

Driving Impact: A Cultural Strategy for West Lindsey



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This document sets out the shared Cultural Strategy of the Council, cultural sector and communities across West Lindsey. It positions culture as a foundation for a thriving, healthy, dynamic and sustainable District where people of all background have access to culture.

It is informed by consultation with the District's cultural and community sector, plus inspired by innovation and good practice across the UK and internationally. Ambitious for West Lindsey, partners are committed to working together to ensure culture and heritage organisations, artists and creative enterprises, have the capacity, skills and resources to drive impact and make a positive and sustainable difference.

As we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic and foster opportunities for long-term, sustainable renewal, we are all reappraising what we value, what matters and what can shape a positive future. This includes the role and value proposition of culture.

Consultation for this strategy has exposed a growing awareness of and commitment to culture as a driver of impact – whether for the delivery of the District's Corporate Plan or for a wider set of priority agendas held by the Council, partner organisations and local communities. But consultation has also shed light on the fragility of the cultural sector, which receives very limited funding and struggles to build the capacity and reach seen elsewhere.

Unlike other parts of Lincolnshire such as North East Lincolnshire, East Lindsey and Boston, the cultural sector in West Lindsey has not yet attracted significant investment capable of delivering step-change in impact. In part, this is because culture has not been positioned as a provider of value across key strategic priorities and is viewed by some as a cost rather than something that provides a strategic return on investment in terms of the value it generates to wellbeing, economy and quality of place.

This has led to a particularly fragile cultural sector, with limited capacity to deliver strategic impact. Cultural organisations, where they exist, are very small and mostly volunteer-led, cultural infrastructure is in need of modernisation and renewal, and audiences are having to travel to access a wider variety of high-quality cultural provision.

As a consequence, the District has missed out on opportunities to raise additional funds for culture – such as through Arts Council England – where applications for project funding are much lower than other parts of rural England and where the absence of a National Portfolio Organisation is limiting sector development.

In turn, this means West Lindsey is not yet recognised as a place of cultural vitality and culture is not positioned to the heart of social and wellbeing provision or as a driver of the visitor economy.

However, the situation is changing. Investment via the Levelling-up Programme, Shared Prosperity Fund, and more, is bringing new opportunities to the District, with culture a key part of the solution for flourishing town centres. Growing agendas such as heritage renewal, green infrastructure, active travel, wellbeing and pride in place, are together part of a wider process of civic renewal as we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Culture has an increasingly visible role to play in this renewal process – as witnessed in the ongoing transformation of Gainsborough town centre and cultural projects and activities in Caistor, Market Rasen and villages across the District.

There is also a sense of growing momentum, with real progress made in recent years to energise the cultural sector in West Lindsey. This is evidenced in:

- Over 200 events annually across the District, bringing people together through culture.
- Investment through the Cultural Reserve in a Cultural Events and Marketing Officer.
- The growth of festivals such as Mayflower 400 and Illuminate which connect local communities to national and international communities; and the Revive Festival, delivered through a partnership with SO Festival, bringing international performers to Gainsborough.
- The expanding touring programmes from Trinity Arts Centre and others, reaching new audiences across the District.
- The continuing changes and innovation in programming at places like X-Church, Caistor Arts Centre, The Broadbent Theatre and Market Rasen Village Hall.
- The ambitions for new cultural infrastructure such as a new cinema in Gainsborough and the District Council's proposed purchase of RAF Scampton and investment in aviation heritage, business, aerospace, space and aviation technology and education opportunities on the 800-acre site.
- Growing political commitment - as evidenced through the work of the Leisure, Culture, Events and Tourism working group of local councillors.

It is clear that West Lindsey has some incredible cultural assets to build from. This includes historic houses, churches and industrial heritage; aviation heritage; the iron age archaeology of the Lower Witham Valley; and industrial and natural heritage of the Trent Valley. This includes an active volunteer community which, given the right enabling environment, can spring to life in exciting ways. This includes key facilities and hubs

for culture, such as school, village halls, libraries, markets, and vital infrastructure such as Trinity Arts Centre and Caistor Arts and Heritage Centre. And this includes the talent and resourcefulness of artists, creative enterprises and festival producers who see the opportunity to make West Lindsey their home.

This Cultural Strategy builds from these assets and feeds from a renewed commitment to culture to provide structure and focus for the District Council, working in partnership, to catalyse an uplift in the role, capacity and impact of culture across West Lindsey. This includes an ambition to:

- Growing grass roots community cultural capacity; building the legacy of or community champions and ensuring long term sustainability.
- Position culture to the heart of great places: re-imagined town centres, dynamic heritage and clear and navigable itineraries and programmes for cultural participation.
- Support culture as a foundation for the District's wellbeing, including health, confidence and quality of life.
- Champion the talent of local communities, facilitating opportunities to create and make new culture, access skills and employment in the creative industries, and to present and tour new work across the arts.

This ambition can be delivered with new investment and dedicated capacity to drive culture-led impact. It is recommended that a new Community Cultural Officer post be introduced, that cultural partnership is supported through a new Cultural Providers Network, that marketing and programming are more effectively coordinated, that capacity and skills support is offered to key organisations and that, over three years, the District can attract NPO investment from Arts Council England as part of a range of new incoming investment. In West Lindsey, the opportunity over the next 5-10 years is to position culture as a foundation to the District's long-term, sustainable renewal. This Cultural Strategy sets out priority themes, actions and partnership considerations to deliver on this opportunity.

What do we mean by culture?

Culture is our lives, community and environment. It is the way we see ourselves and our place in the world. It is where we live, who we are and how we learn. It is how we live our lives. It is how we dress, communicate, eat and drink. It is how we build and decorate our homes. It is how we express ourselves – from music to sport. It is how we design and inhabit our streets and open spaces. It is what we do and why we do it.

Culture is heritage. It is our memories and stories, lived through our friends and relatives here and elsewhere. It is what we imagine ourselves to be. It is our possessions and artefacts. It is the built and natural landscape. It is our story and how we re-tell it. It is who we were and who we are becoming.

Culture is museums, galleries, cinemas, music venues, theatres, libraries, festivals and events. It is how we record, collect, curate and present our identities and how we understand others' identities. It is how we preserve and bring to life our stories. It is how we express our world to others. It is about the conscious experience of culture.

Culture is practice. It is the applied imagination of artists, writers and performers. It is the act of making – ideas, text, code, objects, paintings, sound and vision. It is performance. It is active participation. It is innovation and renewal.

Culture is industry. It is the economic value generated by culture. It is the jobs and revenue. It is the added value – to innovation, productivity and brand. It is the creative and digital businesses.

Culture is our shared future(s) It is how we connect and exchange. It is what we have in common and how we differ. It is our neighbourhood, ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, religion, values and politics.



A Vision for Culture

In West Lindsey, culture is central to our communities, economy, wellbeing and distinctiveness. It drives positive impact, with thriving, sustainable cultural activities improving the lives of our communities and attracting investment and visitors.

Through collaboration with the cultural sector, supporting and investing in culture across the Council and with a wider partnership that has a shared ambition for West Lindsey.

With a district-wide approach that focuses on the distinctive needs and opportunities of different communities while forging shared activities.

By embracing change, supporting people to fulfil their potential, giving hope and enhancing quality of life, providing routes into employment in an inclusive economy, committed to tackling the climate emergency.

For everyone, with everyone.



Four Priority Themes for Culture in West Lindsey

This Cultural Strategy is both urgent and it re-frames the role of culture for the long-term. It works for now and the bigger picture. The Covid-19 pandemic has brutally exposed fragility in every area of society, causing immense suffering and exacerbating social and economic fragility. We need a strong and inclusive approach to cultural sector development for our sustainable renewal.

For West Lindsey, there are 4 strategic themes from which the strategy will grow into action.

Theme 1 - Grassroots Culture

Develop the 'West Lindsey Way' for community led cultural development by building on existing assets and practices in order to develop a strong, sustainable network of community led cultural provision.

Theme 2 - Great Places:

Culture as a foundation to sustainable place-making: vibrant, inclusive and distinctive town centres and villages, including new developments. Access to cultural infrastructure and programming across the District.

Theme 3 - Community Wellbeing:

Culture as a foundation to a healthier, happier District, enhancing quality of life and boosting pride and confidence. Access to culture as part of wellbeing provision and rise in everyday cultural activities.

Theme 4 - Dynamic Talent and Practice:

Local talent championed to create, make and experience culture across all art forms. Innovative programming and touring provides opportunities for talent to work in the District and build sustainable organisations and enterprises.

These themes are expanded upon with priority actions on pages 28 to 35.

Cross-cutting Priorities:

- Culture-led innovation to face up to climate emergency
- New types of strategic partnership underpinned by culture
- Collaborative programming and delivery
- Sustainable investment in a portfolio of cultural infrastructure and organisations
- Heritage assets and parks modelled as platforms and hubs for culture
- District-wide coordination with tailored approaches to different places



In a time of profound transformation, conversations with cultural organisations, community groups and Council officers have urged a focus on how culture makes a difference to people's lives. This is based on the acknowledgement that working to improve individual wellbeing, community resilience, social equity and environmental responsibility cannot happen in isolation.

Culture has a unique power in making the connection between individuals, communities, social structures and the environment. Culture gives us the resources to thrive, to participate in civic life, to explore new creative connections, to feel active and energised. A strong, dynamic, confident cultural sector can be a foundation for the sustainable renewal of this unique District of Lincolnshire, which itself is made up of multiple communities across very different neighbourhoods.

This West Lindsey Cultural Strategy sets out the 10-year ambitions and a 3-year action plan that embeds culture as a strategic approach for a thriving, sustainable and healthy District. It establishes a platform to drive impact through culture, within the ambitious plans for town centre renewal, revitalised sport, leisure and tourism offers, and a diverse and inclusive economy.

Predominantly a rural district, West Lindsey, combines an outstanding natural environment with historic villages and the vibrant market towns of Gainsborough, Market Rasen and Caistor. The District is situated in close proximity to the City of Lincoln, is part of the area of outstanding natural beauty, the Lincolnshire Wolds to the east, and has a boundary with Nottinghamshire across the Trent to the west.

West Lindsey enjoys strong economic ties and good connectivity to the North and the Humber Bank and forms an economic corridor to the west towards the Sheffield City Region. Covering an area of 115,773 hectares and with a population of 95,200 (2021), it is one of the most sparsely populated areas in England. However, the 2021 census showed the population was growing faster than many areas.



Levelling-Up and Inclusive Growth:

The wider strategic context for this Cultural Strategy includes the heightened national focus on investing in areas which have missed out on the economic growth that other more prosperous areas have enjoyed.

For West Lindsey this has already translated into £10 million of investment into new public realm, enhanced retail spaces and a cinema in Gainsborough, building on the £3 million Heritage Masterplan funded by the National Lottery Heritage Funded Townscape Heritage Initiative.

£3.5 million has also been secured from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for the whole District for capacity building for community groups, supporting cultural activity and improvements in the built and natural landscape.

The [West Lindsey Economic Growth and Regeneration Strategy \(2014-2034\)](#) sets out an ambition for a resilient and diverse rural district which has embraced sustainable growth whilst retaining its quality, heritage and character for the benefit of all. This includes priorities for a strong visitor economy with an extensive leisure and cultural offer which complements the natural environment and built character of the area, a thriving micro business sector and a skilled and productive workforce, with local jobs and training options.

This is underpinned by the Corporate Plan 2023-2027 priorities for:

- People: focusing on leisure (and culture), health and wellbeing, skills, and vulnerable groups and communities
- Places: focusing on economic growth, external Investment, social regeneration, infrastructure, enhanced environment

The [West Lindsey Visitor Economy Strategy and Action Plan \(2022-2025\)](#) is about adding value and stimulating the growth and development of the visitor economy. A key theme of the Strategy is Partnership and Collaboration involving businesses and communities in product development, visitor experience, marketing and promotion.

Partnerships across administrative boundaries are central to the Strategy with Destination Lincolnshire and Visit Lincoln primary partners. Three 'spatial brands' have been defined: Gainsborough, Lincoln City Fringe and Lincolnshire Wolds.

Building on the Visitor Economy Strategy, a new guide to West Lindsey's most treasured church buildings has been published in partnership with Destination Lincolnshire and launched alongside the District's highly successful Church Festival. It focuses on the District Council's three core visitor brands: 'Beyond Lincoln', 'Discover Gainsborough', and 'Lincolnshire Wolds', encouraging people to explore the wider area when visiting the churches.



Greater Lincolnshire – Countywide Partnership and Exchange Opportunities:

Culture has become a significant strategic priority for Districts across Lincolnshire. For example, working together, East Lindsey, Boston and South Holland have attracted over £5m of investment in dedicated culture-led regeneration and place-making.

This includes investment from Arts Council England to establish a new National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) in the District to drive-up cultural capacity and catalyse impact across a range of social, cultural and economic outcomes.

It also includes new capital funding via Arts Council England's Cultural Development Fund, which will see ambitious plans to re-imagine Skegness pier, surrounding public realm, and the Embassy Theatre as a major international cultural hub. This investment followed an intensive process of strategic development and capacity-building where culture was positioned as a foundation to the area's renewal.

West Lindsey can both learn from and be inspired by progress made elsewhere, and it can build effective cultural partnerships to share success and support the development of culture in West Lindsey.

As highlighted above, there is already strong partnerships around tourism. More recently a partnership has developed with Magna Vitae, the charitable Trust for Leisure and Culture for East Lindsey. This will see the So Festival international street festival, an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation managed by Magna Vitae, extended to Gainsborough for the first time in June 2023 through the Revive festival. This paves the way for stronger strategic partnership activities – as outlined in the Action Plan for this Cultural Strategy.

The University of Lincoln is increasingly operating as an anchor and catalyst of civic renewal, working in the City of Lincoln and other parts of the County to drive culture-led change.

In 2019, the Creative Lincolnshire Project, led by the University of Lincoln and local partners including the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) and the County Council, identified priorities for investment and support to drive inclusive growth through culture.

Many of its findings are relevant to this West Lindsey Cultural Strategy – not least the overall finding:

“Lincolnshire has emergent, but undeveloped, cultural and creative industries and ecology. The County has not significantly benefitted from the very high growth of the creative and cultural industries nationally and internationally and lacks the hubs and associated agglomeration effects seen elsewhere. The quality of place, access to talent, relatively low cost of living, and strong local culture, all point to the potential of establishing a high growth and high value creative and cultural economy.”

The University of Lincoln has continued to build on this work. Their Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategic Plan 2022-2027 sets out their ambitions for the University to be a hub for partnership, working across the region and beyond, to develop the local cultural ecology, creative and heritage industries, contributing to their future success. This includes opportunities to build dedicated activities in West Lindsey, with particular interest in a re-imagined Trinity Arts Centre.

Driving Impact Across Strategic Areas:

Culture can also drive impact across other key strategies in West Lindsey, including:

- Emerging Health and Wellbeing Strategy is of direct relevance to the Cultural Strategy, with culture driving health outcomes. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing report found that culture can help meet challenges in health and social care around ageing, loneliness, long-term conditions and mental health. It also found that culture can help save the care sector money. Culture can also be a vector for a broader set of wellbeing outcomes, including pride in place, community cohesion, and participation in social, learning and personal development activities.
- The Sustainable Environment Strategy can have a strong cultural dimension given the proven role of artists and cultural organisations in building environmental literacy and responsibility through their work in public engagement; through innovation in new sustainable practices in art and design; and by nurturing local cultural provision so people can access activities without significant travel.
- Leisure, where there is a clear overlap, given the that for many, culture is a leisure pursuit and that leisure facilities often provide space for cultural activities. Dedicated spaces which support cultural practice are being introduced in many places across the UK and internationally (e.g., leisure centres also providing facilities as dance studios or as hubs for theatre and live music).



Arts Council England - Support for Priority Places:

Arts Council England's 10-year Strategy, Let's Create, and its Delivery Plan for 2021-2024, set out priorities for future work which will help drive the impact that culture can deliver across the country. Through a collaborative approach with co-investors such as National Lottery Heritage Fund, there is a renewed commitment to a place-based approach.

For Arts Council England this includes a focus on Priority Places - those with low levels of cultural engagement and investment; and 109 Levelling Up for Culture Places which includes West Lindsey and neighbouring Bassetlaw, East Lindsey, North Kesteven, North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire.

Neighbouring districts have already benefitted from the 'levelling up' approach to investment with East Lindsey District Council securing a three-years ACE National Portfolio Organisations (NPO) funding through the partnership bid with Boston and South Holland. Magna Vitae has secured an uplift in their NPO funding for the So Festival and have also secured Cultural Development funding for the Embassy Theatre Skegness.

The Culture House Grimsby also became a NPO for the first time in 2023 and North Lincolnshire Visual Arts Centre received a 355% uplift in funding from the previous 3 year-round. So, there is real opportunity for West Lindsey to build a long-term strategic partnership with Arts Council England to drive culture-led renewal in the District.

The three outcomes set out by Arts Council England in their Let's Create strategy provide a good framework for prioritising investment and support for West Lindsey.

They also set out the types of development that need to be put in place to strengthen any future bid to join the Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation cohort in 2026 and secure other cultural project and development funding.

The three outcomes are as follows:

1. Creative People:

More opportunities for people of all backgrounds to participate and be creative. For West Lindsey, this will be championed through the growing cultural offer across the whole District and through the Culture can also be a vector for a broader set of wellbeing outcomes, including pride in place, community cohesion, and participation in social, learning and personal development activities. This connects all three themes of this Cultural Strategy.

2. Cultural Communities:

Investment in cultural activities and in arts organisations, museums and libraries to help improve lives, regenerate neighbourhoods, support local economies, attract visitors and bring people together. For West Lindsey this will be championed through the Great Places and Community Wellbeing themes.

3. A Creative and Cultural Country:

To achieve the first two Outcomes, a professional cultural sector that generates new ideas, works easily and effectively with others, and is adept at developing diverse talent from every community, is needed. For West Lindsey, this will be achieved through the capacity building of the sector, work with partner organisations and engagement with all communities - threads running throughout this Cultural Strategy.

Culture in West Lindsey: An Asset-based Approach

This Cultural Strategy works to maximise use of current and planned cultural assets and to introduce opportunities for culture to drive impact across major strategic priorities for the District Council and partners.

Culture can play a formative role in supporting the District's long-term development ambitions. But to reach this position will require considerable innovation in the ways current assets are modelled and utilised and a step change in ambition for the role of culture overall.

There are three main types of cultural asset which require renewal and innovation, as well as an uplift in capacity. These will feature in the priority actions for this Cultural Strategy, and each relates to its three themes: great places, community wellbeing, dynamic talent and practice.



Building-based:

Those facilities which operate as local hubs, supporting community participation in culture, nurturing new cultural practice and offering safe spaces for exchange. This includes libraries, leisure facilities, heritage buildings, schools, community centres, village halls, and dedicated cultural spaces such as arts centres and museums. In West Lindsey, such spaces are vital to cultural programming.

The Challenge:

Many buildings are in need of repair and struggle to generate a sustainable income. There is also a relative lack of shared or coordinated cultural programming across venues and little cross-over between local audiences.

Plus, key assets (notably Trinity Arts Centre) fall short of their potential as catalysts of cultural production and programming which goes beyond the building into community settings (e.g., other spaces) across the District.

Opportunities:

- To boost the capacity and reach of Trinity Arts Centre by extending Trinity on Tour (to coordinate programming across the District; and to grow a hub of new cultural practice, with a medium-term priority to grow a local theatre company(ies), build partnership with University of Lincoln for a new testbed for cultural prescribing and social engagement.
- To build a network of cultural provider spaces across the District where professional cultural work can be programmed as part of a coordinated offer. This can be supported by a capital renewal process.
- To introduce new cultural activities into town centres with a focus on old retail – e.g., trial an artist in residency model or creative space in Gainsborough Town Centre.

- To position cultural use to the heart of new developments and as part of the strategic solution for repurposing heritage assets – with a particular opportunity to identify spaces for cultural activity in the long-term future of Scampton and as part of a master-planning opportunity for Hemswell Cliff (in partnership with private sector partners).

Inspired by Landscape:

The urban and rural landscape, including the public realm, parks and gardens, blue infrastructure; (e.g., rivers), walkways and transport infrastructure. These 'every day spaces' are cultural assets. They can be utilised to develop, programme and present culture – e.g., festivals, events and public art. They are also vital resources for cultural organisations and practitioners – providing inspiration for new cultural work as well as barriers to its development.

The Challenge:

the landscape of West Lindsey has not been holistically conceptualised as a cultural resource, with sporadic interventions such as public art commissions, weak signposting of cultural assets and a still emergent approach to cultural itineraries.

Specific assets such as parks and public spaces do not cater effectively for a range of cultural uses (e.g., the market squares, parks and gardens). Transport connections make travel between cultural assets costly and challenging. The role of art in enhancing the public realm and supporting wider agendas such as traffic calming is under-explored.

Opportunities:

- To re-think town centres through a cultural lens – e.g., exploring how they can operate as hubs for artistic production, as more efficient platforms for events, and as zones of experimentation – e.g., use of meanwhile spaces for culture; or use of digital technology to reanimate heritage assets.

- To develop signage and itineraries which link cultural assets, and which engage artists to support the design of itineraries in heritage, environment and tourism.
- To align with the new 'Heritage 2033' 10-year Strategy of the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support culture's role in place-making – with a focus on inclusion, access and participation; protecting the environment; saving heritage (finding cultural uses); and building organisational capacity (for cultural and heritage organisations).



People-centred:

Local communities and creative talent living and working in the District. This includes professional artists, creative entrepreneurs, focusing on increasing levels of cultural access and participation (including a focus on diverse communities, older people, young people and people with disabilities), supporting talent to develop specific cultural skills (e.g., for different art forms and in technology and backstage skills), securing organisational resilience, and growing and diversifying cultural programming in events, festivals and everyday cultural practices.

Plus, focusing in building cultural excellence and innovation – through homegrown talent and via partnership across the county, nationally and internationally.

The Challenge:

Although some local people are very involved in cultural activities, most people have relatively low levels of access to and participation in culture. This is a particular challenge for people with barriers to mobility, post-16 young people, and for people with limited time and spending power (e.g., people with more than one job, working on low income and relying on benefits).

There is also a lack of dedicated cultural provision to tackle specific communities or people with particular needs – e.g., relating to a range of health conditions, to ageing, and to tackle loneliness or confidence issues. Plus, there are very limited opportunities to develop new skills across the cultural and creative industries and to develop sustainable careers while based in the District.

This includes low levels of capacity, experience and expertise in key areas of cultural provision, including fund-raising, marketing and digital skills in the voluntary sector.

Opportunities:

- Build a dedicated cultural development resource / role which is directly responsible for culture-led transformation across the District. This will include a leadership role, championing the role of culture and ensuring it is central to wider strategic delivery; and an intermediary role, joining the dots across the cultural sector and collaborating with partners outside West Lindsey to attract great culture, build local capacity and nurture local hubs of cultural innovation and practice.
- Boost marketing of cultural activities – including a central platform and coordinated programming and promotion. Plus establish dedicated seasons and events for cultural touring – e.g., via festivals and through an expanded Trinity on Tour.
- Trial activities in cultural prescribing, connecting existing good practice (e.g., X-Church) and developing a dedicated programme of tailored approaches that deliver impact for priority agendas in health (e.g., ageing well, mental health and loneliness).
- Validate and promote opportunities to develop careers in the cultural and creative industries sector – in partnership with skills and education providers.
- Boost volunteering through coordinated skills and capacity-building activities linked to festivals and events.
- Build skills, confidence and capacity for voluntary-led organisations to support their resilience and growth.

This asset-based approach will enable partners to develop a tailored approach which builds from particular strengths, attends to a range of challenges and delivers opportunities which are distinctive to West Lindsey. The following page presents a sample 'aerial view' of cultural assets across the District. It is followed by a re-introduction to the three themes of this Cultural Strategy, which provide the architecture for an Action Plan for Years 1-3.

Arts Venues

Trinity Arts Centre:

Council owned 200 seat theatre in the South West Ward in Gainsborough offering a variety of performances, film screenings and events. Opportunity to grow its role as a hub which supports cultural development across the District.

X Church:

Run by Slumgothic, hosting a variety of artistic events and exhibitions, youth programmes and local groups such as Gainsborough Crisis, Action Team, martial arts groups and the NHS.

Kings Theatre:

Restored by private investor Lee Fox with the intention of using it for shows, local events and local groups.

Caistor Arts and Heritage Centre:

Volunteer led, consisting of a café, local history displays, a gallery and a public library. They also host a variety of events.

Broadbent Theatre:

Community run theatre set in a converted methodist chapel in Wickenby and home of the Lindsey Rural Players.

Heritage

Gainsborough Old Hall (English Heritage):

Medieval manor house over 500 years old and one of West Lindsey's key heritage attractions.

Gainsborough Heritage Centre:

With a goal to make the town's history and heritage accessible, it houses a research library, gift shop, tearoom, and permanent exhibitions.

Old Nick Theatre and Museum:

An award-winning amateur theatre and home to Gainsborough Theatre Company.
Also, home to The Police Museum.

Broadcast Museum Hemswell Cliff:

Housing a collection of historic broadcast equipment. Run by the Broadcast Engineering Conservation Group. Potential to develop as a visitor attraction as part of a re-imagined Hemswell Cliff.

Market Towns:

Home to three notable street markets in Gainsborough, Market Rasen and Caistor, forming a central feature of their public realm environment and cultural identity.

Churches:

A number of churches across the district full of history, heritage and also used as community spaces and for festivals and events.

Festivals and Events

Illuminate Festival:

Providing high-quality cultural activity over several years, building from Mayflower 400, and producing a range of artistic outputs, engendering an interest in local history and creating pride of place.

Trinity on Tour:

Bringing accessible theatre and entertainment across the district by bringing high quality live performances to small rural venues.

West Lindsey Churches Festival:

Over 90 churches across the district open their doors to share their rich history and put on a series of events.

Increasing Diversity:

Though relatively small in number, other faith groups in the District celebrate religious and cultural events including Eid and Diwali.

Other Events:

There are over 200 festivals and events taking place across the district each year. Other notable events include the Lincolnshire Wolds Walking Festival and Lincolnshire Wolds Outdoor Festival.

Other Event Spaces

Lincolnshire Showground:

Boasting nearly 300 acres of multifunctional space the showground has a varied events programme as well as a year-round education programme.

Market Rasen Racecourse:

Part of The Jockey Club, staging over 20 jump racing fixtures each year and a leading conference and events centre in the East Midlands.

Other Notable Assets:

Market Rasen Festival Hall, other village halls and leisure centres, and schools such as The Gainsborough Academy.

There is an opportunity to capitalise on other underutilised outdoor spaces and to develop new heritage assets as part of RAF Scampton planned developments.

Further Assets

Arts and Community Groups:

Plethora of local drama, dance and heritage groups, as well as groups serving the needs of their community, which are mostly volunteer run.

Assets include the Performing arts club of St Johns, Caistor Amateur Theatrical Society, Delvers local history group, Gainsborough Heritage Association.

Other community groups include Caistor and Market Rasen Lions and the Bearded Fisherman.

Outdoor Infrastructure:

Highlights include Gainsborough Historic Market Place, Gainsborough Riverside, Marshall's Yard, historic towns of Market Rasen and Caistor, villages and extensive countryside (including the edge of the Lincolnshire Wolds) with extensive walking and cycling routes.

Plus, areas of archaeological significance and areas of industrial heritage, including the Lower Witham Valley and Trent Valley.

Our Priorities for Culture

Consultation for this Cultural Strategy has brought into sharp relief both the opportunities for culture in West Lindsey and the challenges.

The area is one of significant potential but also one where multiple barriers and years of under funding have historically stood in the way of system-wide cultural renewal.

The area's ageing population and sustained loss of younger talent, limited transport links, health and wellbeing indicators, fragmented communities, and lack of critical mass in a range of industries, are commonly identified as challenging features or as barriers to cultural development. But the area can also be understood from an 'asset-based perspective' – providing a set of cultural resources, often based within community localities, which can be nurtured as part of a holistic process of cultural renewal.

In exploring what is possible, what is needed, and also what is most challenging, this consultation for this Cultural Strategy has identified 4 interconnected strategic themes. These provide the thematic architecture for a Cultural Action Plan, which will be a core operational document for delivering the objectives and outcomes identified in this strategy. Delivery of the action plan will sit with LCET, whilst oversight of progress resides with the Prosperous Communities Committee via an annual progress update report.

For each strategic theme, a set of core outcomes are identified. These signal how partners can measure progress and assess the impact of this Cultural Strategy as an outline 'theory of change' that can be adapted over the coming years and used to measure progress and demonstrate impact to funders as well as reflect on what has worked and what needs more work.

Theme 1 - Grassroots Culture:

Sustainable, accessible and diverse community led cultural provision.

Theme 2 - Great Places:

Vibrant, inclusive and distinctive town centres and villages.

Theme 3 - Community Wellbeing:

A healthier, happier District, enhancing quality of life and boosting pride and confidence.

Theme 4 - Dynamic Talent and Practice:

Championed to create, make and experience culture across all art forms.



Theme 1 - Grassroots Culture:

The 'West Lindsey Way' for community cultural development will see partners, providers, the Council, and our community, collaborating within an enabling ethos to simply get things done.

Recognising that our network of providers and cultural assets are rich and diverse, the 'West Lindsey Way' will support our cultural providers to be sustainable in the long term, whilst offering activities that are inclusive and participatory.

With a core belief that all of our communities have the capacity for artistic excellence, our support will engage with artistic specialists and cultural experts who can lead, inform, shape and share their skills to ensure that community grass roots provision always benefits from external input.

Our ethos for grassroots culture will drive forward the connecting of people and practices in shared spaces that make sense to our communities and enable the championing of the intergenerational transfer of cultural and artistic knowledge and skills.

By recognising that the 'West Lindsey Way' for grass roots cultural development means aspiring for our communities to have access to talent pathways, we will ensure that our cultural events and activities provide local, regional, national, and international platforms and spaces to showcase talent and to stretch and strengthen our community cultural capital.

Theme 2 - Great Places:

Across West Lindsey, culture can act as a vital force in improving the quality and distinctiveness of place, in enhancing the built environment, and in supporting the protection and reanimation of heritage and green assets.

Partners have already made some progress in positioning culture as a catalyst for town centre renewal, with events, design improvements and heritage renewal. Ongoing activities in Gainsborough will facilitate culture-

led impact, enabling the town to re-connect with its riverside, reanimate the marketplace and strengthen connections between retail and heritage assets. In turn, this will make the town more culture friendly – a safe space for events, attractive to cultural workers (including the potential for artist studios), and vibrant into the evenings and at weekends.

In other town and village centres, culture can play a more tangible and impactful role – such as through imaginative public realm enhancements which engage the services of artists; through the programming of events which tour excellent work from across the arts, working in partnership with leading organisations; and through the re-framing of community spaces as hubs for cultural participation and development.

The wider landscape of West Lindsey also provides both a cultural resource and can be enhanced through a 'cultural approach'. For example, efforts to connect different neighbourhoods, green spaces, heritage assets and waterways are having some impact in enhancing legibility and mobility. This increases access to culture as well as providing opportunities for new public art, trails, events and cultural hubs.

Culture can also help to build environmental responsibility among residents and visitors – through public engagement and storytelling.

Culture can affirm pride in place, providing a platform for the District's communities to express their distinctive identities, infusing each place with a unique quality.

Theme 3 - Community Wellbeing:

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the fore evidence of how culture can deliver a range of positive outcomes for health and wellbeing. In the UK, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing report found that culture can help meet challenges in health and social care around ageing, loneliness, long-term conditions and mental health. It also found that culture can help save the care sector money.

Models of cultural prescribing have been developed and tested across the UK and internationally, with proven outcomes in both prevention and treatment. For example, the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance point to evidence in Gloucestershire where:

“Arts on Prescription Programme has shown a 37% drop in GP consultation rates and a 27% reduction in hospital admissions. A social return on investment of between £4 and £11 has been calculated for every £1 invested in arts on prescription”.

Culture can also be a vector for a broader set of wellbeing outcomes, including pride in place, community cohesion, and participation in social, learning and personal development activities. This links to Theme 1 above, with culture contributing to pleasant neighbourhoods and safe, vibrant town centres. It also links to the ways people access leisure facilities and engage with their environment.

Consultations for this Strategy suggest that arts and culture are already making a big difference to the wellbeing of West Lindsey residents and to the quality and distinctiveness of place. There is some excellent emergent practice, with the engagement work of Trinity, X-Church and Caistor Heritage Centre and more. However, too many people feel disconnected from the cultural life of the District; loneliness and depression are major issues in contemporary society; and the role and value of arts and culture as a preventative tool relating to a range of health issues are under-explored.

Theme 4 - Dynamic Talent and Practice:

Long-term, culture in West Lindsey will thrive and have the capacity to deliver impact through an ecosystem that provides pathways for participation for every community, encompasses stable cultural and community organisations and infrastructure, and supports a growing baseline of creative enterprises.

Currently, even when comparing with other relatively rural districts, this ecosystem is very emergent and fragile, with major gaps in capacity.

Outside Council-run amenities, there are no professional cultural organisations of scale in the District and very few professional artists and creative enterprises.

Events and festivals, of which there is a growing offer, depend on importing content from outside the District, with – until recently – little emphasis on building local skills and capacity. There is also a significant gap in expertise and capacity for voluntary-run organisations and a lack of coordination in marketing and knowledge exchange, which limits the resilience of culture providers.

For culture in West Lindsey to deliver on its potential – e.g., for great places and health and wellbeing – there is a need to focus on:

- Collaboration: which can be more expansive, sustained and better resourced. A new sector network – e.g. a Cultural Providers Network (see Action Plan) can help shape a shared voice as a basis for stronger partnership with the Council and other key agencies.
- Touring and local provision: Opportunities to participate in cultural activities and to build professional practice are uneven across the District. In some places, exposure to cultural activities is very limited and the lack of consistent, accessible and affordable training and capacity-building for volunteers and cultural workers means many cultural activities are precarious and at risk. Opportunities to coordinate programming with other Districts and balance local and incoming work can deliver step-change in cultural provision.
- Festivals and events: this sector is still emergent, with West Lindsey yet to build a critical mass of cultural programming that can support a thriving ecosystem of home-grown and incoming artists and cultural producers. This can catalyse long-term cultural development.

Priority Objective 1:

West Lindsey is a place leader in grassroots community led cultural development.

Lead Outcomes/Approaches:

- The 'West Lindsey Way' for grassroots community cultural development is established to build capacity in community organisations supporting them to understand their strengths and weaknesses and to develop longer term plans that see their sustainability improve. At the heart of this ethos is 'enabling' and 'collaborating' to get things done.
- Unlocking local community assets for the benefit and wider use of the community, ensuring that culture is everywhere and accessible to all. This will include looking for gaps and matching potential assets such as schools and churches with grassroots providers looking for delivery space.
- Creating grassroots community cultural networks to build upon our 'West Lindsey Way' and to support providers to support each other and add value to existing provision whilst developing the sustainability of our cultural offer.
- Polishing our grassroots gems by ensuring that our events and festivals always offer a platform for local talent, connecting in local, regional, national, and international performers to raise aspirations and inspire our communities to believe in their abilities and embark on ambitious cultural pathways.
- Refining our toolkit of monitoring and evaluation, hand in hand with our grassroots providers to ensure that part of the 'West Lindsey Way' for community cultural provision always builds a legacy and delivers a suite of metrics that can be used to target and secure future investment in the sector.

Priority Objective 2:

West Lindsey adopt a cultural planning model where culture is a foundational element in town centre and neighbourhood renewal and a key factor in infrastructure, transport, housing and environmental investment and renewal.

Lead Outcomes/Approaches:

- Town centres, high streets and 'left behind' neighbourhoods are re-imagined as centres of cultural activity, with culture driving renewal. Cultural production / practice is prioritised – unlocking lost retail and replacing with active spaces for culture. Festivals and events are developed and supported with longer-term programming and funding.
- Planning has a dedicated cultural dimension focused on animating town centres supplying and safeguarding affordable creative workspace and building the festival and events offer. The potential for Section 106, neighbourhood planning and conservation area appraisals as tools is explored.
- Large-scale new developments such as Scampton deliver long-term affordable cultural infrastructure – in terms of community spaces, plus explore the potential for a larger-scale cultural and creative industries production and development hub – as witnessed in High House Production Park, Essex: <http://hhpp.org.uk/>
- Heritage is championed as a resource for contemporary cultural practice, through events programming, studio space, trails and artist-led community engagement.
- Trails, signage and wayfinding interventions have a strong cultural dimension – with West Lindsey a beacon of smart public art commissioning, art trails, and of engaging artists to advise on approaches to safer streets, active travel and public realm enhancements.

Priority Objective 3:

West Lindsey is a regional pathfinder for responsibility and sustainability through culture.

Lead Outcomes/Approaches:

A District of climate literacy and responsibility through culture: develop climate action training/capacity building for community organisations; commission cultural organisations to lead processes of engagement and education for the wider community. Work with environmental artists to develop new heritage trails, walks and active travel routes. An uplift in environmental skills and competencies generates new enterprises and employment at the interface of culture, environment and place-making.

Priority Objective 4:

Culture is at the heart of health and wellbeing provision.

Lead Outcomes/Approaches:

- Linking to the Council's emerging Health and Wellbeing Strategy, West Lindsey prioritise the development of culture, health and social care partnership, with access to culture a central feature of post-Covid recovery and healing. The Council and cultural/community sector will work with the NHS, Public Health, and organisations with a track record in culture and health to co-create a strategic approach for culture, health and wellbeing. This can be developed in partnership with other Districts across Lincolnshire.
- Cultural/community organisations and practitioners are supported to grow their expertise and capacity to deliver health outcomes. Based on the above, a cultural prescribing model is co-designed and tested in West Lindsey.

Priority Objective 5:

Safe and inclusive spaces for cultural participation and practice support community engagement and wellbeing.

Lead Outcomes/Approaches:

- Existing building-based cultural assets are supported to secure their long-term future as dynamic cultural hubs which support local health and wellbeing outcomes and reach out across the District through partnership-led activity – with a focus on Trinity and a network model which connects with partners such as X-Church, Caistor Arts and Heritage Centre, and community hubs across the district.
- Parks and green spaces grow a role as cultural spaces – for events, walks, cultural and educational activities.
- Cultural/community organisations are supported to boost their communications profile – to existing audiences and to reach new audiences and participants. This includes support for shared marketing.
- Public spaces are re-imagined and re-modelled as spaces for culture – e.g., as event sites for festivals. Focusing on town centres, this will build capacity for West Lindsey to programme regular performances and activities across all art forms.

Priority Objective 6:

Talent from every community is supported to develop their practice, take part and make a difference.

Lead Outcomes/Approaches:

- Partners in West Lindsey prioritise cultural education and creative skills development for children and young people, building on the work in Gainsborough through Mayflower 400 and Illuminate Festival, collaborating with expert providers such as The Mighty Creatives and Lincolnshire Music Service to make the connection between cultural provision in schools and opportunities to create and make culture in the community.
- Dedicated engagement, commissioning and training prioritises people from harder to reach communities, to validate and showcase talent, build capacity and increase visibility of cultural opportunities – e.g., in less deprived areas, supporting health and wellbeing outcomes (Theme 2) and building more active engagements in places which currently lack cultural provision.
- Cultural and heritage organisations/hubs are supported to build their skills and capacity – focusing on increasing levels of access and engagement for audiences and talent across the District.

Priority Objective 7:

Cultural capacity and infrastructure are boosted for all communities.

Lead Outcomes/Approaches:

- Feasibility work is undertaken to remodel Trinity Arts Centre as a cross-art-form cultural hub for the District and beyond. This will include options for securing anchor tenant(s), growing social/cultural prescribing services, and operating as an impact hub for cultural development (across key social and environmental agendas).

This can include institutional partnership – e.g., with University of Lincoln. This will also provide a launchpad for more extensive 'Trinity on Tour' productions and festival and events production. Medium-term, this becomes the NPO for West Lindsey, modelled on similar principles to the new NPO for South East Lincolnshire.

- Support is provided to fund-raise for project and core funding for key cultural and heritage organisations – so they are able to build their base and diversify their programmes and activities.
- Local cultural infrastructure and provision is increased and enhanced, with cultural activities in community settings reducing the need to travel for culture. This can include dedicated strategic planning and feasibility support for infrastructure of promise – e.g., Broadcast Museum at Hemswell Cliff as a visitor attraction and community cultural and education hub connecting heritage to the future of media and creative content.
- Festivals and events are supported to coordinate programming and audience development – potentially as a 'Seasons Programme'.

Priority Objective 8:

Step Change in dynamic collaboration across the cultural sector and partnership with other sectors.

Lead Outcomes/Approaches:

- Build capacity via a new cultural development officer role, with responsibility to nurture a network of cultural providers - small community organisations, artists, creative enterprises, and partners in education, health and tourism. This is to exchange information, explore collaboration opportunities and identify ways to support the delivery of this Cultural Strategy. The network can, over time, develop into a Cultural Leadership Group or Culture Board for West Lindsey, providing a shared voice which informs sector development and a shared 'front door' for culture in the District.

- Partnership with other parts of Lincolnshire are strengthened – building on the success of the So Festival. This will include a coordinated approach to programming and capacity-building in partnership with Magna Vitae in East Lindsey. It will also include feasibility for an impact hub at Trinity Arts Centre in partnership with University of Lincoln. This would work as a ‘satellite project space’ connected to the University’s Barbican creative hub in the centre of Lincoln.
- Partnership with Arts Council England is significantly strengthened, with the identification of shared investment opportunities to deliver this Cultural Strategy. This will focus on the establishment of a sustained resource for culture – i.e., through the development of Trinity as the District’s first NPO, which can work as a cultural development agency for West Lindsey. This will require activities mobilised through the Cultural Strategy to align with Arts Council England’s Investment Principles: Ambition and Quality, Dynamism, Environmental Responsibility, Inclusivity and Relevance. Similarly, strategic alignment with the new Heritage 2033 Strategy of the National Heritage Lottery Fund can unlock new investment opportunities.

What’s Next?

This Cultural Strategy for West Lindsey provides a call to action for the Council and partners to cherish and champion culture as a foundation for the District’s sustainable renewal, wellbeing and economy. It plants the seeds for longer-term transformation. West Lindsey District Council, working with the proposed new Cultural Providers Network, will lead a process of positive change where investment in culture supports a wider set of strategic corporate priorities. Backed by the LCET Member working group, this will require a coordinated development process to shape strategic themes into actions and reframe the approach to partnership and investment.

This may also require a new partnership model for West Lindsey, working with organisations across the County and beyond in health, education, economy, planning and environment – to collaboratively shape a better future for all communities.



Images of the Revive Festival, June 2023

List of Consultees

In addition to the consultees listed below, TFCC has engaged a range of District Councillors in both engagement and brainstorming sessions over the course of the development of this Strategy. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of all colleagues across the District.

- Ady Selby, Director Commercial & Operational services
West Lindsey District Council
- Amy Potts, LUF Programme Manager
West Lindsey District Council
- Anne Welburn, Councillor Cherry Willingham
Leisure, Culture, Events and Tourism Group
- Cara Markham, Commercial Development Manager
West Lindsey District Council
- Charlotte Goy, Chief Executive
Destination Lincolnshire
- Chris Evans, Committee member Gainsborough Theatre Society
Old Nick Theatre and Museum
- Claire Morris, Community Engagement
West Lindsey District Council
- Clare O'Shea, Manager
Caistor Arts and Heritage Centre
- Craig Sanders, Trinity Arts Centre Manager
West Lindsey District Council
- Daisy Fields, Cultural Events and Marketing Officer
West Lindsey District Council
- Des Kirkland, Chairman Gainsborough Theatre Society
Old Nick Theatre and Museum
- Di Krochmal, Assistant Director Homes & Communities
West Lindsey District Council
- Dr Anna Scott, Mayflower 400 Officer
University of Lincoln and West Lindsey District Council
- Emma Foy, Finance Director
West Lindsey District Council
- Ian Knowles, Chief Executive
West Lindsey District Council
- Ian Marsham, Historic Environment Officer
Lincolnshire County Council
- James Brindle, Executive Director
Magna Vitae
- James Sharples, Heritage Transformation Manager
Lincolnshire County Council
- Jayne Southall, CEO
Lincolnshire Showground
- Jodie Pacey, Centre Manager
Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough
- John Cairns, Relationship Manager
Arts Council England
- Julie Heath, Communications Manager
West Lindsey District Council
- Lesley Rollings, Councillor Scotter and Blyton
Leisure, Culture, Events and Tourism Group

- Lynne Birkitt, Exhibitions
Gainsborough Heritage Centre
- Marcus Hammond, Curator/Director
X church/Slumgothic
- Matt Snee, LUF Project Manager
West Lindsey District Council
- Matthew Archer, Development and Partnership Manager
Magna Vitae
- Mick Grundy, Site Manager
Gainsborough Old Hall/English Heritage
- Nadia Powell, Interim General Manager
Market Rasen Racecourse
- Nicola Rogers, Partnership Manager
Lincolnshire Libraries
- Paul Marshall, Chair
Broadcasting Engineering Conservation Group
- Owen Bierley, Councillor Caistor and Yarborough
Leisure, Culture, Events and Tourism Group
- Sally Grindrod-Smith, Director of Planning and Regeneration
West Lindsey District Council
- Sarah Grundy, Historic Environment Officer
Lincolnshire County Council
- Shayleen Towns, Senior Community Action Officer
West Lindsey District Council
- Stephen Bunney, Councillor Market Rasen Wolds
Leisure, Culture, Events and Tourism Group
- Sukhy Johal, Director Centre for Culture and Creativity
University of Lincoln
- Theresa Workman, THI Activity Co-ordinator
West Lindsey District Council
- Wendy Osgodby, Economic Development Team Leader
West Lindsey District Council

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