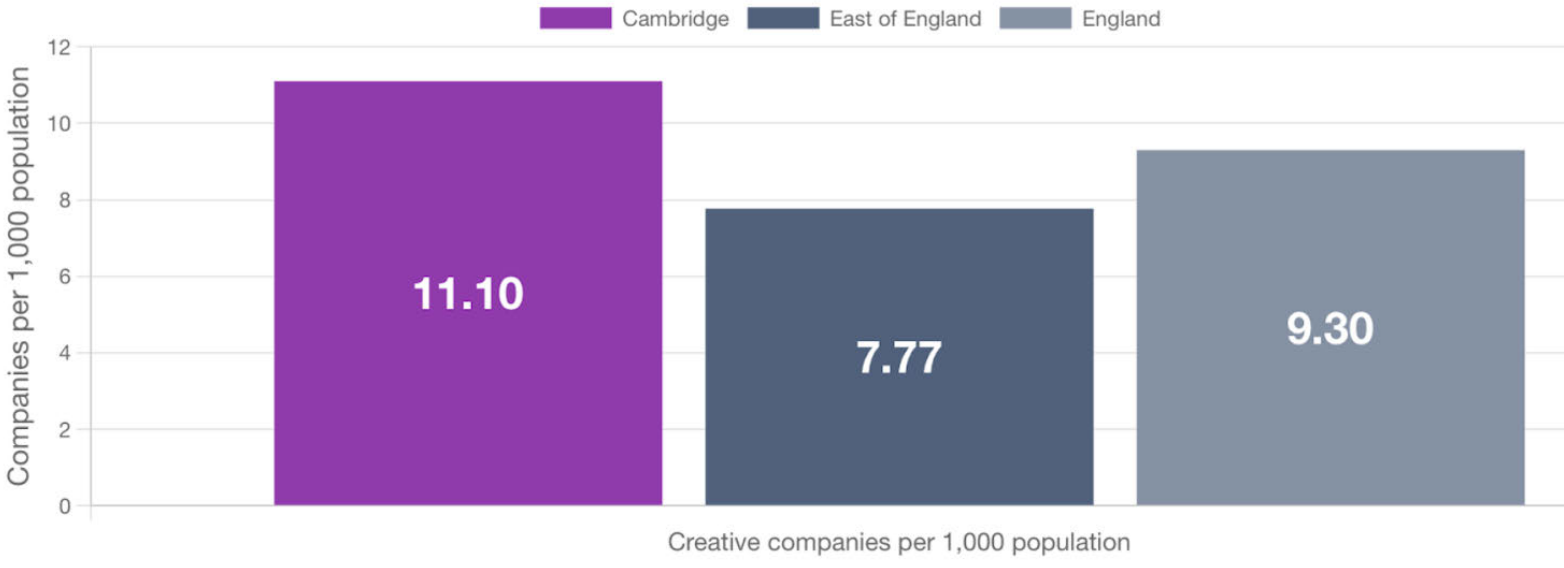


Source: Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)

In Cambridge there are a total of 6,670 registered businesses across all sectors - 945 of these are in the creative and cultural sectors (14.3%). This is higher than the proportion of creative and cultural businesses in the East of England (6.89%) and higher than the proportion in England (9.3%). Additionally, this is higher than **the percentage of creative and cultural businesses across the whole of the UK economy (12.65%).**⁵

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-and-digital-economic-estimates-business-demographics-2023/dcms-economic-estimates-business-demographics-2023-main-report>

Creative companies per 1,000 population (registered with Companies House)



Source: Companies House

The Creative Policy and Evidence Centre has analysed the proportion of employed and self-employed creative professionals in Cambridge, using Census data from 2021:

Occupation	Self-employed	Employed	Total
Programmers and software development professionals	177	2989	3166
Authors, writers and translators	339	208	547
Information technology directors	143	357	500
Marketing associate professionals	66	402	468
Marketing, sales and advertising directors	43	321	364
IT business analysts, architects and systems designers	16	314	330
Newspaper and periodical editors	66	254	320
Managers and directors in the creative industries	101	172	273
Graphic and multimedia designers	85	130	215
Artists	174	33	207
Arts officers, producers and directors	83	81	164
Public relations professionals	18	120	138
Actors, entertainers and presenters	65	72	137
Photographers, audio-visual & broadcasting equipment operators	72	60	132
Archivists and curators	14	113	127
Musicians	77	41	118
Design occupations n.e.c.	24	74	98
Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters	56	39	95
Web design professionals	18	72	90
Librarians	1	89	90

Advertising accounts managers and creative directors	24	63	87
Architects	10	76	86
Chartered architectural technologists, planning officers, consultants	14	67	81
Public relations and communications directors	17	52	69
Interior designers	24	22	46
Other skilled trades n.e.c.	26	17	43
Glass and ceramics makers, decorators and finishers	20	10	30
Clothing, fashion and accessories designers	16	10	26
Dancers and choreographers	14	3	17
Furniture makers and other craft woodworkers	7	5	12
Stonemasons and related trades	4	1	5

What does this tell us?

The cultural and creative industries appear to be thriving in Cambridge - though this does not reflect the experiences 'on the ground'. These statistics sit in stark contrast to the challenges and frustrations expressed by the consultation and workshop participants. This can be attributed to the statistics combining the cultural and creative industries, whereas the consultation participants largely came from the cultural sector.

The success of the creative industries is masking the challenges in the cultural industries.

B2. Stakeholder consultations: recurring themes & insights

Multiple stakeholders were invited to share their thoughts on Cambridge's current cultural ecosystem, and their ambitions for the future. Conversations did not follow a set format, but instead were open, iterative, and participant-led. Nevertheless, several themes recurred often and consistently, and have been highlighted below.

Lack of shared ambition & cultural leadership

Whilst Cambridge as a whole has been growing exponentially, and is a global leader in innovation, the cultural sector has failed to keep pace – even with nearby towns and cities. An absence of shared strategy, vision and leadership has damaged Cambridge's ability to develop a cultural sector of the size, scale, impact or ambition one might expect of a city of Cambridge's international standing.

'It has absolutely been a failure of everyone in the city to come up with anything strategic and joined up.'

"There are so many conversations that people aren't even starting because of these layers of power, history, and imagination in this city."

"...there are a lot of visions and ambitions, but actually we don't have a plan."

"We should be more ambitious and self-critical about our artistic offer."

Innovation & creative sectors

Cambridge's reputation for innovation creates opportunities to link culture, science, and technology more closely. Participants described a shared ambition for creative experimentation but expressed concern about uneven support across the region.

"Innovation and creativity could give Cambridge a real sense of distinctiveness."

"Innovation must happen outside the University if we want to involve schools and communities."

"We want our studio to become a cultural lab, not just a space for basic craft workshops."

"What's the end game of all this work? It should be to create a community which recognises itself as a community—and has the desire to create a unified narrative, in the same way 'Innovate Cambridge' has done on innovation."

A collective action problem

Many contributors questioned whether Cambridge sometimes relies too heavily on its reputation for excellence, rather than pursuing new, risk-taking approaches. Consultations highlighted a general desire for collaboration, but little impetus or incentive to make this happen. Those that benefit from the status quo are reluctant to disrupt it.

“There’s just a huge kind of collective action problem where everyone else is looking to other people to show leadership rather than grasping it themselves.”

“[And]... there is zero obligation at the moment for any of us to ever work together.’

“People in power rarely share it, even when they say they will.”

Inclusion and Inequality

Concerns about inequality and exclusion appear in almost every conversation. Participants stressed that cultural success must be measured not only by artistic quality but by reach and representation – including in governance models and decision-making.

“Cambridge is one of the most unequal cities in the UK; we can’t let that deepen.”

“We don’t all live in the same cultural space anymore – programming still caters to the same audiences.”

‘How can we bring everyone around the table on equal terms and actually figure out what’s really going to work for the city.’

“There’s no reason why Cambridge can’t be a beacon for how we make sure that opportunity is extended to everyone. Or a beacon for how we look at the arts of the future.”

Closed-door power cultures

Linked to the inclusion point, stakeholders frequently described Cambridge as a place where influence is exercised through informal, opaque, and often exclusive networks. Many spoke of decisions happening “behind closed doors,” with power concentrated in small circles that are difficult for organisations

– particularly independents, smaller charities, and newer entrants – to access or understand. This lack of transparency fuels mistrust, reinforces siloed behaviours, and makes it challenging to mobilise collective action or progress shared priorities.

“...I think one of the challenges we have in Cambridge is that there’s an awful lot of people coming together, but not quite knowing where the power lies and how you actually move from the ambition into making something happen.... How do you just not have circular conversations?”

Cambridge as an engineered creative ecosystem

Connectivity between organisations emerged as a recurring priority. Respondents see potential in building a coherent and sustainable cultural ecosystem, but there are concerns about how that is engineered, governed and where the power lies.

“Cambridge should act as a connected city built on relationships.”

“A narrow vision of cultural infrastructure stops work from benefiting the city.”

“This is the time to look at structures, look at the governance model, and then understand what the right set of priorities to go after might be, once we have a sense of the key outcomes out of the consultation.”

“[Finding] ...the right balance between curating something that feels organically dynamic, where things can just happen, but at the same time there’s some dynamism in it, there’s a bit of leadership in it.”

Funding & sustainability

Almost all contributors mentioned funding pressures. Limited and competitive funding systems risk undermining cooperation, and a lack of shared ambition and strategic leveraging of funds has further inhibited this.

'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.'

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

"Funding models are too competitive – we're all chasing the same small pots."

"Local government can access funds that small organisations can't, and should use that to help them."

Overall insights

Across the consultations, participants expressed a clear appetite for a cultural ecosystem that is more connected, transparent, and capable of acting with shared purpose. While Cambridge has no shortage of creative energy or visionary thinking, stakeholders highlighted that progress is consistently hindered by fragmented leadership, opaque power structures, and an execution gap that leaves promising ideas stuck in circular conversation. They described a need for cultural infrastructure that intentionally knits the city's many assets together – bridging the divides between institutions, communities, independent creatives, students, tourists, and the innovation economy.

Stakeholders want a strategy that links creativity and innovation across disciplines; strengthens participation and representation; and establishes governance models that are open, accountable, and capable of turning ambition into delivery. They emphasised that Cambridge's cultural future depends not only on artistic excellence, but on the ability to build equitable relationships, share power, and create the civic connective tissue that enables collaboration to happen by design rather than by chance.

B3. Artist & freelance engagement (ongoing)

The artist and freelance creative practitioner engagement strand is ongoing, and will continue to inform and influence the development of the Cultural Plan. A full report on this engagement strand will be produced as a standalone document once it is concluded, and will highlight in what ways artist consultation directly informed the Plan. It will also act as a case study for best practice in artist engagement in a cultural strategy development process.

Summary of activity

Across this first phase of artist and freelancer engagement, we've hosted several creative gatherings, including artist and freelancer dinner, workshops, or 1:1 conversation. The methodology we've used was designed to share positive reflections on Cambridge's creative sector and encourage honest dialogue. There have been to date 15 paid opportunities and an additional 10+ paid opportunities through upcoming workshops and commissions. These have supported skills development and encouraged artist to artists conversations.

The dinner which took place at Cambridge Junction, was structured around a shared meal and guided conversation. Throughout the evening, participants were invited to respond to a series of prompts and reflective questions designed to provoke open discussion. With the overall focus question being *'If Cambridge was thriving for artists what would it look and feel like?'* Additional provocations were also introduced to encourage a breadth of responses.

Workshops were facilitated by an artist, and through conversation, creative exercises and collaborative sculptures-making, participants reflected on past, present, and potential futures, creating space for new visions to emerge. During one of the workshops, artists created sculptures representing a 'ghost' in the city, a metaphor that continues to shape Cambridge's cultural life and then shared reflections with the group.

Conversations were open and interactive. A detailed breakdown of the activity to date can be found in [Appendix D.5](#).

Method & participation to date

Artist and freelance engagement so far has prioritised building trust, enabling peer-led dialogue and creating paid opportunities for artists to help shape the programme. The methodology used aims to celebrate positive reflections on Cambridge's creative sector while creating space for open and honest discussion.

Engagement has been delivered through artist-led commissioning and a nominator model that encourages participants to bring forward voices not usually included in strategic conversations. The dinner followed a methodology previously used within Metal's programmes via a nominator model.

Using this approach artists and creative freelancers we invited to nominate others to attend the event according to specific parameters:

- Nominate someone who doesn't usually get invited to these conversations.
- Nominate someone whose voice should be at the table.
- Nominate a surprise or 'wild card'.

Both nominators and nominees received payment for their participation and were invited to share a home-cooked meal together. This methodology broadens networks beyond usual circles, organisations, and social or professional silos. It also helps create a more inclusive and trust-based environment – individuals may be more likely to attend when nominated by someone they know. Importantly, this process also relinquishes curatorial control, shifting decision-making power and agency towards artists themselves.

Participation (headline summary)

- Artists and creatives Dinner: 13 artists (16 invited).
- Workshop 1: Vanquishing the cultural ghost of Cambridge – with artist Kate Genever – fully booked at 20 capacity. 9 attendees.
- Paid Opportunities Created: 15 paid opportunities to date, 10+ additional paid opportunities planned through upcoming workshops and commissions.

Dissemination of information

Information about public activities has been shared widely through multiple channels to maximise reach:

- Shared with 41 organisations.
- Connected with 15 creative networks and studio spaces.
- Shared information directly with 150+ artists.
- Distributed information to 50+ city event organisers and university departments, who further circulated it through their own networks.
- Circulated to programme co-leads and the working group.
- Shared with individuals and organisations who expressed interest in staying informed.
- Distributed through organisation newsletters, including Metal's artist and freelancer networks in Cambridge.
- Promoted through social media, partner networks and events.
- Uploaded on to event websites.

The programme has reached a diverse and intersectional mix of artists and freelancers across artforms and career stages, including those involved in dance, socially engaged art, theatre, visual arts, and socially engaged art. Many participants combine artistic practice with freelance roles in producing, project management, education, and creative health. The artists who have attended are deeply involved in socially focused work, supporting communities including migrants, refugees, and vulnerable adults.

Key findings

Through this listening process, across both the dinner and workshop engagement, artists shared their experiences, frustrations, and hopes for what it means to live and work creatively in Cambridge.

Artists talked about the city's strengths and potential, how Cambridge already has so much going for it, and how exciting it could be if those different parts connected more. There was a real sense of pride in what the city achieves, but also a feeling that things aren't quite joined up yet. Artists identified longstanding structural issues and a strong desire to reshape the city's creative ecology, through fairness, visibility and collaboration. Some key insights below;

Collaboration and leadership

There was a strong call for more collaboration and less hierarchy, or to break down traditional hierarchical structures / ways of working. To move away from competition for small pots of funding and towards shared, long-term, and meaningful ways of working.

Connection across sectors was important, with practical ideas about activating unused high-street spaces for creative use:

"More conversation and collaboration between the business community and artists. We could use old shops as pop-up studios, creative learning spaces, all sorts of things. We can make those spaces thrive."

Artists also want to be recognised as strategic leaders, paid fairly for their time and included in decision-making, particularly around Create Cambridge's future governance.

"We need a seat at the table. Many, many more seats at the table... so much to offer."

Celebrating and embracing diversity in Cambridge was highlighted, especially international students seeking connection, and the barriers they face accessing spaces to connect with like-minded creatives, highlighting an opportunity for a more inclusive creative community.

Access to space and transparency

Access to space came up repeatedly. Artists and freelancers emphasised the lack of accessible, affordable creative space and the absence of clear pathways into funding and accessing venues. Artists shared there was a sense that access exists, but with no knowledge about "how to get in" held by a few rather than shared openly.

The closures of community arts organisations have left significant gaps in support, particularly around mental health. Financial precarity came up repeatedly, with Cambridge described as a "financially ruinous place for creatives." Many felt that institutional spaces can feel closed off without the right connections, and that creative knowledge is often undervalued compared to academic or research-based expertise. Artists also called for genuine collaboration rooted in shared purpose, not just 'book and research knowledge,' but recognition of 'creative knowledge' as equally valuable.

Funding & economic realities

Artists spoke openly about the challenges of sustaining their practice and making a living as an artist right now. Many described how difficult it is to access funding, feeling regularly directed towards Arts Council England, yet held back by Cambridge's postcode (not being a designated priority area). There was a curiosity and energy around imagining alternative funding models that could better support local creative activity.

Artists also shared how they often find themselves having to advocate for the value of culture, reminding others that art and artists are foundational to a thriving society. They spoke about the expectation to contribute to the city's cultural life, often for low pay or unpaid time, and the need for their work to be respected and properly valued.

Many described juggling multiple jobs or "side hustles" to make ends meet. Some felt that these realities are rarely acknowledged publicly, that the true picture of what it takes to survive as an artist in Cambridge is often hidden. There was a call to make this more visible, to show that there are many different routes into creative careers, and that all of them are valid.

Participants described working with highly vulnerable communities to support wider social agendas, emphasising that to retain skill in the sector there must be wellbeing support and pay that matches current living costs. Rather than working in silos or competitive environments. There was a desire for

fairer ways of sharing resources, funding, and support in difficult times.

Education & knowledge exchange

Participants shared the potential to cross collaborate with academics, utilising the knowledge and assets that Cambridge has or is known for. They shared excitement over the potential of building bridges between these sectors and how to involve them as audience and or collaborators.

They noted how experimentation and "research and development" are deeply valued within science and questioned what it would mean if creative processes were understood and supported in the same way.

"A city for exploration, we are extremely used to funding experiments in a lab. What if we looked at creative experimentation in the same way, lens and language that we understand scientific experiments? What about social experiments led by creativity? But given the same respect as science."

They also used the analogy of Cambridge being known as 'high achieving' and of excellence in science and research and wondered what might happen if the city also celebrated experimentation, risk-taking, and even failure, as essential parts of innovation in both art and science.

There was also a strong emphasis on education and young people. Artists spoke about the importance of nurturing the next generation of creatives, recognising that the children and

young people in Cambridge today are the artists, and thinkers of tomorrow. They raised concerns about the challenges facing arts education nationally, from limited curriculum to reduced access in schools, and felt that Cambridge could be a leader in reimagining creative education.



See more in-depth breakdown of discussions in [Appendix D.5](#).



Visual notes – Artist Dinner. Emily Bowers

Initial thoughts & recommendations

- Developing a shared code or charter, creating a city-wide charter for collaboration, with shared values and ways of working with each other (organisations and artists). This might be a visible statement of intent and embed openness and equal partnership working. This would help underscore stakeholder commitment to the strategy, and help enshrine curious and collaborative working methods across delivery partnerships.
 - Strategy sits above everything as a city-wide ambition that welcomes all in but charter could be what organisations sign up too to become part of that ambition.
- Mapping the gaps and connecting them, between artists, institutions and communities and focus on building some of the bridges and avoiding duplication.
- Reframing what collective progress could be, for all of Cambridge, that could strengthen Cambridge creative community as a whole. Have shared ambitions that define short and long term aims (e.g. 6 month, 1 year, 2 year etc) to support momentum and to continue to involve artists and it's visible what is happening and how their contribution is valued / included.

- Artists included in strategic conversations in paid positions.
 - This may be in the formation of a Cambridge Artist Union, where representatives can then represent artists for Cambridge. Not relying on one single artist.
 - Rolling artist / freelancer member included on Create Cambridge governance, subsidised.
- Transparency of pay rates for artists and freelancers, the possibility of benchmarking rates of pay for artists within the city, to hold Cambridge organisations to account.
- Designated creative workshop space and more openness / collaboration in accessing spaces.
- Affordable studio space, recognising the cost of living in Cambridge and challenges for artists to exist and work in the city.

Next steps & upcoming activity

There is much to come following the initial workshop and dinner and conversations had with artists. We're hosting several additional workshops, open advice sessions, small commission opportunities and sharing events. The topics of these workshops have been informed by conversations and findings from initial dinners. To increase engagement numbers of artists and freelancers, future methods will also include 1:1 conversation alongside a short online survey. We are still in early stages, and further insight is anticipated following upcoming delivery strands. Upcoming workshop activity detailed in Appendix D.5.

B4. Stakeholder workshops

Three workshops took place on 21 & 22 October, held at Cambridge Room. c.70 stakeholders attended, and were asked to review 'provocation sheets' (appended). The sheets contained four emerging themes, supported by anonymous quotes from the stakeholder and artist consultation, excerpts from policies and plans, and statistics, and posed questions designed to stimulate conversation amongst participants.

EMERGING THEMES

Identity & visibility

Cambridge's global reputation masks a more complex local reality. Participants described a city that's *"known for the brain, not the heart."* The cultural offer is diverse but hidden, scattered and siloed - and lacking a shared narrative. Visibility depends on who you already know, and is the difference between participation and exclusion. *"People don't come because they don't feel invited."*

There's tension between Cambridge as a global brand and as a lived city. The story is dominated by the university - *"if the university tells the story, everyone else is a footnote."* Many creatives felt unseen within a city famous for intellect rather than imagination. The need emerged for a more civic, collective identity that celebrates local creativity and the "everyday" culture beyond college walls.

Access & inclusion

Many communities do not see themselves in the city's cultural offer. Accessibility is still treated as an add-on, not a baseline expectation. Cost, geography, and confidence were recurring barriers. Rural residents and working families face obstacles of transport and timing, while community-led work remains undervalued compared with the city's "high culture."

Participants stressed that *"inclusion needs power-sharing, not outreach"*. The phrase 'extractive' occurred repeatedly, used to describe a transactional model of project-based working where those that 'do' culture 'engage' with communities, only for the communities to never see the output of their ideas. This leads to 'participation fatigue', with local communities less inclined to offer their time towards projects and programmes.

It was interesting to note access and inclusion discussions predominantly focussed on youth participation, rural isolation, and socio-economic challenges in certain areas of the city. At no point did equality and diversity agendas such as race, sexuality, disability, gender or ethnicity come up in conversations. This is a notable absence compared to other places we have worked.

Spaces & infrastructure

Physical space emerged as a defining pressure point. *“Space is the biggest barrier.”* Studios are lost to development; affordable rehearsal and exhibition spaces are rare. City-centre venues are booked by major institutions, leaving little access for independent groups.

Temporary pop-ups help, but they lack permanence. *“We can’t rehearse in a lab.”* Outdoor and underused public spaces were seen as opportunities. Infrastructure, participants said, means more than buildings — *“we’re rich in assets, poor in access.”* The call was for shared, multi-use, low-cost places to work and meet, alongside stronger connective “infrastructure” between people and organisations.

Skills & careers

Cambridge’s creative ecology trains people well — and then loses them. *“We train people to leave.”* There’s a shortage of early-, mid-career and leadership opportunities, and freelancers are isolated without collective representation or shared space. This issue is compounded by a lack of ‘churn’ or staff turnover within cultural organisations, with individuals staying in their roles for many years. This creates a very static cultural landscape. Mentoring, peer learning, and more structured professional support were identified as essential to build long-term capacity.

Investment & value

Participants described a mismatch between Cambridge’s visible wealth and its cultural funding. *“There’s money in Cambridge, but it’s not flowing into culture.”* Arts funding is treated as subsidy rather than investment, with success measured by outputs instead of outcomes. Again, churn is low amongst organisations receiving funding. Those that are already well-resourced tend to be successful in securing further funding, whilst two cultural organisations have had to close.

“We’re constantly proving worth instead of building trust.” Short-term grants limit ambition, and philanthropy is uncoordinated. Businesses engage inconsistently, often through personal networks. The group called for a stronger narrative linking culture to social and economic value — recognising that *“value is moral, not just financial.”*

Partnerships & collaboration

Cambridge has plenty of partnerships, but they tend to form around familiar faces. *“Who convenes the conveners?”* Participants felt collaboration was siloed, lacking neutral spaces or shared goals. *“It’s easy to collaborate within your tribe — harder across boundaries.”*

While goodwill exists, the city lacks what one participant called *“collaboration infrastructure.”* Many joint projects dissolve when funding ends. Participants wanted a broker or civic platform that can connect sectors — culture, tech, academia,

community – for long-term alignment rather than ad hoc, project-based cooperation.

“The reason some people, organisations and cities experience more breakthroughs than others is not through luck - it is because they are better connected in ways that amplify the probability of valuable coincidences occurring.”⁶

Planning & place-making

Culture was described as an afterthought in local development. *“We plan for buildings, not for belonging.”* Section 106 funding mechanisms feel disconnected from cultural & community needs, and there is frustration with recent public art commissioning which is perceived as a wasted opportunity to invest in cultural infrastructure, and address the pressing need for creative spaces.

“How to get culture to the table of investment planning?” was a common question. Participants argued for embedding culture in planning from the outset, not retrofitting it later: culture must be treated as essential infrastructure, not decoration.

Youth & education

Young people are both the future audience and the missing voice. *“Young people don’t see culture as for them.”* Opportunities are centralised, while schools cut back on arts education, and the Local Cultural Education Partnership has closed.

“We tell young people to ‘aspire’ but don’t show them how.” Participants called for youth-led decision-making, mentorship linking schools and creative organisations, and investment in spaces where young people can make and lead cultural activity. ‘Fiver’ at Cambridge Junction was lauded as an exemplary programme which provides longevity, sustainability and confidence for young people with creative aspirations. The proposed new iteration of the LCEP programme holds merit as a pilot scheme, and will go some way to addressing this issue.

⁶ “Serendipity: It Doesn’t Happen by Accident”, David Cleavelly, 2025

B5. Consultation themes: compare & contrast

High-level overview

Across the three strands (stakeholder consultations, artist / freelancer engagement, and stakeholder workshops), the same core issues surface again and again:

- Fragmented leadership and no shared cultural ambition.
- Inequality, exclusion, and limited access to power.
- Lack of affordable, accessible space.
- Weak collaboration structures and siloed working.
- Funding challenges and resource imbalance.
- A desire for Cambridge to better connect creativity, innovation, and civic identity.

Differences arise from the perspectives of each group (organisation-based stakeholders vs. artists vs. mixed-sector groups), which shapes how themes are discussed such as precarity, hierarchy, and agency.

Thematic comparison

Shared ambition, leadership & power

In common:

- Cambridge lacks a shared cultural vision and the leadership to make one stick.
- Decision-making power is concentrated in small, often opaque networks (“closed doors”, “fortress”).
- Collaboration feels rhetorical rather than real.

Distinct:

- Stakeholder Consultations:
 - Strong focus on a *collective action problem* – everyone waiting for someone else to lead.
 - Leadership failure is framed as historic, structural, and deeply entrenched.
- Artist Engagement:
 - Artists push for *agency*: wanting seats at the table, paid leadership opportunities, and mechanisms like a local artists’ union.
 - More emotionally expressive – metaphors like “ghosts,” “glass ceilings,” “no ladders.”
- Stakeholder Workshops:
 - Focus on the lack of “collaboration infrastructure,” not just lack of will.
 - Leadership vacuum framed through system design: who convenes, who connects, who brokers.

Inclusion, inequality & access

In common:

- Inequality is a major theme: Cambridge’s visible wealth obscures deep social divides.
- Participation is uneven; access depends on networks, confidence, and geography.
- Communities are often ‘done to’, and not included in power-sharing or decision-making.

Distinct:

- Stakeholder consultations:
 - Strong, generalised framing of inequality and exclusion.
 - Power cultures seen as opaque and exclusionary.
- Artist engagement:
 - Artists speak candidly about lived precarity and exclusion from institutional spaces.
 - Wide-ranging EDI awareness – race, sexuality, disability appear explicitly.
- Stakeholder workshops:
 - Notably, certain EDI categories *do not* come up – race, gender, disability, sexuality are absences in workshop discussions.
 - Focus instead on socio-economic inequalities, youth, transport, rural isolation.

Space, Infrastructure & the built environment

In common:

- Space is the number-one pressure point.
- Lack of affordable studio, rehearsal, and meeting space.
- Institutions control the best buildings; independents struggle to access them.

Distinct:

- Stakeholder consultations:
 - Infrastructure linked to governance: “engineered ecosystem,” structures, connective tissue.
 - Power dynamics within infrastructure are central.
- Artist engagement:

- Emotional urgency: Cambridge is “financially ruinous for creatives.”
- Specific asks: affordable studios, artist-led spaces, more public creativity, better access to institutional buildings.

— Stakeholder workshops:

- Planning system critique: culture is retrofitted, not integrated.
- Strong comments on Section 106 and lost opportunities.
- “Rich in assets, poor in access.”

Collaboration, community & networks

In common:

- Everyone wants more collaboration, but nobody believes the conditions for collaboration exist.
- Siloes dominate – institutions talk to each other; artists talk to each other; communities are peripheral.

Distinct:

- Stakeholder consultations:
 - Collaboration hindered by power imbalances, fear of risk, competition for funding.
 - People acknowledge what’s missing, but feel unable to affect change.
- Artist engagement:
 - Collaboration is tied to belonging, trust, and mutual support.
 - Strong desire for cross-sector working (arts + business + science + academia).

- Calls for non-hierarchical spaces (e.g. use of campfire metaphors)
- Stakeholder workshops:
- Focuses on system architecture: the absence of brokers, platforms, and frameworks to make collaboration occur consistently.

Funding, sustainability & economic conditions

In common:

- Funding models are too competitive and maintain the status quo.
- Those with resources ‘keep winning’; others fall behind, or close down altogether.
- No strategic or collective approach to investment.

Distinct:

- Stakeholder consultations:
 - Failure to leverage Cambridge’s status to leverage strategic funding.
- Artist engagement:
 - Personal economic reality: low pay, unpaid labour, precarity, side hustles.
 - Desire for new funding models and fair pay systems.
- Stakeholder workshops:
 - Mismatch between visible wealth and actual cultural investment.
 - Distrust from short-term grants; lack of coordinated philanthropy structures.

Creativity, innovation & the Cambridge story

In common:

- Cambridge’s innovation story is powerful but does not yet integrate culture.
- Desire for closer links with science, tech, and academia.
- The city is seen as more intellectually famous than creatively expressive.

Distinct:

- Stakeholder consultations:
 - Focus on “creative experimentation”, linking cultural ambition to innovation.
 - Innovation must happen beyond the universities.
- Artist engagement:
 - Creative R&D is equivalent to scientific R&D.
 - Desire to be co-creators of Cambridge’s identity.
- Stakeholder workshops:
 - Framed through identity and visibility: “known for the brain, not the heart.”

Youth, education & future talent

In common:

All three cohorts recognise the importance of nurturing future creative talent, but they differ in how strongly this appears.

Distinct:

- Stakeholder consultations:
 - Less emphasis on youth as a standalone theme.
- Artist engagement:

- Strong interest in creative education and supporting young people as future artists.
- Artists reference national challenges with cultural education, and see Cambridge’s potential for leadership.
- Stakeholder workshops:
 - Youth emerges as one of the most prominent issues — missing voice, lost pathways, shrinking options for creative learning in formal education environments.
 - “We train people to leave.”

Overall contrast

Strand	Distinctive Focus
Stakeholder Consultations	Systems, governance, power structures, strategic failures, collective action problems. Strong critique of leadership and institutional behaviours.
Artist Engagement	Lived realities: precarity, belonging, identity, emotion, “ghosts,” metaphors of exclusion. Deep focus on pay, space, trust, agency, and non-hierarchical collaboration.
Stakeholder Workshops	Planning, place-making, infrastructure, youth, identity narrative, sector churn, investment structures. More policy- and system-oriented than the artist document.

Together, these paint a clear picture: **Cambridge has outstanding assets but lacks the structures, culture, and connective tissue to turn potential into a coherent, inclusive creative ecosystem.**

B6. Alignments: policy & partners

Local & regional policy landscape

We have researched policies and plans across the local area and the wider region, drawing on published strategies, spatial frameworks, economic development plans, and inviting conversations with civic, cultural and regional stakeholders. We have highlighted notable quotations below to illustrate recurring themes and gaps in the policy environment.

Across the evidence base, it is clear that while local policy properly focuses on the needs of Cambridge's rapidly expanding population and organically the region benefits from Cambridge's world-class assets, there is a lack of coherent, system-wide strategy for developing culture and creativity either within Cambridge or across the wider region. This is a strategic gap that the Cultural Plan needs to fill.

For example, the *Inclusive Innovation Report* from the Bennett School excludes culture as a target sector in its methodology, instead grouping it under the voluntary sector. This positions culture outside the core innovation narrative.

The Ideas Incubator is similarly framed as an arts, humanities and social sciences academic exercise, rather than as a catalyst for cultural industries. These choices highlight the absence of cultural strategy at the system level.

The emerging regional governance landscape

Consultation with representatives from the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough (GCGP) area reinforces a critical **known unknown**: the governance environment around Cambridge is shifting rapidly, but the precise shape, scope and implications of forthcoming devolution are not yet defined. What is clear is that the Combined Authority's remit is expanding, moving beyond its established focus on tourism, the visitor economy and heritage, towards deeper integration with economic growth, spatial planning, innovation and regional identity. The uncertainty lies not in whether these changes will occur, but how they will be structured, funded and governed. This creates a strategic imperative to design an approach and governance model capable of flexing with, and plugging into, a regional landscape that is evolving but not yet settled.

Key insights from the research and consultation include:

- The new Local Growth Plan will shortly define regional "opportunity zones", shaping investment and sector development, including tourism and heritage.
- The region is establishing a Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) with a new Destination Management Plan (DMP) currently in procurement.
 - The LVEP will be chaired at mayoral level and involve senior figures across transport, heritage, business and education.

- The Combined Authority is participating in the Culture Commons / DCMS devolution pilot, exploring new models for cultural investment and strategic oversight.
- The Mayor’s priorities emphasise “healthier, wealthier, happier” outcomes, prioritising visible regional impact, particularly through heritage, tourism and community access.

Crucially, regional policy leaders emphasised that Cambridge cannot achieve the level of cultural impact or system change it seeks without operating at the scale of the wider region, where the powers around economic development, innovation, sector growth, and the visitor economy now reside.

This has significant implications for the Cultural Plan. The challenge around “connective tissue” is not only relational within Cambridge’s cultural ecosystem but structural, reflecting a civic ecology not yet engineered for regional alignment and partnership from a culture perspective.

The importance of strategic alignment

Our consultation highlighted a significant risk of misalignment between this Cultural Plan and the emerging LVEP/DMP infrastructure if the workstreams are not intentionally connected. As the LVEP will shape the region’s visitor narrative, and cultural assets form a core part of that narrative, strategic alignment is essential.

It is also clear that a barrier to the GCGP team fully prioritising engagement with this work is the perception that it is framed as a localised “cultural compact”, rather than a place-based

coalition with direct linkages into regional governance, economic planning, tourism strategy, innovation policy and civic leadership. Without this broader framing, the work risks being seen as outside the main currents of regional decision-making and not in scope of the relevant policy team.

In summary, to mitigate the mid-long term risks of these external factors, for Cambridge’s cultural strategy to service the city but also be able to ‘plug and play’ at regional scale, it needs to have a governance model capable of engaging meaningfully with the Combined Authority, any future local government reshaping and the wider innovation ecosystem.

Quotes from local & regional policy & evidence

“Cultural infrastructure alone does not guarantee cultural vitality or high levels of community engagement in the arts. What truly matters is the accessibility and responsiveness of cultural infrastructure to the people it serves.”

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service Cultural Placemaking Strategy, North East Cambridge Area Action Plan Evidence Base, 2020

“To encourage the vibrant culture that attracts high-skilled workers and businesses, incentives should be created for cultural development.”

Eastern Powerhouse Manifesto 2024

“Success in building cultural capital in the community should be judged less by the calibre of touring exhibitions and events it attracts, and more by the ambition, reach and diversity of the culture produced within north east Cambridge and

surrounding communities.”
Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service Cultural Placemaking Strategy, 2020

“Over the last decade Cambridge has grown faster than any other British city. This both presents an opportunity for the city’s cultural scene to develop the customer base, but also a challenge to ensure equal access to the arts for all.”
Cambridge City Council Cultural Strategy

“Greater Cambridge is approaching the size of Brighton and will be on a par with Leicester, Nottingham and Wakefield by 2031. This population growth has significant future capacity implications for the cultural infrastructure of Greater Cambridge.”
Greater Cambridge Cultural Workspace Supply & Demand Report, 2020

“Cultural and sporting engagement is supported through partnerships and public access... Yet residents described the University as a ‘hidden world’, with limited access to spaces and decision-making processes.”
People, Place, Power. Civic priorities for the University of Cambridge, 2025

“The voluntary and community sector also suggested that there is not sufficient collaboration in the sector... The absence in Cambridge of a clear, overarching strategy, purpose, mission or set of agreed outcomes can... dilute potential impact.”
Inclusive Innovation in Cambridge, Bennett School of Public Policy, 2025

“Access to play, leisure, sport and culture... We will work with partners across the statutory and voluntary sector to focus on those neighbourhoods where young people need this most.”
Youth Strategy 2024–27, Cambridge City Council

“One Cambridge – Fair for all... Arts, sports, and culture are thriving.”
Cambridge City Council Vision, 2024

Implications for this plan

Taken together, the published evidence and consultation insights show that:

1. Cambridge lacks a regionally connected cultural strategy, despite regional systems increasingly determining success conditions.
2. Though green shoots are now appearing, Culture remains fragmented across innovation, growth, spatial, skills and visitor-economy policies, with no structural mechanism for unifying these.
3. The Combined Authority’s LVEP and DMP will shape regional identity and visitor engagement, and must be aligned with this Plan.
4. This Plan must therefore establish:
 - Culture and creativity as system-level contributors, and
 - A governance model capable of engaging effectively with regional partners and decision-making structures.

B7. Cultural place wheel™

This wheel was populated at the end of the initial research phase, [presenting a consultancy team view](#). Whilst subjective, it presents an indicative assessment of where Cambridge is currently and where changes could be made and the impacts they could have with current plans and programmes in mind. This has proved very informative when looking at planning and investment priorities, as well as the audience development potential.

This is a city region-wide analysis. Clearly some programmes, venues and plans have a notable influence, but the (subjective) ratings seek to present a balanced view.

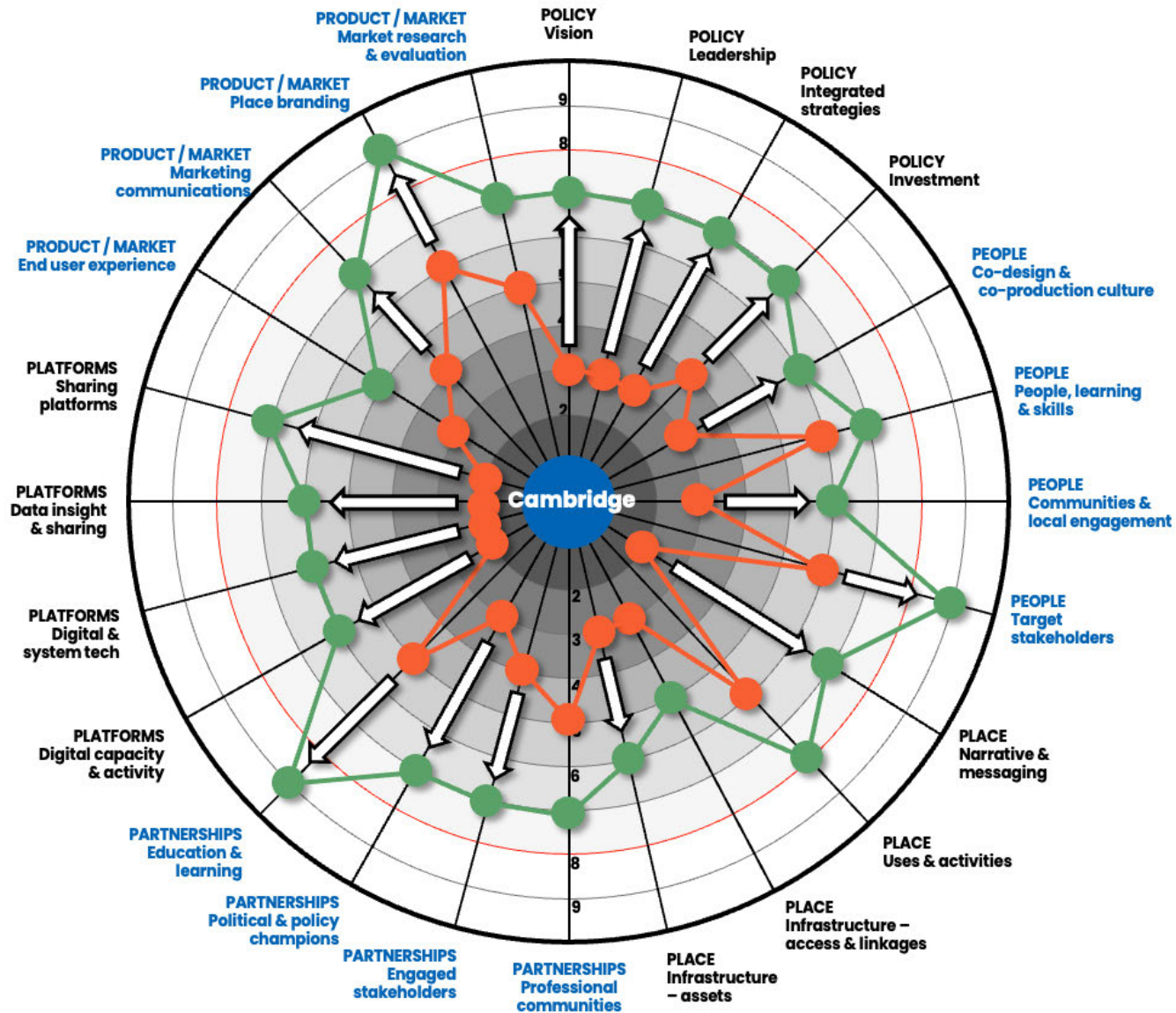
The Cultural Place Wheel™ sets out an array of useful, connected criteria – 6Ps:

[Policy](#) | [People](#) | [Place](#) | [Partnerships](#)
[Platforms](#) | [Product / Market](#)

Key to the Wheel

The **orange** line represents the current level of performance and the **green** line presents the possible uplift from a successful development cycle in c.5 years' time post-investment or shift in approach – e.g. a new strategy. The **white** arrows highlight where marked changes – more transformational – are seen as achievable targets within the emerging plans.

Culture place wheel for Cambridge



A place wheel™ Exercise

1	Policy (vision & leadership) – what is the quality, clarity and effectiveness of Cambridge’s place leadership?
2	Policy (aligned strategy & investment thinking) – to what degree is strategic planning integrated across key place agendas, e.g. jobs, health, education etc.?
3	People (professional collaborative culture) – is there the maturity and evidence of key agency and stakeholder co-design and co-delivery?
4	People (community collaborative culture) – is there the maturity and evidence of neighbourhood and public service co-design and co-delivery?
5	Place (image, reputation & messaging) – how positive and controlled is the local, regional and national face of Cambridge, as represented by agencies, organisations, businesses, residents, media and other stakeholders?
6	Place (infrastructure – access, linkages & assets) – what is the quality and connectedness of the city and district’s physical assets – built and natural environment
7	Partnerships (engaged professional networks) – are there multiple and cross-sector engagement with place regeneration programmes?
8	Partnerships (political & policy champions) – do we have strong, impactful local, regional and national advocates for Cambridge (stand alone and within the region)?
9	Platforms (digital maturity, systems & activity) – how connected, agile and sophisticated is Hartlepool’s digital activity, e.g. communications, joint enterprises and data sharing?
10	Platforms (data insight & sharing) – is place-based decision-making using aggregated insights and data the norm?
11	Product / Market (marketing comms & research) – does Cambridge have effective, consistent marketing comms activity, and place-based research to help target planning and campaigns?
12	Product / Market (place branding) – is Cambridge able to consistently say who it is, what it stands for, and how it behaves – for its residents, visitors, businesses, investors etc.?

These help to build a picture of where a place is, and where it could progress if a strategy was successfully implemented.

Using the Wheel as an exercise is a provocation to stimulate a strategic debate – not to generate an agreed ‘result’ or data set. We also make assessments in a comparative context. We have applied this exercise to many cultural places across the UK in recent years, which provides a digest of how a cultural

ecology works – which we then analyse to assess ‘how’ and ‘why’ a place operates as it does.

So we can ask: What is driving its priorities and investments? Why are some areas weaker or lower priority than others? What is the impact of the current cultural leadership, digital maturity or community engagement as a place, and what can we learn from the experiences of other places?

We can then review how different markers on the Wheel impact each other – and where ‘quick wins’ and stubborn barriers to sustainable growth and innovation typically occur. For Cambridge, there is clear potential reflecting the current cultural provision and inherent structural strengths – and weaknesses – of the city.

Element	Rating	Commentary
POLICY		
Vision	3.0 > 7.0	A lack of progress leaves space for Cambridge’s cultural community to seize the opportunity and become a leading partner in the city – connecting, animating, partnering, innovating.
Leadership	3.0 > 7.0	A City Council focused more on coordination and enabling than being an operator / deliverer for culture could be transformational. The county council limits its cultural support to key service delivery of libraries, archives and local studies. The Combined Authority is in the process of increasing its staffing resources for cultural development. Outside of the local authorities, Create Cambridge exists to provide cultural leadership. A new iteration of this, with an agreed governance model, membership review and communications plan is required.
Integrated strategies	3.0 > 7.0	Key plans and developments are well-placed to draw on culture for place-making and meet infrastructure needs – much more than in the past. A clear strategic connection into devolution / LGR is vital.
Investment	4.0 > 7.0	Funding from national bodies is comparatively high but the (national) trend is decline. Strategic integration must be accompanied by partnership-driven funding / investment planning, and new approaches to funding and philanthropy need to be found. This can then be much more mid- to long-term in its focus.

PEOPLE		
Co-design & co-production culture	3.0 > 6.0	Some pockets of activity can be built upon to move from ‘average’ to ‘good’ overall – more skills and expertise dissemination and exporting across organisations, and more long-term or sustained community engagement processes. Programmes such as Take Two at Cambridge Junction are good examples.
People, learning & skills	6.0 > 7.0	Both universities provide ample skills development and learning opportunities across cultural and creative theory and practice. But too often, graduates leave the city due to the high cost of living and lack of job opportunities. There is a low turnover of staff in cultural organisations, limiting career development. Places such as Cambridge MakeSpace are important to the city’s creative skills ecology.
Communities & local engagement	3.0 > 6.0	Individual programmes and artists do this well, but it lacks strategic coordination. Local communities feel fatigued by a constant churn of short term projects. This needs to connect more to planning and co-design / co-production, and region-wide knowledge / skills transfer, and sustained activity. The closure of Arts & Minds and Cambridge Community Arts have had a big impact on this area. Cambridge Curiosity & Imagination and Together Culture are examples of good practice.

Target stakeholders	6.0 > 9.0	There is a good cohort of cultural stakeholders, which should be backed... more networking, communications, support programmes, regional connectivity. Trust needs to be built. Individual organisations need to work as 'Team Cambridge' in order for the whole sector to grow, as well as connecting more across sectors (including tech & innovation, education).
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PLACE		
Narrative & messaging	2.0 > 7.0	Though Cambridge itself has a strong narrative, there is little to no <u>cultural</u> narrative for the city – even locally. A cultural strategy can assist with creating a sense of place – but much more strategic work is required for any real impact to be made. The opportunity is ripe for culture to be at the leading edge of Cambridge's identity.
Uses & activities	6.0 > 8.0	Participation in the arts is generally high. Increased participation initiatives can be targeted to specific audiences in need.
Infrastructure – access & linkages	3.0 > 5.0	Outside of the city centre, existing public transport routes & infrastructure often dictates how and where audiences travel for their cultural consumption. The availability of free / low-cost culture in neighbourhoods is worthy of review.
Infrastructure – assets	3.0 > 6.0	There is a clear and urgent need for access to affordable space for creative activity, and for the cultural infrastructure strategy to be finalised and published, and for the Planning Authority to advocate for quality cultural infrastructure to be included in new developments. Opportunities for pop-up, meanwhile and temporary activity must also be given more consideration. This is a pressing issue which must be addressed by the relevant authorities, and which puts the long-term success of the sector at risk.

PARTNERSHIPS		
Professional communities	5.0 > 7.0	A few cultural networks exist in the city, but need more time to embed and / or reflect on shared priorities. Strategic facilitation of these networks – including sharing & exporting best practice, and political advocacy – could have a big impact.
Engaged stakeholders	4.0 > 7.0	Without a shared vision and 'ask', Cambridge's cultural sector has been limited in its ability to engage target stakeholders. This process can help turn this tide and provide the united message and call to action stakeholders need to meaningfully engage with and support the sector.
Political & policy champions	3.0 > 7.0	Advocacy is required to generate political buy-in. The Combined Authority is currently focussed on cultural development through the lens of the visitor economy, and is leading the LVEP. The new Portfolio Holder at Cambridge City Council is engaged, which is positive.
Education & learning	5.0 > 9.0	A new schools programme from the City Council is in its infancy, but is well-considered. The FE college and both HE institutes offer a good range of creative courses. Many individual cultural organisations offer good quality creative learning programmes. Again, good work lacks coordination.

PLATFORMS		
Digital capacity & activity	2.0 > 6.0	Use of data and digital is partly a reflection of general capacity, but the digital activity could be more sophisticated and joined-up. The sector is data-poor which impacts on its ability to plan, evidence, advocate, share knowledge, secure funding etc. A collective solution (across the city and county) would be transformational.
Digital & system tech	2.0 > 6.0	Systems match current digital activity – at a low level – but with the potential to quickly accelerate a joined-up approach. There are quick, transformational wins.
Data insight & sharing	2.0 > 6.0	Again at a relatively low level, but a potential quick win.
Sharing platforms	2.0 > 7.0	There is a need to connect – environment, education, health, economic development etc. – to influence social and economic agendas, and be informed by multi-sector insights.

PRODUCT / MARKET		
End user experience	3.0 > 5.0	There are lots of small cultural players delivering great experiences, but with weak digital presence, communication and marketing. A more sectoral / place-based response could address this.
Market comms	4.0 > 7.0	Content, content, content. Culture has it, but does it use it well? The dominance of University of Cambridge activity, posters tied to railings, and the churn of managing content initiatives / platforms means it's very difficult to find the 'right' content. Cambridge must make asking 'what's on' easier.
Place branding	6.0 > 9.0	Cambridge has an incredibly strong place brand – but a narrow, excluding one. The city's name is known globally as a mark of quality and innovation in learning and research. However, culture barely exists in this narrative. Culture can add diversity, authenticity and distinctiveness to the place brand. A much more strategic approach – with the appropriate investment – is required.
Market research & evaluation	5.0 > 7.0	The audience research that exists seems funder-led and slightly reactive as a result, not as a driver of cultural development – yet. It can shift to inform strategy without blowing the collective budget.

C. The 'new' brief and next steps

C1. Unlocking transformational potential

As this Insights Report has underlined, there is compelling evidence of strong cultural assets, activity and potential in Cambridge.

But the ongoing development of the Cultural Plan, and its implementation, needs to shift the Cambridge cultural sector from a fragmented, risk-averse ecosystem to one that is better connected, and more collectively ambitious and strategically significant.

And as the data we reported earlier on the city's cultural workforce shows, there is much work to be done to secure the talent foundations of the city's cultural future. Indeed, a potential temptation in the Cultural Plan, which would be a mistake, is to default to a predominantly boosterish creative industries narrative, dominated by a creative industries mindset about innovation. Such an approach will not build the sustainable foundations of cultural ideation in the city

So in light of our analysis, what are the key focus areas on which our collective strategy development work now needs to concentrate, and why?

Our **Cultural Place Wheel** commentary has brought together disparate evidence on culture, economy, health, inclusion and environment into a single shared frame. When we overlay the findings from mapping, consultation and policy analysis onto that Wheel, a number of areas emerge as having the highest potential for transformational impact if tackled in the round:

- **Creative city / innovation:** aligning culture with Cambridge's global innovation profile, rather than allowing it to sit on the margins.
- **Inclusive growth and talent:** addressing who gets to participate, lead and make a living from cultural and creative work in the city.
- **Health and wellbeing:** using creative health approaches to respond to anxiety, isolation and inequity in a rapidly changing place.
- **Environmental and spatial quality:** ensuring that growth does not erode, but enhances the cultural and everyday liveability of the city and its hinterland.

The strategic focus areas set out below are deliberately designed to read across to these high-impact zones on the Wheel. They provide the scaffolding for a future Cultural Plan that will need to be:

- Honest about Cambridge’s current “less than the sum of its parts” position.
- Rooted in the realities of a volatile funding and policy environment.
- Ambitious about what could be achieved if the city’s cultural, civic, business and innovation assets are better connected and more confident.

The task of the Cultural Plan will be to help partners translate the focus areas into a distinct set of clear, co-owned strategic goals, a fit-for-purpose governance model and a realistic delivery plan, recognising that some actions can and should be taken quickly, while others will require patient, long-term work. These areas identified above helpfully begin to define a practical framework for focus and action, setting out where the Cultural Plan now needs to concentrate its effort. But before any practical application of those focus areas can happen, the governance structures must be determined.

C2. Leadership, governance & delivery

Across interviews and workshops there is strong recognition that Cambridge needs a clearer, civic-facing structure to convene partners, steward the Cultural Plan and broker existing and new resources. Whilst there is a recognition of the effort and commitment being required of those engaged in leading this work, there is also some unrest about opaque decision making and a lack of understanding about who is “at the table” and how representative it is.

At the same time, there is understandable anxiety from all camps about simply rebranding current arrangements or creating another talking-shop. And of equal concern is that political volatility from devolution and local government reorganisation also threatens to derail progress, as the instability resulting from the unknown outcomes creates disruption to civic partner engagement.

“Serendipity doesn’t happen by accident. It follows predictable patterns...It emerges from the structure of our connections, the pathways through which ideas, people and opportunities flow. And once we understand these structures, we can move beyond simply recognising patterns to deliberately designing environments that make ‘fortuitous’ events more likely.”⁷

Serendipity: It Doesn’t Happen By Accident, David Cleevly

Taken as a whole, this evidence enforces the consultants original view that the form of any future Cultural Compact (or “Create Cambridge” equivalent) should follow function.

That function includes:

- Cross-sector convening.
- Advocacy into both regional and national planning and growth structures.
- Shared data and evidence.
- A route to mobilise funding and capacity around agreed priorities.
- Facing outward to national and international opportunities, as well as rooted in the Cambridge city region.

To create a necessary cross-sector bipartisan space, and to mitigate against historical and current complex relationships in existence, there is particular value in ensuring the form is an independently chaired body that can operate as a neutral space rather than an extension of any single institution.

The work to date underlines that ambition and evidence are necessary but not sufficient.

⁷ <https://www.foyles.co.uk/book/serendipity/david-cleevly/9781068439230>

Without the right leadership, governance and capacity, even the most compelling strategy will struggle to move beyond aspiration. Recurring themes in the consultation material include:

- A vacuum of visible cultural leadership at civic level, especially given Cambridge's national and international profile.
- Strong individual institutions but few spaces where leaders are incentivised to think and act for "Greater Cambridge" as a whole.
- Limited dedicated capacity to drive cross-sector work forward, with over-reliance on people who already hold full-time roles elsewhere.

The governance model needs to reflect best practice from successful Cultural Compacts and related cross-industry initiatives nationally: independent, cross-sector, evidence-led and properly resourced. Once agreement on strategic focus areas is reached via this Insights Report, then moving forward with the most fit for purpose governance model can become a high-priority objective with a short delivery timeframe designed to complement the publication of the final plan.

In summary, in relation to Governance the Cultural Plan will need to:

- Define the leadership behaviours and roles that Cambridge needs (across civic, cultural, business and community leaders), not just illustrate the structure on paper
- Identify where dedicated capacity is essential to steward the strategy, coordinate partners, manage

data and drive fundraising – and how that might be funded

- Demand governance and leadership arrangements that are diverse, porous and accountable, with clear responsibilities for delivery and clear routes for artists, communities and young people to influence decisions.

By doing this, the function of the plan will demand the right form of governance to be in place and that structure will be accountable to the beneficiaries of the Cultural Plan e.g. communities, artists, creative organisations and civic and business stakeholders, all of whom should see themselves represented in the governance model.

C3. Focus areas

With this aim of representative governance in mind, the focus areas outlined below have been purposefully designed to be both strategically grounded and delivery-oriented, so that decisions about governance, leadership and investment can be tied directly to a small number of clear priorities rather than dispersed across a long list of competing initiatives.

C3.1 FOCUS 1: CONNECTIVE TISSUE & A LIVEABLE ARTIST ECOLOGY

The workshops and interviews consistently describe a sector that is rich in assets but thinly connected, with limited churn in roles and funding, and too few pathways for new voices to enter or progress (ref/quotes). The data analysis reinforces this (ref): creative industries growth is buoyant, but masks the fragility of the cultural workforce and artist ecology.

Key considerations for the plan

From stasis to flow: Future work needs to focus on reducing the “stagnation” in progression and funding patterns, and sharing and/or creating practical routes for early- and mid-career practitioners to develop and progress in Cambridge, not elsewhere:

- Connective infrastructure, not just projects: The strongest opportunities lie in building connective tissue – shared networks, co-commissioning frameworks, space-sharing and data-sharing – rather than a loose collection of one-off initiatives.

- A cultural, not generic “creative industries”, frame: The Place Wheel and economic analysis both point to a divergence between high-growth creative tech and a more precarious cultural sector. The plan needs explicit action driven objectives on cultural worker support and renewal and should avoid a catch-all creative industries narrative.

This focus area will draw directly on:

- The thematic analysis of stakeholder and artist consultations (including the dedicated artist strand completing in early 2026).
- Evidence on funding flows, workforce data and audience behaviour assembled in the mapping work.
- A review of infrastructure and asset provision and routes to accessing the non-financial resources that can underpin growth and progression.

3.2 FOCUS 2: REWIRING THE FUNDING MODEL

The longitudinal funding analysis and consultations point to a stagnating funding ecosystem characterised by a low churn in Arts Council investment, constrained local public funding, and limited experimentation with other forms of capital. At the same time, work on cultural compacts and place-based investment nationally shows that there is genuine potential in:

- Place-based philanthropic vehicles and “city endowment” style funds.

- Social investment and repayable finance for infrastructure.
- Blended models that use public funding to de-risk commercial and philanthropic capital.

“A process combining grant and community budgets into a merged or aligned fund or set of funds in this way would reduce the “scattergun” effect as well as the bureaucratic drag on VCSE organisations of having to bid into numerous funds for increasingly small amounts of money. Impacts from the social investment would be long-term, and investors would need to be comfortable with that, as well as with seeing returns in terms of social and environmental value, not just financial...There is clearly a role for the umbrella body to play a pro-active enabling role in this kind of process.”⁸

Key considerations for the plan

- From static grants to a mixed ecology: Move from over-reliance on a low-churn public funding base towards a more resilient mix of public, philanthropic, commercial and social investment that can support experimentation rather than only maintain the status quo.
- Place-based vehicles, not scattered asks: Explore whether Cambridge could support shared vehicles (for example, a cultural endowment or city fund) that aggregate contributions from universities, major employers and funders, rather than each organisation fundraising in isolation.

- A clearer civic and philanthropic offer: Develop a confident, Cambridge-specific proposition for major donors and institutional funders, aligned with the high-impact zones on the Place Wheel and driven by the diverse “Create Cambridge” governance offer.
- Using the Compact as an investment platform: Treat any future Cultural Compact / Create Cambridge-type body as a mechanism to coordinate investment, set shared priorities and provide assurance to funders, rather than as an additional talking-shop.
- Evidence-led funding conversations: Use the mapping and longitudinal funding analysis to make a more robust, data-driven case about where additional capital is most needed and what it will unlock for the wider Cambridge system.

This focus area will draw directly on:

- The longitudinal analysis of strategic funding into the Cambridge cultural sector and its comparison to peer cities.
- The Place Wheel synthesis of culture’s relationship to economy, inclusion, health and environment.
- Consultation findings from Cambridge stakeholders and partners in the Create Cambridge process, including themes around dependence on a small number of funders and limited risk capital.
- Policy and strategy materials collated for the Cambridge Cultural Plan that touch on investment, philanthropy and city-level funds.

⁸ Inclusive Innovation in Cambridge, Bennett School of Public Policy, 2025

This is not about replacing public funding, but about building a more mixed, resilient model that can support the level of ambition implied by Cambridge's assets and growth trajectory.

3.3 FOCUS 3: STRATEGIC INTEGRATION WITH TECH & INNOVATION

The Place Wheel analysis and the external research on culture, clusters and micro-clusters highlight a recurring theme: cultural strategy and innovation strategy are still running on separate tracks and missing out on highly strategic opportunities for Cambridge as a result.

"It's not just about having the right components, but about how easily they're able to connect. The architecture of innovation is fundamentally an architecture of connection...The ideal innovation environment [is] a serendipity factory - a production system where the conditions are set up so that the right combinations are more likely to happen, and happen faster."⁹

In Cambridge, there is clear opportunity to:

- Position culture as a critical enabler of the innovation economy.
- Connect cultural actors more deliberately into innovation infrastructures.
- Build on emerging practice around data, AI and digital maturity in the cultural sector, potentially leapfrogging other cities in the process.

Key considerations for the plan

- Culture as part of the innovation story: Explicitly position cultural organisations, programmes and public realm activity as part of Cambridge's innovation system (talent attraction and retention, experimentation, quality of place), not a parallel "nice-to-have" track.
- Bridging the "two tracks": Create deliberate links between cultural actors and innovation infrastructures such as Innovate Cambridge, university research agendas and the emerging conference / knowledge economy, so that cultural projects sit inside, not alongside, these conversations.
- Data, digital and AI as enabling infrastructure: Build on emerging local practice around digital maturity, data and AI in the cultural sector to improve how Cambridge understands audiences, tells its story and designs hybrid cultural / innovation programmes.
- Targeted pilots with a learning brief: Prioritise a small number of joint pilots that bring artists, technologists and researchers together around shared challenges (for example, creative health, net zero, inclusive growth), with clear expectations around learning and replication.
- Inclusive innovation: Ensure that tech-culture collaborations do not simply benefit already-connected institutions, by investing in skills, access and support for artists, freelancers, young people and communities to participate, via those institutions, or independently, or both.

⁹ 'Serendipity: It Doesn't Happen by Accident', David Cleevley, 2025

This focus area will draw directly on:

- The evidence behind the Place Wheel analysis and external research on culture, clusters and micro-clusters that underline the risk of culture and innovation strategies running on separate tracks.
- Consultation summaries and meeting notes from Cambridge partners highlighting current gaps between cultural and tech ecosystems.
- Project documentation and early write-ups on digital maturity and AI practice in Cambridge-linked cultural organisations (for example, around data, evaluation and workflow tools).
- Comparative national and international examples where culture is used as a driver of innovation, skills and knowledge-exchange, rather than as an output alone.

We have already conducted an analysis of five comparator international cities, and their approach to cultural led innovation¹⁰, and there is no shortage of innovative approaches that Cambridge, and this plan, can draw upon. For example, having reviewed the cultural led innovation approach of the five cities listed above, there are some clear commonalities around programme, activity, and governance. For example, some of their cultural and cross disciplinary innovation features (to mention just a few!) that could be actively adopted in the Cambridge Cultural Plan include:

- Public-facing cultural / creative programming.
- Citizen and community involvement.

¹⁰ 1 e.g. Montréal – Quartier des spectacles (QDS); Barcelona – 22@ Innovation District; Eindhoven – Brainport

- Shared ‘programme office’ that brokers collaborations between labs, cultural orgs, businesses, communities.
- Place-based labs: distinct precincts (city north, etc.) where new ideas are trialled in real streets and spaces.
- Open innovation initiatives: calls, challenges and showcases that bring together universities, businesses, NGOs and artists.
- Maker & media lab for young people, researchers, communities.
- Neutral space for cross-sector collaboration and co-design.
- Embed design and cultural practitioners into city and county problem-solving (transport, climate, health) via cultural residencies.

3.4 FOCUS 4: PLANNING, GROWTH & CIVIC DECISION-MAKING

The policy scan and review of relevant strategic plans highlight a growing recognition of the role that culture, wellbeing and placemaking must play in Cambridge’s future growth. Yet across consultations, stakeholders noted a persistent gap between this rhetoric and what is delivered through planning, housing, transport and economic development decisions. Cultural infrastructure is still too often an after-thought rather than treated as essential civic provision. Developers remain focused on stand-alone public art commissions while the studios, rehearsal rooms, performance spaces, community galleries and creative workspaces that Cambridge urgently needs are rarely embedded into new schemes.

Region; Helsinki – Oodi Central Library & design-led city; Melbourne – Melbourne Innovation Districts (MID)

At the same time, national evidence on Creative Health – and the internationally recognised work of the Addenbrooke’s Arts Team – demonstrates the role that cultural participation can play in tackling loneliness, improving mental health, strengthening communities and supporting inclusive growth. Stakeholders emphasised that Cambridge has an opportunity to align creative health principles with decisions about housing, public realm and neighbourhood design, ensuring that growth contributes to wellbeing rather than exacerbating inequality. Together, this points to a need for a clearer civic framework in which culture, planning and inclusive growth are understood as mutually reinforcing, with expectations embedded early in the development process rather than added at the end. This demonstrates the Plan must:

- Make culture a visible, testable requirement within planning and growth processes, not an optional enhancement.
- Develop a shared framework for place-making that sets out expectations for cultural infrastructure, engagement and design from the outset of major schemes.
- Strengthen the interface between cultural actors and key “anchor” institutions – including health, education and universities – so cultural value is recognised across civic decision-making.
- Use creative health evidence as a lever to shape how Cambridge approaches housing, public realm, wellbeing and health inequality.
- Position cultural infrastructure as a contributor to inclusive growth, talent attraction and community resilience and bring the key ‘growth and planning’ players onboard.

Key considerations for the plan

- From rhetoric to requirements: Shift from broad cultural aspirations in planning documents to clearer policy expectations around cultural infrastructure, Section 106 contributions and the social value of development.
- Embedding a Cultural Framework in planning practice: Ensure cultural impacts sit alongside environmental, economic and social tests in Local Plan policy, growth decisions and business cases.
- Creative health as a planning principle: Apply creative health evidence to inform approaches to neighbourhood design, public space, education and health inequality.
- Clarifying civic cultural leadership: Define the role of councils, the universities, health partners and anchor institutions in championing culture within planning and economic development.
- Data and mapping: Use cultural infrastructure mapping, engagement evidence and neighbourhood analysis to inform planning decisions based on lived experience as well as institutional priorities.

This focus area will draw directly on:

- The policy scan of Local Plan, regional growth frameworks and planning strategies identifying where culture is present, weakly referenced or absent.
- Existing mapping of cultural infrastructure, neighbourhood provision and growth areas commissioned for this and other city strategies.

- Consultation findings from civic, health, education, community and cultural stakeholders on culture's role in liveability, access, wellbeing and inclusive growth.
- Meeting notes across the Create Cambridge project that highlight how culture is positioned within broader city-region narratives, governance and development agendas.

D1. Statement: use of AI in producing this report

This report used AI assistance in certain areas. For the purposes of full transparency, AI was used;

- For data discovery in the mapping (prior to human validation and analysis.)
- In stakeholder consultations, to transcribe conversations, identify key quotes, and suggest prominent themes.
- In stakeholder workshops, to transcribe notes produced by the participants and provide a summary of discussions.
- To support the thematic grouping of the three consultation approaches.
- To provide examples of places which Cambridge might look to for inspiration.
- To check spelling, grammar and punctuation, as well as consistent use of terminology.

The AI tools used were Dovetail, ChatGPT and Google NotebookLM.

D2. List of organisations consulted

Representatives from the below organisations have participated in individual or small group consultations.

Abbey People
Arts Council England
Anglia Ruskin University
Cambridge Arts Theatre
Cambridge City Council
Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination
Cambridge Jazz Festival
Cambridge Junction
Cambridge Music Festival
Cambridge School of Art, ARU
Cambridge Sketch Group
Cambridge Sound & Vision
Cambridge United Football Club
Cambridge University Hospitals
Collusion
Creative Culture Capital
Fitzwilliam Museum
Innovate Cambridge
Kettle's Yard
King's College
Makespace
Museum of Cambridge
New International Encounter
Stapleford Granary
Tandem Works
Together Culture
University of Cambridge
University of Cambridge Museums
Wysing Arts Centre

Representatives from the following organisations agreed to participate in the stakeholder workshops.

Abbey People
Anglia Ruskin University
Art in the Burrow
Arts Council England
Britten Sinfonia
Cambridge City Council
Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination
Cambridge Festival
Cambridge Jazz Festival
Cambridge Junction
Cambridge Science Centre
Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Cambridge University Press & Assessment
Cambridgeshire County Council
CamCreatives CIC
CASTEM CLUB
Commission Projects
Conscious Communications
Fitzwilliam Museum
Frontier Developments plc
Futurecity
Gameware Europe Ltd.
Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service
Kettle's Yard
Lele Saa Illustrations
Makespace Cambridge Ltd
Makower Architects
Menagerie Theatre Company
Milton Road Primary School
Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology
Museum of Cambridge
NEUBAU
Neubau Architecture Ltd.
New International Encounter
One Glove Films
Queen Edith Community Forum

St Andrew the Less Community Project
Stapleford Granary
Stir Cambridge Limited
The Arts Theatre Cambridge
The Women's Art Collection
University of Cambridge
University of Cambridge Museums
unscrunch
Urban&Civic

D3. Selected bibliography

Local	Author	Year
Inclusive Innovation in Cambridge	Bennett School of Public Policy	2025
Business Plan Executive Summary 2025-30	Collusion	2025
Cambridge – City of Curiosity	Godric Smith	2025
Creative Futures Academic Offer 2025-6	Cambridge City Cultural Education Partnership	2025
Kettles Yard – <i>Zvakazarurwa</i> Exhibition Evaluation Report	University of Cambridge	2025
Kettles Yard – <i>Paint What Matters</i> Exhibition Evaluation Report	University of Cambridge	2025
Cultural Strategy 2024-9	Cambridge City Council	2024
Open Letter	Create Cambridge	2024
Our Vision 2024-34	Cambridge Junction	2024
Community Wealth Building Strategy 2024-9	Cambridge City Council	2024
Adopting a Philosophy of Solidarity and Fellowship at Kettle’s Yard: A Study of Sanctuary at Arbury Court Library	University of Cambridge	2024
City Events Report	Cambridge City Council	2024
Most Significant Change Report August 2023-January 2024	Cambridge Junction	2024
Kettles Yard – <i>Issam Kourbaj: Urgent Archive</i> Exhibition Evaluation Report	University of Cambridge	2024

Arts & Culture in Oncology Environments, CUH Arts	University of Cambridge	2023
Community Grants Annual Reports 2021-2, 2022-3, 2023-4	Cambridge City Council	2022-24
Museum of Cambridge, Strategic Plan 2022-7	University of Cambridge	2022
Kettle’s Yard Annual Report 2021/2, 2022/3, 2023/4	University of Cambridge	2022-24
Invest in Communities Reports, 2020-1, 2021-2, 2022-3	Greater Cambridge Shared Planning	2021-23
Cambridge Junction ‘Take Two Evaluation Report 2021-5’	Cambridge Junction	2021
Cultural Placemaking Strategy, North East	Greater Cambridge Shared Planning	2020
Cambridge Area Action Plan Evidence Base	Greater Cambridge Shared Planning	2020
Greater Cambridge Cultural Workspace Supply & Demand Report	Greater Cambridge Shared Planning	2020
<i>Open House: The Difference Made Through Working Together</i> Evaluative Research 2014-21	University of Leicester	2014

Regional / National	Author	Year
Cultural Strategies & Futures, Prof. Daniel Ashton & Makanani Bell, Public Policy Southampton	University of Southampton	2025
<i>Serendipity: It doesn’t happen by accident</i>	Dr David Cleevly	2025
Townscapes: Pride in Place,	Bennett School of Public Policy	2025

Measuring Social & Cultural Infrastructure		
Creative Corridors: Connecting Clusters to unleash potential	Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre	2024
Region Investment Prospectus 2024/5	Oxford to Cambridge pan-Regional Partnership	2024
Manifesto for the East	Eastern Powerhouse	2024
<i>Geographies of Creativity</i>	Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre	2023
Creative Industries Sector Vision: a joint plan to drive growth, build talent and develop skills	DCMS	2023
Building a More Diverse and Inclusive Public Art Sector	BEAM	2023
Heritage 2033	National Lottery Heritage Fund	2023
Heritage Counts	Historic England	2023
Centre for Cities data tool Greater than the Sum of Parts: Realising Universities in Cultural Compacts	National Centre for Academic and Cultural Exchange	2022
Mapping and Examining the Determinants of England's Rural Creative Micro-clusters	Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre	2022
<i>Movers and Stayers</i> : Localising Power to Level Up Towns	DEMOS	2022
Cornerstones of Culture: Commission on Culture and Local Government	Local Government Association	2022
<i>No Place Left Behind</i>	The Commission into Prosperity and	2021

	Community Placemaking	
Heritage & the Value of Place	Historic England	2021
<i>'Bringing Out the Best'</i> Public Engagement – Final Report	National Lottery Heritage Fund	2021
Valuing Culture and Heritage capital: a framework towards informing decision making	DCMS	2021
<i>Let's Create</i>	Arts Council England	2020
<i>Creative Places</i> : Supporting your local creative economy	Local Government Association	2020
Cultural Strategy in a Box	Local Government Association	2020
Strategic Funding Framework 2019–2024	National Lottery Heritage Fund	2019
Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing	APPG for Arts, Health & Wellbeing	2017
The Mendoza Review: an independent review of museums in England	DCMS	2017
The Geography of Creativity	NESTA	2016

Reference websites and online articles / blogs (selected)

Local

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<https://www.aru.ac.uk/>
<https://www.junction.co.uk/>
<https://susanabbs.co.uk/about>
<https://www.togetherculture.com/story-of-us>
<https://www.layrddesign.co.uk/about>
<https://karenjinksdesign.co.uk/about>
<https://www.lelesaa.com/>
<https://www.meetup.com/cambridge-sketch-group/>
<https://www.cambridgedrawingsociety.org/>

<https://neubau.uk/>
<https://www.annabrownsted.com/projects>
<https://www.collusion.org.uk/>
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<https://www.cambridgebid.co.uk/>
<https://engageenvironmentagency.uk.engagementhq.com/fens2100>
<https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/about-us/our-structure/other-departments/cuh-arts/meet-the-team/>
<https://innovatecambridge.com/>
<https://www.cambridgewireless.co.uk/>
<https://www.bradfieldcentre.com/>
<https://www.cambridgesciencepark.co.uk/>
<https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/about-us/our-structure/other-departments/cuh-arts/>
<https://cambridgecandi.org.uk/>
<https://www.enterprise.cam.ac.uk/>
<https://www.cambridgefilmfestival.org.uk/cambridge-film-trust>
<https://davidparrhouse.org/>
<https://x-crop.com/>
<https://capturingcambridge.org/map/>
<https://www.camcityevents.co.uk/>
<https://www.cambridgelivetickets.co.uk/>
<https://www.cambridgefolkfestival.co.uk/>
<https://www.cambridgeroom.org/>
<https://abbeypeople.org.uk/about/>
<https://greatercambridgeimpact.org/>
<https://www.festival.cam.ac.uk/>
<https://www.museumofcambridge.org.uk/>
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<http://www.gameseden.uk/>
<https://thecgc.org.uk/index.php>
<https://www.crashh.cam.ac.uk/>

Regional

<https://www.oxford-cambridge-partnership.info/invest>
<https://techcorridor.co.uk/>
<https://innovationcorridor.uk/>
<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/>
<https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/>
<https://www.cambridgeindependent.co.uk/>
<https://www.easternpowerhouse.uk/>

National / international

<https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport/commission-culture-and-local-government>
<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/universal-offers/culture-creativity>
<https://living-knowledge-network.co.uk/>
<https://getitloudinlibraries.com/>
https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/creative-corridors-connecting-clusters-to-unleash-potential/
<https://www.centreforcities.org/blog/a-tale-of-four-cities-what-local-economic-role-do-their-universities-play/>
<https://www.centreforcities.org/publication/town-and-gown-the-role-of-universities-in-city-economies/>
<https://inclusivegrowthnetwork.org/about-us>
<https://stationf.co/>

Additional articles

<https://www.manchester.ac.uk/about/news/manchester-and-cambridge-awarded-48-million-funding-for-groundbreaking-cross-uk-innovation-partnership/>
<https://cambridgetownowl.com/2024/03/15/cambridge-city-councils-cultural-strategy-2024-29>
<https://www.enterprise.cam.ac.uk/genius-of-the-place-cambridges-creative-promise/>
<https://www.enterprise.cam.ac.uk/news/cambridge-is-the-uks-most-innovation-intensive-city/>
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<https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport/commission-culture-and-local-government>
<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/universal-offers/culture-creativity>
<https://living-knowledge-network.co.uk/>
<https://getitloudinlibraries.com/>

Selected site visits

- Cambridge Junction
- Fitzwilliam Museum
- Cambridge Walking Tour
- Whipple Museum
- Kings College Chapel
- Cambridge Contemporary Crafts
- Raspberry Pi Foundation
- Museum of Cambridge

D4. Definition of culture

What do we mean by 'culture'?

"Culture' means many things to many people and is often used to refer to food, religion and other forms of heritage... Creativity and culture are deeply connected, but different. Creativity is the process by which, either individually or with others, we make something new: a work of art, or a reimagining of an existing work. Culture is the result of that creative process: we encounter it in the world, in museums and libraries, theatres and galleries, carnivals and concert halls, festivals and digital spaces."

Arts Council England

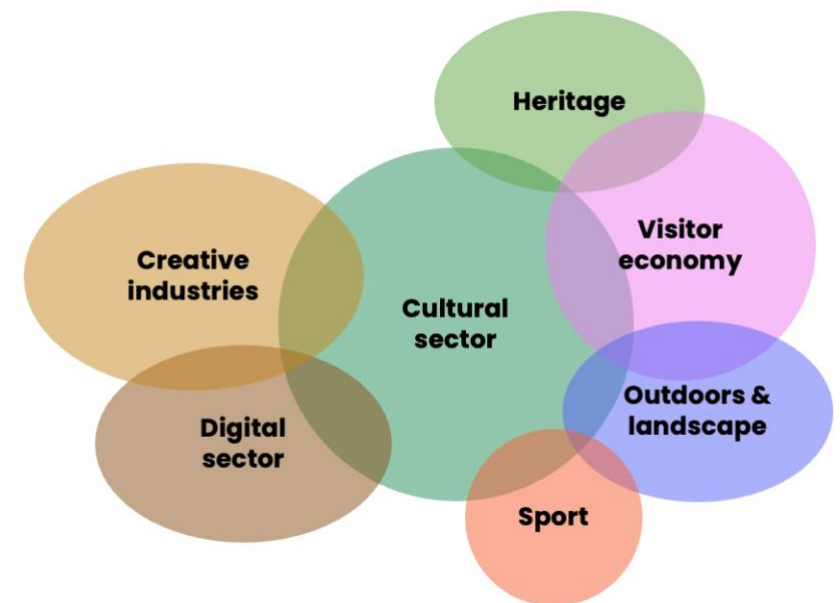
In this document, we take a place-based approach to 'culture'. This means we take a holistic view of what creative activities local communities value, experience, participate in, consume, and are inspired by.

A place-based approach recognises that whilst culture has its own intrinsic value - it delivers most when it is deeply embedded across a place - linking into place regeneration, health, education, economy, skills and jobs.

This requires strategic direction and delivery to be shared. In this scenario councils are enablers and facilitators - they are not solely responsible for determining, funding and delivering everything - but it is their job to help cohere and then steer and coordinate to achieve shared priorities.

Given the profile of tourism, festivals and built heritage in the area, the local understanding of the cultural sector can be dominated by these assets and the important role they play in the visitor economy. This document seeks to rebalance this understanding and give more weight to the creative arts (visual, performing, digital and applied), and creative practice.

The edges of any definition should be porous - letting in new ideas and thinking, and therefore opportunities. Whilst the focus of this report is on culture, we acknowledge the overlap with multiple other sectors such as nature, creative industries and sport which share direct links but have their own ecosystems and definitions, as illustrated in this diagram:



D5. Detailed artist engagement report

The artist and freelance creative practitioner engagement strand is ongoing, and will continue to inform and influence the development of the Cultural Plan. A full report on this engagement strand will be produced as a standalone document once it is concluded, and will highlight in what ways artist consultation directly informed the Plan. It will also act as a case study for best practice in artist engagement in a cultural strategy development process.

Participation to date

Artists & Creatives Dinner – 13 artists (16 invited)

Participant demographics reflected an intersectional mix of individuals, including those from Global Majority backgrounds, DDN participants, and LGBTQ+ communities.

The artists and freelancers who attended, were either based in Cambridge, or worked in Cambridge. Participants represented a wide range of artistic practises, including dance, socially engaged art, theatre, visual arts and community focussed artists. Attendees also reflected a broad spectrum of career stages, emerging artists involved in partner programmes such as TROOP, mid-career practitioners with established studios, long standing Cambridge based artists with extensive local knowledge and artists who have recently moved to the city / country through academic or professional work.

Many participants had portfolio careers, combining their artistic practice with freelance roles such as producing, project

management or education. Their wider experience included work in creative health, co-creating projects with communities, including migrants and refugees (e.g. Platforma), producing work with vulnerable adults, and teaching or tutoring within the education sector.

Workshop 1: Vanquishing the cultural ghost of Cambridge – with artist Kate Genever

Fully booked at 20 capacity. 9 attendees.

Participant demographics reflected an intersectional mix of individuals, including those from Global Majority backgrounds and DDN participants.

Workshop participants were distinct from those who attended the dinner and again reflected a wide mix of artforms and professional backgrounds. Attendees included artists working in creative health, visual art, socially engaged practice, performance, live art, and freelance producing or project management across the cultural and community sectors in Cambridge. The workshop also engaged artists at varied stages of their careers, from early-career practitioners to those with mid-career experience.

Artist Dinner – 30th September

Strengths & challenges: Through this listening process, artists shared their experiences, frustrations, and hopes for what it means to live and work creatively in Cambridge.

“Cambridge has got so much potential, right! All the right ingredients! But somehow it is flat. It could do so much more with the ingredients it has.”

Artists talked about the city’s strengths and potential, how Cambridge already has so much going for it, and how exciting it could be if those different parts connected more. There was a real sense of pride in what the city achieves, but also a feeling that things aren’t quite joined up yet. Many saw opportunities to link the creative community more closely with the university, science, and tech sectors

“What happens if Cambridge was a trailblazer in how we work with tech, science and the university. World leading in a framework of how artists and culture are integrated into that ecology.”

Artists strongly wanted more opportunities to come together to network, to meet, to share ideas, and to connect across different industries and communities. Artists said they wanted to be in the same rooms as people from business, tech, education, and other sectors, to show the value of arts and culture and imagine what’s possible when they work together.

“We need more opportunities for artists to be in a room with other sectors / businesses / Cambridge Uni to share the value of arts and culture and also the potential of what it could do.”

They also recognised the barriers that exist in Cambridge over its identity and although it may on the outset seem like a wealthy city that for them as artists, they find it hard to access that funding and when they are working with communities they

see first-hand some of the realities. Including Cambridgeshire being in the top 10 for inequality – and how they felt that art could play a key role in helping to bridge divides and bring people together.

Community, collaboration & leadership: There was a strong call for more collaboration and less hierarchy, or to break down traditional hierarchical structures / ways of working. To move away from competition for small pots of funding and towards shared, long-term, and meaningful ways of working.

“Wouldn’t it be great if there was a community that welcomed artists in, instead of setting them all in competition for miniature funding opportunities and pieces of work. Greater bonding between people. Less scarcity mindset, less scarcity reality.”

Artists described wanting to break down barriers and create a more connected community, between artists, and between artists and other sectors. One artist used the image of sitting around a campfire, as a place where everyone has space to speak and listen.

“More conversation and collaboration between the business community and artists. We could use old shops as pop-up studios, creative learning spaces, all sorts of things. We can make those spaces thrive.”

Moreover, there was also a shared desire for artists to be recognised as leaders and contributors in shaping the city’s future, not just as participants in projects, but as equal voices in decision-making. Artists wanted to be included in strategic

conversations about Cambridge's growth, with fair pay for their time and expertise.

"We need a seat at the table. Many, many more seats at the table. No one is looking out for our interests. And we have so much to offer."

They were also keen to understand the Governance of Create Cambridge and who is involved / why they have been asked and how artists could play a more active role in shaping its direction in future.

Celebrating and embracing diversity in Cambridge was highlighted, recognising there was a high proportion of students studying abroad as well who were looking for permanent residence. That they were keen to connect with others and found it challenging to access space to connect with like-minded creatives.

Assets & space: Access to space came up repeatedly. Artists described how difficult it can be to find affordable, usable places to make and share work. Some noted that while institutions may have buildings or studios, these can feel closed off unless you already have the right connections.

Affordable studio / creative space or that which is purpose built was important. Valuing the spaces to make the work. Whilst an overall acknowledgment of the cost of living in Cambridge being particularly high which has forced many artists to move outside of Cambridge. Although their work may exist in the city, they may not be able to afford to live there anymore.

Artists also wanted to see a more colourful, visible Cambridge, one where creativity shows up in public spaces and city life. They were keen to be part of local planning conversations, to think differently about public art, and to explore how development funds (like Section 106) might help make that happen.

Artists suggested solutions as to how they might combat challenges they face within Cambridge such as low pay rates for artists. Suggestions included creating a local artist union in order to protect their rights and to have someone represent the voices of artists in the city.

Funding & economic realities: Artists spoke openly about the challenges of sustaining their practice and making a living as an artist right now. Many described how difficult it is to access funding for their work, especially in Cambridge. They felt they are often directed towards Arts Council England but that Cambridge's postcode (not being a designated priority area), makes funding harder to secure, both from the Arts Council and from other funders. There was a curiosity and energy around imagining alternative funding models that could better support local creative activity.

Artists also shared how they often find themselves having to advocate for the value of culture, reminding others that art and artists are foundational to a thriving society. They spoke about the expectation to contribute to the city's cultural life, often for low pay or unpaid time, and the need for their work to be respected and properly valued.

Many described juggling multiple jobs or “side hustles” to make ends meet. Some felt that these realities are rarely acknowledged publicly, that the true picture of what it takes to survive as an artist in Cambridge is often hidden. There was a call to make this more visible, to show that there are many different routes into creative careers, and that all of them are valid.

Artists spoke about how they are often working with highly vulnerable communities, working to support social agendas. In order to do that work and to keep skill within the sector, there needs to be artist wellbeing support and pay that matches current living costs.

Participants also shared their concern for closing organisations, that publicly it looks as if they have disappeared with no explanation and or sector support. Their understanding of the current cultural landscape and funding struggles, but we’re expressing how organisations, artists and freelancers come together to show support, collaborate in difficult times.

Education & knowledge exchange: The artists involved in the dinner shared the potential to cross collaborate with academics and science and utilising the knowledge and assets that Cambridge has or is known for. They shared excitement over the potential of building bridges between these worlds and how to involve them as partners, audience and collaborators.

They noted how experimentation and “research and development” are deeply valued within science – and questioned what it would mean if creative processes were understood and supported in the same way.

“A city for exploration, we are extremely used to funding experiments in a lab. What if we looked at creative experimentation in the same way, lens and language that we understand scientific experiments? What about social experiments led by creativity? But given the same respect as science.”

They also used the analogy of Cambridge being known as ‘high achieving’ and of excellence in science and research and wondered what might happen if the city also celebrated experimentation, risk-taking, and even failure, as essential parts of innovation in both art and science.

There was also a strong emphasis on education and young people. Artists spoke about the importance of nurturing the next generation of creatives, recognising that the children and young people in Cambridge today are the artists, innovators, and thinkers of tomorrow. They raised concerns about the challenges facing arts education nationally, from limited curriculum to reduced access in schools, and felt that Cambridge could be a leader in reimagining creative education. With its resources, institutions, and cross-sector potential, they saw an opportunity for the city to think boldly about how creativity can be central to learning and development.

Workshop 1: Vanquishing the cultural ghost of Cambridge – with artist Kate Genever

Community & collaboration: Within the workshop artists shared that they valued the opportunity to come together, to make something collectively, and speak openly. They saw the workshop as proof that there is a community in Cambridge if people learn how to access it. Many spoke of the *'power of thinking together'*, the need to *'work in communities to imagine futures'*, and the importance of facilitation as an art form in itself.

The idea of 'ghosts', social, political, and emotional forces from the past that continue to shape the present, resonated strongly, suggesting a collective desire to name and address what still haunts Cambridge's cultural life. Artists expressed a clear wish to work together more openly and collaboratively, rather than in silos or competitive environments.

"Ghosts are just a lost spirit, they're not a bad thing, they just need guiding, they're miss-located. We need to welcome them in. And support with redirection."

Barriers and hierarchy: Participants described Cambridge as a place of privilege and division, where universities and institutions dominate resources, opportunities, and visibility. They shared that artists outside that system feel excluded, describing the city as *'a place of closed doors'*, *'a fortress in the middle of the city with no doors'*, and *'weighed down'* by hierarchy and bureaucracy. The sense of inequality was captured in recurring metaphors of *'glass ceilings'*, *'thresholds in the sky'*, and *'no ladders, no way up'*. Participants also

shared that they felt access to opportunities and decision-making power often feels unevenly distributed.

Access, space & sustainability: Artists voiced frustration about the lack of accessible, affordable space for creative work. Many highlighted the need for clearer pathways into opportunities, funding, and spaces. There's a sense that access is possible but not well signposted, and that knowledge about "how to get in" is often held by a few and isn't very transparent. The closures of community arts organisations have left gaps in support, especially for mental health and inclusion. Financial precarity was a repeated theme. Cambridge was described as a *'financially ruinous place for creatives'*. Artists felt there is plenty of *'book and research knowledge'* but little recognition of *'creative knowledge'* as equally valuable. They called for genuine connection with shared purpose.

Artists also mentioned the need to embrace diversity and inclusion in all its forms and acknowledged the further challenges for marginalised communities to access these spaces and opportunities without it feeling tokenistic.

Cultural imbalance: Throughout the workshop, there was a perception of wealth and opportunity within Cambridge that remained inaccessible to many, which doesn't translate into support for local artists. While the city is rich in institutions, it remains poor in openness. Artists expressed fatigue at *'having to walk through fire'* for limited progress, and a shared recognition that the scene's oppressive structures stifle creativity and collaboration. Artists voiced they'd like a more equitable way of sharing resources and funding.

Hopes & visions: Despite this, there was a spirit of determination. The 'ghosts' became a metaphor for transformation. Artists spoke of '*rubbing ink on the face of the ghost so you can see it*', making hidden issues visible. They called for honesty, collective action, and the courage to name the barriers that persist. Several imagined more open, connected futures: '*The tower, the university, could be a bridge over the water*'. They emphasised that all artists '*deserve to be on the inside too*', and that creative knowledge and facilitation are vital to building a fairer cultural ecosystem.

The workshop revealed both the depth of disconnection and the strength of collective imagination within Cambridge's arts community. Artists are looking for spaces that are open, transparent, and rooted in shared purpose, where creativity, care, and collaboration are valued as much as research.

Artists spoke of change being possible, the power of thinking together, and the importance of collaboration over isolation. Artists described Cambridge's scene as divided, with closures of community arts groups (Arts & Minds, Cambridge Community Arts) leaving gaps in support for wellbeing and access. They voiced concern about lack of artist-led space, visibility of opportunities, and a need for more connection and priority for local artists.

Recent / upcoming activity

Artist Opportunity

- Artist to Artist Commission – Closing date 26th November.

Workshops

- 24th November 10:00 am – 12:00 pm, @ Kettles Yard – From here: Cambridge, Creatively with Zhuozhang Li
- 25th November – 4 – 6pm @ Cambridge Rooms – The connective tissue of Cambridge with Amy Vaughan

Artist open advice sessions

- 2nd December 10am–4.15 pm: Artist Open Advice Sessions with Issam Kourbaj
- 3rd December 10am–4.15pm: Artist open advice sessions with Bryony Kimmings
- 9th December 10am–4.15pm: Artist open advice sessions with Mark Titchner

Sharing

- 18th February 5 – 7pm @ Cambridge Junction: Save the date – sharing event

D6. Stakeholder workshop provocation sheets

These were used as stimulus to help frame the conversations and debate within a series of stakeholder workshops.

LESS THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

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Cambridge has 11.1 registered companies per 1,000 population working in the Creative Industries. This is higher than East of England (7.77) and higher than England (9.30)

In 2023, 84% of Corn Exchange bookers were from outside the City of Cambridge, and over 15% were residents from Peterborough.

A new East Anglia Theatre Touring Consortium has no members from Cambridge.

Creative and cultural GVA represents 9.84% of all GVA in Cambridge. This is greater than the percentage in the wider UK economy (6.9%).

"Another key challenge is getting the balance right between supporting local community based activities, specialist cultural activities, and the facilitation of 'satellite' city-wide events, such as the Cambridge Film Festival or Jazz Festival. Cultural infrastructure alone does not guarantee cultural vitality or high levels of community engagement in the arts. What truly matters is the accessibility and responsiveness of cultural infrastructure to the people it serves."

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service
Cultural Placemaking Strategy
North East Cambridge Area Action Plan
Evidence Base, 2020

"Cambridge has got so much potential. All the right ingredients! But somehow it is flat. It could do so much more."

"There are so many conversations that aren't even starting because of these layers of power, history, and imagination in this city."

"Cambridge is a city with a globally-recognised name that is run like a market town."

"We are a city of failure resilience or could be. Cambridge is seen as a high achieving place, and it is academically. But what if it had a thriving culture alongside high achieving academics? What if the wellbeing of its citizens was as valuable as its academic excellence, what if the two fed each other?"

"There is a little bit of the sum always being less than the parts in Cambridge... [with] ... people not quite knowing how to take something forward."

QUESTIONS / PROVOCATIONS

How can we best join up and work together more effectively, help the city expand what it has to offer – culturally and creatively?

What do you see as the biggest collaboration opportunities in Cambridge (across disciplines and sectors – artists with researchers; coders with choreographers)?

How might working together allow you to collectively reach into every corner of the community more effectively, sustainably? You can't all be all things to all people – where might it help to build specialisms, networks and expertise?

Who do you most want to partner with outside of the cultural sector, and why?

Who do you most want to partner with outside of Cambridge, and why?

How can the cultural sector become more – or less – 'failure resilient'?

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and Cambridge City Council funding data tells us:

- Museums & cultural venues are the only type of cultural asset which received funding from all three sources, receiving **21%** of the total funding.
- The Museum of Cambridge is the only individual organisation to have received funding from all three sources in the past 5 years.
- Cambridge has a high number of organisations repeatedly receiving funding from ACE. On average, **68%** of grantees had already received funding in the past five years. The Junction was funded 16 times across all funding streams.
- Organisations based in Cambridge receive **58.5%** of the total funding for Cambridgeshire in 2021-2026, despite only having **21%** of the population.
 - NHLF funding: **12.4%** of regional total – the top region funded by NHLF is South Cambridgeshire District Council
 - ACE funding: **67.2%** of regional total
 - Cambridge City Council Community Grant funding: **20.4%** of regional total

"It has a hyperlocal political landscape. People have fallen out with each other. You know, there are tensions here, there are tensions there."

"There is zero obligation at the moment for any of us to ever work together."

"Cambridge City Council is doing what it can with what it has got. But the institution simply does not have the resources to compose and deliver a cultural strategy one would expect from a globally famous city."

"There's a huge collective action problem where everyone else is looking to other people to show leadership."

"A lot of Cambridge happens behind closed doors."

"We need artist representatives on local authority panels and councils. Artists can offer such a breadth of skill to council planning and governance."

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QUESTIONS / PROVOCATIONS

How would we know when Cambridge has become a truly thriving cultural & creative place? What would be the key outcomes?

What needs to change to open things up more, create more opportunities?

What needs to happen so can we move beyond historic tensions, disconnections & weak partnerships? What relationships need to be built?

Are there – and do there need to be – new models of 'cultural democracy' that can be distinctively built in Cambridge?

What do we want some of the key partners (universities; city council; cultural organisations; businesses) to do more of, and less of?

"Extractive" – why have we heard this word so often in Cambridge? What is meant by this word? Does it mean 'transactional'? What needs to change in order for more 'additive' working practices to take place?

"I'm going to make Cambridge cool." Quoting Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester. Why does Cambridge need Andy Burnham to do this? (Why) can Cambridge not do it for itself?

INVESTMENT READINESS

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Corridors & Partnerships: a 'Tech Corridor' with Norwich, a 'Growth Corridor' with Oxford, a 'Creative Cluster' with Huntingdon and Bedford, an 'Innovation Partnership' with Manchester.

Cambridge is the UK's most innovation intensive city.

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/news/cambridge-is-the-uks-most-innovation-intensive-city-says-report-0>

Cambridge has 9,575 employees in the creative and cultural sectors (8.25%). This is much higher than across the East of England as whole (3.41%) and also in England (5.05%).

"It has absolutely been a failure of everyone in the city to come up with anything strategic and joined-up."

"[Artists] are always just directed to the Arts Council for funding, and the Arts Council has no funding - and if you live in Cambridge, you won't get it most likely as you have the wrong postcode. So what is the alternative? Can someone else step in where the Arts Council cannot?"

"Cambridge should act as a connected city built on relationships."

"What's the end game of all this work? It should be to create a community which recognises itself as a community—and has the desire to create a unified narrative, in the same way 'Innovate Cambridge' has done on innovation."

"The notion of excellence, that of course Cambridge is incredibly invested in, is not reflected in the cultural provision and in the level of ambition that we could have, as a city and as a region."

*"We want our studio to become a **cultural lab**, not just a space for basic craft workshops."*

*"A space to **fail fast** - that is what university excellence offers scientists, researchers etc. what if that space was offered to artists too? A space to fail fast, learn from that and move forwards."*

QUESTIONS / PROVOCATIONS

What does 'investment ready' mean for your organisation, and what help is needed?

Who are the exemplars of good practice, locally and beyond?

Who will support upskilling and investment in people, organisations, and programs, and how?

With declining ACE investment, who else will invest? How will they be managed, and is a radical approach to funding (public, corporate, philanthropic) needed?

Is there a case for shared investment funds (e.g. CPCA, Cambridgeshire County Council, Community Foundation, VCSE, Innovate Cambridge, Section 106, ACE)?

How do we overcome structural barriers that prevent the cultural sector from benefiting from Cambridge's innovation & growth? How do we grow 'connective tissue'?

How can becoming 'investment ready' be achieved with urgency, fostering a 'space to fail fast'?

POPULATION GROWTH

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Metal

43% of young people in Cambridge have not attended a cultural activity in the last year.

Cambridge University Hospitals is working with artists to inform the design of the future Cambridge Cancer Research Hospital. The programme won the 'Best Patient Experience' category at the 2023 Building Better Healthcare Awards.

Cambridge received **£17.89** per head Arts Council England funding in 2024/25, down from the **£26.72** in 2018/19.

This compares to £66.44 per head in Norwich, £27.18 in Ipswich, £10.50 in Luton and £4.84 in Peterborough.

Cambridge is the UK's most unequal city, in terms of income.

"Over the last decade Cambridge has grown faster than any other British city. This both presents an opportunity for the city's cultural scene to develop the customer base, but also a challenge to ensure equal access to the arts for all."

Cambridge City Council Cultural Strategy

"Wouldn't it be great if there was a community that welcomed artists in, instead of setting them all in competition for miniature funding opportunities and work. Greater bonding between people. Less scarcity mindset, less scarcity reality."

"There's no reason why Cambridge can't be a beacon for how we make sure that opportunity is extended to everyone, or how we look at the arts of the future."

"We don't all live in the same cultural space anymore, but programming still caters to the same audiences."

"What if some of the public art money [the Section 106 funding] could go towards sustaining artist communities in place, instead of sculptures, and given a responsibility to make art with that community, that resulted in art outcomes that were visible in the place?"

"Greater Cambridge is approaching the size of Brighton and will be on a par with Leicester, Nottingham and Wakefield by 2031. This population growth has significant future capacity implications for the cultural infrastructure of Greater Cambridge."

Greater Cambridge Cultural Workspace

QUESTIONS / PROVOCATIONS

What do you need to be able to more effectively advocate for arts & culture in supporting the planned population growth — evidence, access, resource, cross-sector working..?

How can you ensure that culture makes a valuable contribution to successful growth? And how can it be achieved at the pace required to keep up?

ACE funding is in real-terms decline and unlikely to rise soon. As Cambridge's population grows faster than anywhere else in the UK, it risks a sharp drop in cultural investment per person. How can we work together to sustain — or even grow — the per-head share?

How will arts and culture ensure that:

- New and existing communities connect positively with each other?
- People enjoy the quality of life in this place?
- People are informed and proud of its stories and achievements?
- We achieve a sense of belonging and shared identity as a city?

Is the closure of so many cultural assets correlation or causation? Why? How could a shared vision or cultural strategy mitigate this in the future?

What will that shared identity look and feel like? What will be the experience of a resident through their engagement with arts and culture?

The upcoming local government reorganisation creates opportunities for joining-up across places and borders. Who, how, what, where? Where could most impact be felt?

D7. Culture place wheel™ – a guide to scoring

Rating	0 – 2	2 – 5	5 – 8	8 – 10
POLICY				
Vision	No shared, coherent vision	Some visions share degrees of ambition and direction, but are not connected	Key stakeholders have aligned visions and cross-reference	Aligned visions inform a place-based vision for culture, networks and key programmes
Leadership	Little to no support, visible or otherwise	Some cultural leaders (or those with the portfolio) active and championing the cultural agenda	Most cultural leaders active – projects, programmes, teams	Multiple leaders active – internal / local authority and external (independent, funded)
Integrated policies	No interest / momentum in developing	Interest in developing aspects, e.g. cultural calendar, skills, shared data, joint marketing	Interested in moving beyond organisational focus to a place-based model	Active in taking a 'smart West Yorkshire' (or Kirklees) approach to place-making through culture
Investment	No budget or accessible resource	Some budget / resource available	Plenty of budget / resource for specific, defined cultural projects	Multi-year budget / resource available (local, audience, organisational, partnership based)
PEOPLE				
Co-design & co-production culture	No open online / collaborative resource, or rarely connect to it (local, regional)	Resource support limited, e.g. information / content, programme strands	Resource helps sustain variety of cultural activity; some link to place partners inc. local authorities	Internal / networked teams are interdisciplinary: within and connected to their places and partners
People learning & skills	No access to creative skills or knowledge	Access to few people with some skills & knowledge	Access to wide range of skills & knowledge / skills development in Kirklees	We openly share and develop skills & knowledge across culture locally / regionally

Communities & local engagement	Locals are socially, culturally & digitally isolated; little / damaged sense of community	Some are digitally and socially engaged through culture but many excluded	Lots of groups but modest collaboration or impact on places through culture	Local-international groups actively involved in co-creation to drive place-based programmes
Target stakeholders	Community, public & private sector not mapped	Stakeholder mapped but not well communicated with	Some engaged networking & comms, informing strategy / delivery to a degree; accessible to some	Fully engaged cross-sector stakeholder engagement to support culture
PLACE				
Narrative & messaging	Identity of places (villages, towns, cities, boroughs, region) not transferred across all channels	Identity limited to few websites / posts. Residents rarely engaged, certainly not year-round	'Cultural place' identity visible online / offline. Good external perceptions. Locals frequently engaged	'Cultural place' offer clear – anchored in place. Visitors and locals dynamically engaged. Co-create narrative.
Uses & activities	Little to no creative, community offerings or activity, bar social media, some ad hoc provision	Some public online and community offerings but hard to access / confusing / partial	Good offers (e.g. via web, social). Harder for smaller cultural players to build support; to 'own' provision	Great use of diverse programmed offer for various groups. Lots of easily accessible activity
Infrastructure – access & linkages	Poor transport, information and digital infrastructure. Generally isolated	Patchy transport / infrastructure. Limited digital device access / connectivity	Transport / access generally good but not for all. Cultural hubs exist to connect / engage digitally	Good, affordable transport / access; online access. Good mix of networks / hubs based on user need
Infrastructure – assets	Poor, disconnected portfolio of 'place-making' cultural assets: online, venue, programme	Some areas of depth, e.g. landscape-inspired, heritage, music, but with limited impact	Strength in numerous areas that can, but don't currently, help to shape wider place-making	Connected, strong creative / cultural asset base enabling impacts, partnerships & investment

PARTNERSHIPS				
Professional communities	People professionally isolated; no sense of cross-function working	Some people / teams engage with others; many excluded	Lots of area of practice, but not cross-functional / organisational or place-based engagement	Local-international groups from varied sectors actively co-create programmes and opportunities
Engaged stakeholders	No community, corporate engagement with culture in 'place'	Some self-serving collaboration across limited groups / networks / places	Lots of collaboration across stakeholders. Mainly project funded	Community / key agency collaboration. Shared resources & skills. Not project funding reliant
Political & policy champions	No policymaker or political engagement with culture in 'place'	Some self-serving collaboration across limited senior and funded networks	Lots of collaboration across policymakers and political leadership. Mainly project funded	Mature, integrated political collaboration. Shared resources & skills. Strategy, not project-driven
Education & learning	Institutions / groups siloed: little community / business partnerships	Limited relationships. No strategy; few project deliverables	Broad relationships. Outputs based on user needs alongside (funded) programme goals and criteria	Broad / deep collaboration across institutions. Problem-solving changemakers are evident.
PLATFORMS				
Digital capacity & activity	Know nothing of initiatives / plans, education partnerships, 'smart' / data-led programmes	Aware of some initiatives. Take part as oversight, observer or resident	Involved in some initiatives but rarely place-making linked. Harder to get voice heard	Diverse part of plans. Sector engagement voices aspirations & solutions. Place-based support
Digital & system tech	No visible shared digital or systemic tech or tools	Use some basic tech but hard-to-use digital or systemic tools	Confidently use various digital or systemic tools and tech	Very supported & involved in adopting right tech and systems for right needs; constant feedback
Data insight & sharing	No awareness of transformational potential of data / data-led strategic (place) partnerships	Data used by a few select departments / programmes but it's basic and siloed	Events / cultural organisations and places use / share data widely, with good governance	Good practice data sharing across place stakeholders normal and hardwired into planning

Sharing platforms	No awareness of transformational potential of platforms	Platforms used by few select teams in basic and/or siloed way	Platforms used widely within organisations and some places. Shared apps / services well-managed	Shared platforms created a place apps / services ecosystem; enables quick, effective, accessible use
PRODUCT / MARKET				
End user experience	Online and physical experience disconnected, partial, hard to find, harder to use. No link to place	User experience fairly accessible and usable, but not fully integrated, especially online	Online / offline experience present to a good degree and as singular offer for all audiences	Online / offline experience co-developed using data, research and place-based evaluation
Marketing communications	Content is weak / out-of-date, big gaps in comms by target audience; ad hoc, generic marketing	A few examples of targeted marcomms activity, but not place integrated / shared (content)	Targeted campaigns. Shared content used. Less effective data capture, analysis, digital marketing	Place-led, data-driven place marketing across all levels and markets for events and as sector offer
Place branding	No discussion or understanding of value of a shared place brand	Basic place promotional guidelines in place; used by lead agencies / local authorities only	Place marketing active, but lacking strategic step-change in working practice (use of data, co-design)	Active, well-managed place brand, driving shared decision-making and investment, informed by data
Market research & evaluation	No awareness of market trends & behaviour, or value to place partnerships	Primary research insight used by a few select teams / programmes but it's basic and siloed	Organisations and places commission new research; share findings through place networks	Market research & evaluation informs place and influences regional investment across the sector

D8. Global models & features that Cambridge could adopt

A. GLOBAL MODELS CAMBRIDGE MIGHT LEARN FROM

1. Montréal – Quartier des spectacles (QDS)



Essentials

- 1 km² cultural district in downtown Montréal hosting 40+ festivals & events a year, run by an independent ****Quartier des spectacles Partnership**** (non-profit, 85+ members). ([OECD][1])
- Mandated to animate public space as ‘digital lab’, curate lighting / media infrastructure, coordinate programming and branding for the district. ([OECD][1])

How it works – governance

- Non-profit partnership with a board drawn from city, cultural institutions, businesses and residents; formal

agreement with the City. ([House of Commons of Canada][2])

- Public realm as platform: Permanent digital and lighting infrastructure used as a “lab” for interactive art and urban tech. ([gcdn.net][3])
- Programming: Year-round free and low-cost events, festivals and installations, coordinated centrally.
- Networks: Active in the Global Cultural Districts Network (GCDN), using international peer learning. ([QDSinternational][4])

Outcomes

- Strong city branding as a “cultural metropolis”; increased footfall, tourism and clustering of creative organisations. ([gcdn.net][3])
- Public spaces used as everyday civic “living rooms”, improving perceived safety and evening economy.

Possible features for Cambridge

Create a ‘not-for-profit’ “Cambridge Cultural Innovation Partnership” with a mandate for:

- Coordinated cultural programming in defined areas, using public spaces as creative testbeds.
- Managing public-space activations and digital infrastructure (projection, AR, data, lighting).
- Joint branding and audience development.

- Use 'public realm as testbed': e.g. Market Square / river corridor as platforms for:
 - University + tech company prototypes (XR, data visualisation, climate tech, mobility).
 - Co-created installations with local cultural orgs and communities.
 - Join global networks (e.g. GCDN / World Cities Culture Forum via partners) to benchmark and learn.

2. Barcelona – 22@ Innovation District



Essentials

- Long-term, planning-led transformation of Poblenou from industrial zone into a 'knowledge and creative economy district', combining ICT firms, media, design, housing, and cultural spaces in one zone. ([UPCommons][5])
- Re-zoned from 22a (industrial) to 22@ ("knowledge") with targeted public investment to catalyse private development. ([PATRIZIA][6])

How it works

- Planning-led model: New zoning, infrastructure, and incentives to attract knowledge-intensive firms and universities. ([UPCommons][5])
- Mixed uses: Offices, housing, universities, heritage buildings and cultural venues in close proximity. ([Architizer][7])

- Creative industries cluster: 100+ creative firms (software, games, mobile, design) with tailored support. ([barcelonactiva.cat][8])

Outcomes

- Significant uplift in jobs, firm formation and property values; strong international reputation as an innovation district. ([UPCommons][5])

Possible features for Cambridge

- Identify: 1–2 priority corridors / precincts** (e.g. Station–City Centre–West Cambridge spine; Biomedical Campus–city link) and treat them as mixed-use innovation precincts where housing, labs, studios, cultural venues and public spaces are intentionally co-located.
- Use planning tools & development agreements to:
 - Lock in affordable creative workspaces and rehearsal / maker space.
 - Secure developer contributions to cultural infrastructure and public realm.
 - Position precincts explicitly as "test grounds" for digital city, climate innovation, mobility, aging-in-place etc., with culture as a core stakeholder, not an add-on.

3. Eindhoven – Brainport Region



Essentials

- Post-industrial repositioning of Eindhoven as “Brainport” – a high-tech and design-led region anchored by TU Eindhoven, Design Academy Eindhoven, and firms like ASML and Philips. ([blogs.encatc.org][9])
- Dutch Design Week (DDW) turns the city into a ‘living lab’ with 2,500+ designers across 100+ venues. ([brainporteindhoven.com][10])

How it works

- Brainport Development: public-private partnership coordinating regional strategy, branding and innovation priorities. ([blogs.encatc.org][9])
- Design as connector: DDW and design labs connect education, companies and city around future challenges (mobility, health, circular economy). ([brainporteindhoven.com][10])
- Corporate co-investment: Major firms invest in wider liveability and talent infrastructure as part of growth strategies.

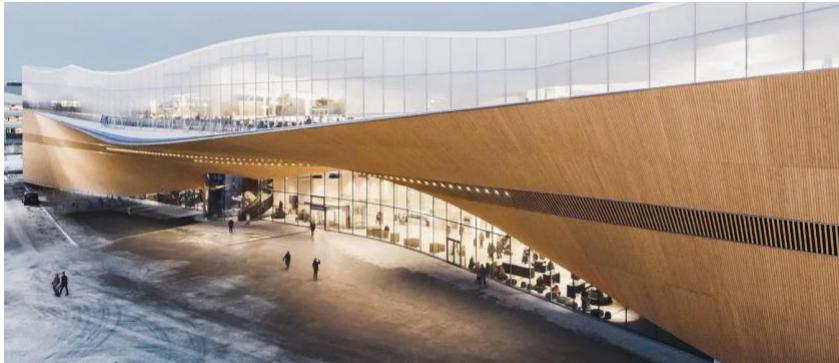
Outcomes

- Very high R&D intensity and patenting; strong talent attraction; design reputation well beyond the Netherlands. ([brainporteindhoven.com][10])

Possible features for Cambridge

- A ‘regional innovation story’ (“Cambridge: where ideas meet people and place”) integrating:
 - World-class research.
 - Cultural & creative strengths.
 - Civic / social innovation ambitions.
- Use festivals (e.g. science, literature, music, craft, design) more deliberately as ‘innovation platforms’:
 - Challenge briefs from companies and the public sector.
 - Student / early-career showcases.
- Create a ‘Cambridge Innovation & Culture Fund’ where corporate anchors (Arm, AstraZeneca, etc.), university, councils and philanthropy co-invest in:
 - Cultural infrastructure and programming.
 - Talent and skills pipelines (esp. under-represented groups).
 - Public-space experiments.

4. Helsinki – Oodi Central Library & design-led city



Essentials

- Oodi: central library positioned as a “living room for the city” – a civic innovation hub with maker spaces, studios, event spaces and co-working. ([Oodi][11])
- Conceived as a national flagship in service design, citizen participation and democratic space. ([Design Helsinki][12])

How it works

- Co-design with citizens: thousands of residents involved in shaping functions and services. ([Design Helsinki][12])
- Multi-use building: reading rooms + fabrication labs + AV studios + cinema + civic meeting rooms in one accessible building. ([Oodi][11])
- Design in government: Helsinki uses design methods across departments; culture and libraries are seen as innovation infrastructure. ([Design Helsinki][12])

Outcomes

- Extremely high visitation; strong role in skills-building (digital, media, maker), inclusion and democratic engagement. ([Culture.eu][13])

Possible features for Cambridge

- Re-imagine a ‘flagship civic building’ (e.g. library or new arts/civic hub) as:
 - Maker & media lab for young people, researchers, communities.
 - Neutral space for cross-sector collaboration and co-design.
 - Embed design and cultural practitioners into city and county problem-solving (transport, climate, health) via: Cultural Residencies in the council, NHS, university institutes; Micro-commissions linked to real service challenges.

5. Melbourne – Melbourne Innovation Districts (MID)



Essentials

- Partnership between City of Melbourne, University of Melbourne and RMIT to create innovation districts mixing research, culture, start-ups and public realm. ([gcdn.net][3])
- Precinct-based testbeds focus on social, digital and environmental innovation; culture and creative industries woven in.

How it works

- Tri-partite governance: formal partnership agreement, shared vision and branding, joint programmes.
- Place-based labs: distinct precincts (city north, etc.) where new ideas are trialled in real streets and spaces.
- Open innovation initiatives: calls, challenges and showcases that bring together universities, businesses, NGOs and artists.

Outcomes

- Increasingly used as a platform for 'inclusive innovation' and international collaboration; aligns university estates strategies with city planning.

Possible features for Cambridge

Formal tri-partite Cambridge City–University–College partnership for one or more innovation precincts.

Clear expectation that every major research theme (AI, health, climate, inequality) has:

- Public-facing cultural / creative programming.
- Citizen and community involvement.
- Shared 'programme office' that brokers collaborations between labs, cultural orgs, businesses, communities.

B. TOWARDS A CAMBRIDGE CULTURAL-INNOVATION DISTRICT (CCID)



Image: Crown Estate. Cambridge Business Park

Purpose

To connect Cambridge's cultural life, research power and innovation economy in specific places where everyone can participate in creating better futures.

Core objectives

- i. Fuse culture and innovation in public spaces, institutions and precincts.
- ii. Generate wider social and economic benefits (skills, wellbeing, inclusion, climate action).
- iii. Provide visible, everyday proof that research and tech are rooted in community and place.

Geography – where is the district?

Options:

- A connected corridor (Station → Hills Road / Trumpington → city centre → West Cambridge)

- A cluster of nodes (Historic Core, CBI, West Cambridge, Biomedical Campus)

Governance Model

- Company Limited by Guarantee or CIO.
- Board with City, County, Universities, Cultural Orgs, Business, Community.
- Ideally, the Board drives a number of distinct working Groups and in time / with funding, a Programme Office.

Legal form: CLG or CIO?

Board (12–15):

- City + County / Combined Authority
- University of Cambridge + ARU
- Cultural sector (3–4)
- Business / innovation (3–4)
- Community seats (2)

Working groups:

- Programme & Place
- Innovation & Research
- Inclusion & Communities
- Investment & Infrastructure

Secretariat:

- Small programme office (Director + 3–5 staff)

Funding Model

- Founding contributions from councils, universities, corporate anchors.
- Programme funding (ACE, Lottery, Innovate UK, philanthropy, social impact investing / venturing).
- Capital via planning obligations.

Programme: ACE, Lottery, UKRI, Innovate UK, philanthropy

Capital: Planning obligations, matched investment

Earned: Events, training, consultancy, licensing/IP

Possible programme architecture

Pillar 1: Public Culture & Everyday Creativity

Pillar 2: Labs & Testbeds

Pillar 3: Skills, Talent & Maker Pipeline

Pillar 4: Communities, Inclusion & Belonging

Pillar 5: Story & Brand

Metrics, impact & learning

Themes:

- Cultural & civic life (participation, diversity, public-space usage).
- Innovation & economy (cross-sector collaborations, prototypes, startups).
- Social value (wellbeing, skills, inclusion).
- Environmental & place outcomes (transport, biodiversity, carbon).

Learning:

- Annual report
- University evaluation partnership

3-Year Roadmap

Year 1:

- Establish partnership
- Define geography
- Quick wins (public-space season, testbed call, maker pilot)

Year 2:

- Scale testbeds
- Launch flagship event
- Secure capital / estate project

Year 3:

- First impact report
- Join global networks
- Refresh strategy

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This report has been produced by CTConsults,
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