



# CELEBRATING CULTURE ON THE EDGE! **A NEW DAWN**

LOWESTOFT'S CULTURAL STRATEGY 2020 - 2025





# INTRODUCTION

**Lowestoft is currently experiencing a cultural renewal in and around the town.** We invited everyone to the beach to celebrate the inaugural First Light Festival in 2019, Lowestoft Rising Cultural Education Partnership is enabling every child and young person in the town to have access to cultural activity and the Marina Theatre is going from strength to strength, welcoming an annual audience of 80,000 people. But we want to achieve more for our residents, the place in which we live, work and visit as well as the cultural sector who are providing us with these exciting and special experiences.

**Celebrating Culture on the Edge, A New Dawn** is central to bringing forward cultural regeneration and more creative opportunities for the town, making a positive contribution on people's lives and giving our rich and varied cultural assets the conditions to grow stronger and be more resilient. The Lowestoft Cultural Leadership Group, in partnership with East Suffolk Council, have prepared this Cultural Strategy for the town. Our ten key priorities all strive to make Lowestoft a place where being on the eastern edge of the country is celebrated. A place which is creatively edgy and leading in cultural leadership, placemaking, community participation and economic growth.





Pakefield Man, First Light Festival 2019.  
Photo: Kate Ellis

# OUR AIMS

## PEOPLE

We will strive to make people happier, resilient and more connected through taking part in cultural activity.

We will ensure that all our venues and cultural events are as welcoming, accessible and inclusive as possible.

We will help people feel a sense of belonging and pride through developing and having a say in culture in their communities.

We will strengthen the role of arts and heritage in the local education offer through clear pathways for children and young people to engage in culture and creative activity.

## OUR 2025 VISION

Lowestoft will become a vibrant and energised town with every resident enjoying and taking part in arts, heritage and culture.

# PLACE

**We will champion the role of culture in everything that we do, supporting our local priorities.**

**We will celebrate our position as the most easterly community through Lowestoft's relationship with water, the beach and protected landscapes.**

# ECONOMY

**We will work with partners to support a strong and diverse cultural programme to promote investment and inclusive growth.**

**We will champion innovation and ambition, with our cultural organisations at the heart of Lowestoft's growth.**

**We will work to transform our historic buildings and creative spaces, encouraging cultural entrepreneurialism by supporting cultural innovation and improved networking.**

**We will develop compelling and innovative offers for residents and visitors using our unique assets.**



## We've chosen People, Place and the Economy as our key themes for Celebrating Culture on the Edge, A New Dawn.

The following quotes, in their own words, are from cultural partners and participants, each describing the impact of culture on themselves, on the place and on communities.

*"Town centres are changing all over the country. We are seeing less retail units and more service and leisure units. A strong cultural identity is essential for our Town centre's survival, this can include bringing cultural based business and organisations to fill the empty units."*

Lowestoff Vision, Business Improvement District

*"The First Light Festival is galvanising people to come up with ideas. Creative ideas and solutions are buzzing about. This doesn't usually happen! It's like it's given people's vision a push in the right direction. I can't overemphasise how much the town felt different"*

Facebook comment, First Light Festival

*"The project has given our children's writing a real purpose and aspiration. There is no doubt in my mind that we need to continue to offer our young people these amazing opportunities and experiences."*

Teacher at Gunton Primary Academy, Untold Tales, Marina Theatre, Making Waves Together

*"It gave me a reason for living - knowing you're not past it, there are still things to learn and enjoy."*

Lowestoff Folk, Suffolk Artlink

*"Culture is a source of economic growth, both directly in terms of jobs and employment, and as a source of innovation and collaboration with other growth sectors. They attract talent, support our visitor economy and drive investment into vital cultural assets in our towns."*

New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, Culture Drives Growth

*"Anything which brings different groups from a town to celebrate what's common has got to be a good thing. Something which is creative, artistic, but also bringing together heritage and a sense of community has got to be worth investing in."*

Glass House Dance, Lowestoff Dance Map, Dance East, Making Waves Together

*"My partner bought me a camera to help me cope with severe depression and anxieties that I've suffered with for the last 30 years. I like to spend at least 5 minutes of every day on the beach taking photos as it helps me to relax and sets me up for the daily struggles I face within myself."*

Local resident, Rise and Shine, The Ness

## **We will strive to make people happier, resilient and more connected through taking part in cultural activity.**

Work with partners to create and deliver a diverse range of cultural opportunities for local people and visitors to watch, engage and participate in.

Deliver new cultural experiences to help people come together, empowering and enriching their lives.

Support the sector to tackle social isolation, help people lead healthier lives and improve mental health for some of our most vulnerable communities.

Continue to introduce new audiences to activities and push the boundaries of creativity to stretch people's views and attitudes.

Build on the work with young people to enhance confidence, self-esteem, knowledge and positive social connections through culture.

Be environmentally responsible, reducing negative impacts on communities, climate and the natural environment.

## **We will ensure that all our venues and cultural events are as welcoming, accessible and inclusive as possible.**

Create opportunities for all generations and groups to take part and enjoy cultural activity and not to be limited particularly by family income, age or by educational background.

Improve creative spaces to help enable them to build audiences, diversify programming and use their buildings to their fullest potential.

Work with partners to provide dementia-friendly sites and programming which can help people living with dementia and their companions stay connected to their families and communities for longer and have joyful, life-enhancing experiences.

Work with partners to put in place transport infrastructure within the district and region, facilitating ease of movement, enabling people to experience cultural activities and explore cultural spaces.

Explore innovative ways to interpret collections inside and outside our museums and libraries.

Improve communication and signposting to our cultural assets.

## **We will help people feel a sense of belonging and pride through developing and having a say in culture in their communities.**

Raise the profile of cultural engagement and involve people and creatives in regeneration projects and 'big ideas'.

Bring Lowestoft's heritage to life through arts and performance, connecting our past with the future and the place.

Co-design projects with our communities and audiences so they feel a sense of ownership and control.

Build upon our rich and diverse cultural assets to change perceptions and the profile of the town inside and out.

## **We will strengthen the role of arts and heritage in the local education offer through clear pathways for children and young people to engage in culture and creative activity.**

Support Lowestoft Rising Cultural Education Partnership by making further investments to strengthen the role of schools and education providers.

Boost the town's connections with local and regional colleagues, sharing skills and knowledge to co-produce effective programmes of engagement.

Continue to work closely with our heritage partners to build on collaborative work that has inspired place-based storytelling and playwriting about the experiences of people in our town.

Work with our further and higher education providers to map out progression pathways and build connections. Support young people into personal development and employment and support New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership Cultural Sector Skills Plan.

Develop the Cultural Schools Programme through Continuing Professional Development for teachers, ensuring a legacy of increased skills and confidence in performing arts.

**We will champion the role of culture in everything that we do, supporting our local priorities.**

Culture will be a key priority for Lowestoft, with the Cultural Leadership Group connecting with partners to advocate the benefits of culture for People, Place and the Economy.

East Suffolk Council will co-invest in cultural provision alongside regional and national funders that support our vision.

Continue to work with the sector to ensure that large-scale ambition is inclusive and reaches all.

By working with partners, we'll value our built heritage and find practical ways to protect, conserve and interpret it for future generations.

Add to our cultural assets with new landmark projects.



Hound of the Baskervilles,  
The Seagull Rep Theatre Company  
Photo: Charlie Ketchen



Poetry People, GritFest  
Photo: Pete Smith

**We will celebrate our position as the most easterly community through Lowestoft's relationship with water, the beach and protected landscapes.**

Encourage groups to deliver and commission work that responds to our cultural identity, landscape and our shared heritage.

Culture will reinforce the work around place making and influence public realm design, encouraging inspirational public art opportunities.

Lowestoft embraces its unique position on the edge and we'll be an exemplar of cultural-led regeneration.



Marina Theatre, RPO.  
Photo supplied

## **We will work with partners to support a strong and diverse cultural programme to promote investment and inclusive growth.**

Work with partners to make Lowestoft an attractive environment for creative businesses to locate to and create work.

Promote and support makers and producers through programmes and events.

Showcase excellence to help transform our town centre and seafronts.

Take advantage of the enormous potential to develop creative hubs as part of the UK's Industrial Strategy.

## **We will champion innovation and ambition, with our cultural organisations at the heart of Lowestoft's growth.**

Embrace opportunities, explore new ideas and deliver excellence in everything we do from conservation to performance.

Open the door for more nationally and internationally renowned art and performance and diverse programming so we can see Lowestoft in a national and international setting.

Grow heritage and arts organisations' digital space with tourism and destination partners to develop exemplar digital initiatives, promoting the place and cultural tourism.

Embody partnership working, especially where additional resources and experience could bring forward innovation and learning opportunities.

Continue to build connections with our science, digital and engineering partners to integrate arts and heritage into their work.

Enable the cultural sector to be more sustainable and resilient through broadening its revenue streams with new models of investment.

Support the growth of cultural enterprises, training, capacity building and employment opportunities.

Champion our key assets to ensure investment and resources.

## **We will work to transform our historic buildings and creative spaces, encouraging cultural entrepreneurialism by supporting innovation and improved networking.**

Animate and find new economically sustainable uses for redundant buildings, starting with buildings at risk.

Engage with partners to provide creative workspace for emerging talent and start-ups in the town and progression routes into the creative industries.

Present opportunities for peer review, bringing cultural organisations and artists together to collaborate and test ideas.

## **We will develop compelling and innovative offers for residents and visitors using our unique assets.**

Increase cultural tourism opportunities in the town, extend the tourist season, create a compelling destination and link visitors to more cultural experiences.

Improve our media profile and position, making our work more visible.

Develop and support our key cultural assets, including theatres, libraries, museums, parks, heritage, festivals and natural landscapes to benefit from the cultural tourism visitor economy.

Enhance the visitor experience by having a clear vision of our unique offer.





# A NEW DAWN

Lowestoft has been through a significant period of cultural development over the last few years, which in part is the result of investment and advocacy driving a fresh momentum. The showpiece event in 2019 was the First Light Festival which was an accumulation of work and effort to support the sector and make it more vibrant through collaborations and finding creative ways to reimagine our shared spaces and assets.

We want investment and growth to be inclusive and this strategy aims to achieve that. We have a wide variety of assets and partnerships in the town, from our former Beach Village 'The Grit' and the historic High Street to Lowestoft Rising, Heritage Open Days and Making Waves Together. Some great successes, but now is the time to bring all of our work and future work together under a shared vision that is both aspirational and achievable.



Excelsior LT472 (preparing the sails at the Ness)  
Photo: Rob Howarth

Culture has a key role to play in addressing some of Lowestoft's most pressing issues but also in promoting the place as a visitor destination. Like many coastal communities, Lowestoft does face some serious challenges, but we can use our cultural assets to help relieve some of these difficulties. There are many studies to prove how culture can be enlisted to tackle some of the socio-economic challenges at a local level, including promoting more cohesive communities and maintaining healthier lives.

In a recent survey, partners and residents were asked how confident the town was and only 6% agreed that the town was confident and

when asked about innovation, 81% said that the town wasn't innovative (thinkingplace 2019). We want to challenge that perception by pushing the artistic boundaries, bringing forward innovative ideas and projects. Through experiencing cultural excellence we want to stretch people's views and attitudes, driving up pride in the town. Being at the edge of the coast, edge of the county and being at the end of the line is to be celebrated.

Lowestoft has always had an important relationship with water and especially the sea. It has shaped the lives and industry of the people who have lived and worked in this

special place. What began as a fishing port became the home of Birds Eye and frozen food, evolving into an important centre for renewable offshore wind energy. In the early 20th century, Lowestoft was one of the country's leading tourist resorts and prior to that a major fishing port with a fishing community: known locally as 'The Grit' that literally grew up on the beach and epitomised the nature of the place. We are now celebrating and sharing the story of our seascape and unique position as the most easterly point of the UK, through projects like the Ness and First Light Festival. Furthermore, we are uniquely positioned, surrounded by water and landscape, with the Broads National

Park and Carlton Marshes to the west of the town.

Despite all the good things that are happening in the town, the socio-economic profile of Lowestoft, with 9 neighbourhoods in the bottom 10% and 8 in the bottom 20% in terms of deprivation (IMD 2019), participation in culture is often significantly lower in these neighbourhoods. We want cultural opportunities to reach far into all our communities and this strategy aims to do that.

The Cultural Leadership Group will be working with partners, including the newly formed Community Partnerships to ensure we distinguish between

Suffolk Artlink, Lowestoft Folk, Pakefield Primary School and Hildesley Court workshop  
Photo: Pagepix



district and town and that we have a clear picture of how well Lowestoft is performing in terms of investment and resources, especially when data is collected at a district level not at a town level.

With Lowestoft Town, East Suffolk and Suffolk County Councils declaring a climate change emergency, we have put in place an objective to be environmentally responsible, reducing negative impacts on communities, climate and natural environment. Projects like North Lowestoft Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) and London Road High Street HAZ both strive to make a positive contribution to environmental policy through conserving the built

environment, focusing on buildings at risk and creating natural green spaces for communities to enjoy and play.

Tackling climate change is also essential for Lowestoft's nationally significant natural landscapes and marshes in maintaining a healthy, resilient natural environment. Research shows that biodiversity will be affected, with species moving or even lost in response to changes in air and sea temperature and water availability.

Having a diverse cultural offer will create a place that attracts creative industries and people that would further add to the visitor economy



Lowestoft Dance Map, DanceEast in partnership with Making Waves Together. Photo: DanceEast



Joshua Freemantle, Photography and Video Services  
Life of Lowestoft  
Photo: East Suffolk Council

and market the town to holidaymakers. The historic High Street has the opportunity to be a focal point for artisan and creative industries as well as culture. Initiatives such as the First Light Festival has put Lowestoft on the map nationally and attracted a new audience to the town. The economic potential of culture in the UK is immense; the creative industries have seen a growth in every single region in the UK and contributed £101.5bn GVA to the economy (2017), with arts and culture contributing more than £10.8bn (Public Investment, Public Gain).

The cultural sector including the visitor economy is a key sector and accounts for a significant part of East Suffolk's economy. Looking at the value of tourism, which is closely related to cultural tourism, in 2016 there was over 1.2 million day and staying trips, with visitors spending over £60 million in Lowestoft. Our cultural assets are a powerful economic driving force. Creative industries, green economy and heritage are now at the leading edge of economic growth and there are significant economic gains in investing and supporting our assets to make Lowestoft a more attractive place to visit.



Carlton Marshes, Suffolk Wildlife Trust.  
Photo: John Ferguson



Wilde Score, North Lowestoft Heritage Action Zone  
Photo: East Suffolk Council

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE...



Photo: Joshua Freemantle, winner of the Rise and Shine Competition

**30,000** people enjoyed the First Light Festival in 2019 with **9 out of 10** agreeing that the 'Festival has left them feeling more positive about Lowestoft'

**10,000** children 0-19 years reached by the Lowestoft Rising Cultural Education Partnership

**£863,800** secured for Great Places, Making Waves Together, making it the only place in East of England to receive this investment

**455** outreach engagements with **232** volunteering hours and **165** students engaged at Lowestoft Suffolk Archives in 2018

**80,000** people reached by the Marina Theatre  
**183** live performances  
**257** cinema showings  
**31** live or encore theatrical screenings

**4,500** people employed in arts, entertainment and recreation in East Suffolk, more than construction, agriculture, forestry and fishing. For every job supported by arts and culture, an additional **1.65 jobs** are supported in the wider economy

**£4 million** secured from National Lottery Heritage Fund by Suffolk Wildlife Trust to create the biggest habitat restoration and wetland development for a decade at Carlton Marshes



21 First Light Festival 2019.  
Photo: Kate Ellis

**120 +** cultural groups and enterprises in Lowestoft

**1,700** school children and local people reached through Watertight Words

**1,200** people attended 'Pearls from the Grit' touring theatre show

**12,000** visits to **85** Heritage Open Days registered events, ranking **10th** in England for hosting the most events

**1,768** school pupils taking part in drama, art, opera and creative writing projects with cultural partners as part of Making Waves Together

**12,000** people reached by the Seagull Theatre, presenting over **200** shows

**15,000** visitors to Lowestoft Museum and Lowestoft Maritime Museum in 2018

**40,000** active library accounts in Lowestoft, including **5,500** under 15. Over **300** sessions held each year for children and babies around crafts, story time, authors and games. A further **500** older people attend an activity every three months at Lowestoft Library

**£500,000** secured for North Lowestoft Heritage Action Zone, the only place in Suffolk to receive this investment

# OUR CULTURAL OFFER

**Celebrating Culture on the Edge, A New Dawn** is part of the Great Places, Making Waves Together scheme which is seeing communities and groups in Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth work together to build cultural partnerships, engage new audiences and put arts, culture and heritage at the heart of the local vision.

There has been a considerable amount of cultural investment into Lowestoft over the last few years (from 2016) including over £400,000 from East Suffolk Council, £640,000 Arts Council England and over £5 million from National Lottery Heritage Fund, including over £4 million to create a southern gateway to the Broads National Park in partnership with Suffolk Wildlife Trust. This investment has paved the way for the acceleration of cultural opportunities in Lowestoft and firmly place culture at the heart of regeneration in the town. 'Without public investment into arts and culture, the remarkable success of the UK's creative industries would simply not be possible' (Public Investment, Public Gain). But its important that this investment continues at a significant rate and we make smart and collective investment choices.

Lowestoft Rising Cultural Education Partnership (CEP) is seen as an exemplar in partnership working, recognised nationally in bringing together cultural and learning providers to provide a menu of multi-arts activities for every child in Lowestoft. There are 27 schools and colleges and 30 organisations in the partnership, that have assisted the CEP to deliver 23 separate projects to date, reaching 10,000 children 0-19 years in the CEP area. The CEP has also attracted over £530,000 of external funding into cultural education programmes and activities since it started in April 2016.

Drawing audiences from the eastern coastline and inland to Norwich and south to Suffolk's coastal towns and villages, the Marina Theatre is firmly rooted in its community and plays an active part in the arts ecology of the east. There is a strong commitment to support the people of Lowestoft and the wider area, not simply by presenting an outstanding and varied programme in the auditorium, but in delivering a variety of learning and social programmes outside of their building.

The North Lowestoft Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) is a five year programme in partnership with Historic England, East Suffolk Council, Lowestoft Town Council, East Suffolk Building Preservation Trust and Lowestoft Vision. Launched in May 2018, the scheme will run until March 2023. Historic buildings that have deteriorated will be restored and brought back into use and the assets within the conservation area, such as the Scores, will be improved, kick-starting regeneration and helping to celebrate the unique character and heritage of the area.

The inaugural First Light Festival held at the midsummer solstice in 2019 on Lowestoft's South Beach was a massive success attracting 30,000 visitors over 24 hours. The festival celebrated the changing tides, light and darkness, sun and stars for a unique shared experience with music, dance, film, talks, walks, sports and workshops as well as the best local and regional food, drinks and produce. The programme included Talvin Singh, Simon Mayo, Danny Boyle and the Natural History Museum. The festival provided a real boost to the visitor economy, bringing pride to the town, with plans underway to hold the festival again in 2020.



**You're never too young to join the Library!**

Suffolk Libraries, Lowestoft Library.  
Photo: Jo Wilde

The Seagull Theatre aspires to transform our community through the arts. They are seeking to build an inclusive community in Lowestoft through high quality arts based activities, helping people to grow in confidence and self-esteem and assisting them to achieve their life goals. The Seagull works with diverse groups within the community to meet their key needs; these include the isolated and vulnerable elderly, people with dementia, families of people living with dementia, adults with learning disabilities, the long-term unemployed and young people and their families.

Lowestoft has a strong heritage sector with many museums dotted around the town, including three museums in one park. The Lowestoft Maritime Museum focuses on the history of the fishing industry and the Lowestoft Museum houses a collection of the famous Lowestoft Porcelain. We also have a Heritage Centre that houses a restored 17th century plaster ceiling rescued from a grade II listed farmhouse in Stoven and a beach village model. In Carlton Colville we have the East Anglia Transport Museum; an open-air transport museum, with numerous historic public

transport vehicles, where visitors can ride on buses, trams and trolleybuses, as well as a narrow-gauge railway.

The Lowestoft Players based at the former Fishermens Bethel contribute to the cultural life of the town by performing theatrical performances of all types on stage and by creating a venue where a wide range of abilities can meet, socialise and perform.

The Excelsior Trust is a charitable organisation that provides life changing sailing experiences for young and disadvantaged people, schools and corporate groups, all whilst preserving and maintaining one of the UK's most historic ships, Excelsior LT472.

These examples reflect the volume of activities being delivered and the impact they are having across our communities. **Celebrating Culture on the Edge, A New Dawn**, creates a framework that will include the creative and cultural community at its' core. Through a collective effort, we will make the town more vibrant and energised with every resident enjoying and taking part in arts, heritage and culture.



Easterly Artist Exhibition Britten Centre.  
Photo: Carl Matthews



Excelsior LT472  
Photo: Rob Howarth

# Thanks to...

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