

A cultural prospectus
Solent Cultural Plan
2025-29

Solent Growth Partnership
March 2025



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"Vibrancy is rarely contained within individual authority areas, but spreads across traditional boundaries [...] this points to a need to work with place-based partners and other stakeholders to address the issues."

Vibrant Economy Index 2018
Grant Thornton

D. ADDENDUM

Supplied as a separate document

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Cover images (r-l):

'Bullet Media' Art Asia Southampton Mela Festival 2024; An Ensemble of Packaging Sequences, John Dalton at Aspex Gallery Portsmouth; HERO Street Theatre at Ventnor Fringe.

Back cover image: courtesy Multi-Stories Westquay project, Graffiti artist Carleen De Sözer. Courtesy RCM.

"If cultural activities are to play a strategic role in supporting urban regeneration initiatives, many new kinds of partnership will be needed – between departments and disciplines, between the public and private sectors and, critically, with the voluntary sector and community organisations."

**The Art of Regeneration:
Urban Renewal through Cultural Activity**
Charles Landry, Lesley Greene, Francois Matarasso, Franco Bianchini.



ART ASIA

Art Asia "communicates the rich and exciting experience of South Asian Arts to the widest possible audience".

<https://artasia.org.uk>

FOREWORD

As political leaders who strongly believe in the power of the Cultural and Creative Industries and their positive impact locally and globally, we are pleased to bring you this Solent Cultural Plan as a starting point for realising the huge potential of this sector and for our respective geographical areas.

We know that the Cultural and Creative Industries are a key plank in the government's mission for delivering sustainable economic growth in all parts of the UK, with a £60m creative sector support package announced as part of the Industrial Strategy and a sector plan due to be published in 2025.

We are delighted that the Hampshire and Solent area is included in the Devolution Priority Programme – it represents a unique opportunity for people living and operating in the Hampshire and Solent area to have a greater say over what is important to them.

Prior to this announcement, the Solent Growth Partnership with Arts Council England, started the process of commissioning an assessment of the cultural and creative development potential for the Solent geography – something that is very important to us economically, socially and environmentally.

Focused on the upper tier local authorities of Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton and the surrounding areas, this document provides a direction of travel, based on mapping, research and workshops with the cultural and creative sector, although within a fast-changing context. It was undertaken at a moment in time and has been guided by the political leadership of the three upper tier local authorities who are mindful of the contributions and potential of the surrounding districts and communities to be part of this powerful opportunity.

We see this as the starting point for working together to grow the potential of the Cultural and Creative Industries and the role it will play in the future.



THE BASE, GUILDHALL

Portsmouth Guildhall has transformed its basement into a creative space for young people, including access to facilities and equipment as well as performance opportunities. The Base is overseen by The BASEpanel – made up of young people to gain experience of programming and decision making in an arts organisation. See Addendum for a comparable approach by The Teenage Market.

<https://thebaseguildhall.com>

FOREWORD

“As a collective political leadership, we have come together to champion the cause for the cultural and creative industries. It is a critical part of the Solent Growth Strategy which complements and adds value to the other industries for which we are already well known and lead in. It gives us a real opportunity to amplify our places on the local, regional, national and international stage and deliver economic, social and environmental benefits for our all communities and partners. We are excited about the collaborative opportunities to deliver lasting change, and in a sector which has so much more to offer the world.”

Councillor Lorna Fielker
Leader of the Council
Southampton City Council



Councillor Phil Jordan
Leader of the Council
Isle of Wight Council



Councillor Steve Pitt
Leader of the Council
Portsmouth City Council



ARTSWORK

Artswork’s mission is to make the arts and creativity available to absolutely everyone. To do so, they continually develop new ways for people to discover the success, empowerment and joy that the arts and creativity can bring to classrooms, communities and careers. A truly collaborative model – across communities, education, culture and heritage – enables Artswork to work with children and young people in different contexts – listening and empowering young people from any background; developing skills for future cultural leaders; providing career support and creative training to drive innovation.

<https://artswork.org.uk/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **Solent Cultural Plan** outlines a dynamic vision to drive transformational cultural and creative development across the region. This has a focus on the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton, alongside the surrounding districts and their communities, from the rural creativity of the New Forest in the west to the maritime heritage of Havant in the east. By leveraging distinctive regional assets and fostering collaborative partnerships, the document seeks to establish the Solent region as a central hub of cultural innovation, economic growth, and social engagement. Key elements include:

Building on regional strengths and opportunities

1. A rich cultural and creative ecosystem, with 4,500 businesses and 40,000 jobs contributing £1.5 billion GVA.
2. Significant creative micro-clusters.
3. High-growth sectors in digital, design, sound, and film, supported by strong cultural infrastructure and heritage.

Strategic priorities

1. **Creative SMEs and Community Entrepreneurship:** Nurturing innovation and enterprise through advice, advocacy, and resources.
2. **Skills Development:** Promoting creativity as a critical driver of inclusive growth and fostering cultural education.
3. **Cultural Tourism:** Building Solent's reputation as a creative destination by integrating cultural experiences into visitor itineraries.
4. **Collaborative Practices:** Encouraging partnerships and knowledge exchange to amplify regional impacts.

Leadership and governance

1. Led by upper-tier local authorities (UTLA) with cultural leaders and all Solent districts, the plan emphasises collective leadership, data-driven approaches, and long-term priorities.
2. A place partnership approach will strengthen networks, align investments, and foster innovative pilot programs.

Vision and outcomes

1. Harnessing cultural entrepreneurship to deliver social, economic and environmental value.
2. Creating pathways for talent development, linking cultural and creative disciplines to wider economic opportunities.

Why Now?

1. Aligning with transformative local, regional and national agendas including Growth Plans, Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.
2. Opportunity to build on current and potential significant strategic investments, including from Arts Council England and other arms-length bodies, local authorities, government programmes, and major projects.

This document outlines a prospective roadmap for fostering cultural vibrancy, community participation and economic prosperity through strong partnerships, innovative practices, and strategic investment. By embracing its unique identity, the Solent region can realise its potential as a beacon of creative and cultural excellence.



DEPARTMENT – RYDE HIGH ST

A former department store in Ryde town centre, redeveloped as a cultural hub for the Isle of Wight, is operated by Shademakers. The Isle of Wight has a global reputation for carnival arts, and locating Shademakers on the high street alongside creatives such as Horse Box Theatre and Stitch will create more visibility, participation and events.

<http://department-ryde.org>
<https://www.shademakersuk.org>
<https://turner.works/works/view/department/>



A. OUR STARTING POINT

A1. A STATEMENT OF AMBITION

THE SOLENT'S CULTURAL ARCHIPELAGO: DRIVEN BY AMBITION AND PARTNERSHIP

The Solent is a rich and diverse landscape, and has flourished for centuries as the UK's coastal powerhouse. It is a cultural and creative 'archipelago' that connects places, histories and communities. In partnership, this cluster of cultural and creative 'islands' are capable of transformational change. This prospectus is based on three foundation blocks:

- **The asset base.** What is possible in terms of cultural and creative innovation and growth? How can we maintain up-to-date, accessible asset mapping across the whole region, including our rural and third-sector cultural activists?
- The **aspirations and ambitions** of creative leaders and practitioners. What are the most exciting opportunities to create and pursue?
- Where **relationships** can mature across the cultural sector, and across community and commercial sectors. How can partners make the most of their common purpose, a shared vision, to deliver cultural, social, economic and environmental impact?

A purposeful and dynamic alliance

This is a vibrant alliance, led by the UTLA partners of the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton: three distinctive cultural hubs, with complementary assets. These partners are keen to celebrate what is distinctive about each place, whilst having a shared set of ambitions that can deliver bigger regional benefits. This partnership can create an exciting set of shared ambitions to

unlock new strengths from Solent's unique geography, and its history of outstanding partnership practice. The region's cultural ecology is already mature and progressing many of the ambitions set out in this vision – community engagement, screen / film development and tourism.

A1.1 A CLUSTER ABLE TO TAKE ITS OPPORTUNITIES

Cultural and creative industries often grow in distinctive clusters and specialisms. As NESTA's report into the geography of creativity in the UK noted: *'...this geographical proximity has important advantages: creative businesses are able to tap into a critical mass of creative workers, access clients, and collaborate and share information with one another.'*¹

These critical masses are key in growing enterprise – skills, reputations and wealth. Such clusters – like maritime craft, engineering and design – helps talented people to discover, interact, learn and innovate². This creative cluster strength is helping to drive growth across Solent, with around 4,500 business and 40,000 jobs, generating £1.5bn GVA.

The growing status and potential of regional clusters has been further underlined by the Creative Industries PEC's recent pioneering work on identifying what they have dubbed 'micro-clusters'⁵ – 'micro hotspots' for each creative industry sub-sector. To pick one place as an example, in their recent analyses, Southampton was ranked in the top 20 of UK creative micro-clusters, featuring 1,456 firms⁶ (with seven creative industry



FILM OFFICE & SCREEN DEVELOPMENT

A Feasibility Study led by Creative Network South with the Partnership for South Hampshire, and Fareham, Portsmouth and Southampton local authorities, Southampton Solent University (image). It sets out the strong potential to become a film and screen production hub. A clear recommendation is to "act now" to:

- Unlock millions in production spend by attracting high-profile projects.
- Leverage film tourism to increase profile and visitor numbers.
- Build a sustainable pipeline of talent through education and training partnerships.
- Sustainability Goals: Aligning film production with green and inclusive practices to support the region's broader strategic objectives.

<https://www.creativenetworksouth.co.uk/a-new-vision-for-the-regions-screen-sector/>

A1. A STATEMENT OF AMBITION

micro-clusters as compared to 11 in Oxford and Cambridge). The strength of the Solent's cultural infrastructure has been vital to creative industries cluster growth. The PEC's analysis confirmed that 'micro-clustering is associated with heritage and cultural-led facilities'.⁷

In this sense the region's cultural organisations and networks are very much the 'root system' of innovation and growth in the Solent's creative economy. The Solent region has high-impact sectors in digital, maritime, design, space, manufacturing and the visitor economy. The creativity and innovation fostered by the cultural sector helps these sectors to realise their potential and grow the economy.

A1.2 STRONG CULTURAL LEADERSHIP AND AMBITION

This Cultural Plan has been shaped by the ambitions of cultural leaders. A UTLA leadership group has an appetite to:

- Maintain an ambitious **vision**, with cultural leaders informing, inspiring and influencing a wide range of impact areas.
- Find new ways of **working together**, through 'step-change projects'. The emphasis is to extend long-term ambitions with cultural partners to produce credible, sustainable impacts.
- Use values to embed positive **ways of working** with all partners, with a strong emphasis on collaboration, trade and exchange.
- Bring sustained focus on the **strategic priorities** to progress joint developments including securing investment.

- Look at what collaborative work has worked well in the region (e.g. recent work led by Culture in Common and enabling bodies such as Creative Island, Portsmouth Creates, Southampton Forward) and to apply lessons to keep energising **networks** towards project-based collaboration.
- Embed a **data-led** approach to assessing impacts, to better track how creative communities grow over time.
- Deepen understanding of how cultural and creative **talent** is nurtured to create more opportunities. This in turn can play a vital role in creating new talent pathways linking different parts of the economy.
- Ensure that the mass of cultural and creative workers can seamlessly **connect** with each other, and access new opportunities and contribute to shared priorities. The cultural sector is a unique 'development asset' as it bridges commercial activities with a strong collaborative focus on the 'social economy'. **In other words, social enterprise through cultural entrepreneurship.**

A1.3 SOLENT'S CULTURAL AND CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT COALITION

The three UTLAs (Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council) have been the central players in producing this Plan, supported by regional creative leaders and networks, and local authorities across Solent. They are seeking to promote the cultural and creative industries for the benefit of the whole regional economy.

CREATIVE CLUSTERS

A number of reports by NESTA ('The Geography of Creativity' in the UK, 2016, and 'Creative Nation', 2018), and more recently by DCMS and Frontier Economics³, have created a list of 55 recognised creative clusters across the UK.⁴

In that recent DCMS led analysis Southampton is identified as a recognised creative cluster, classified in the 'Creative Conurbations' category, defined as '*relatively stable locations where creative firms have high survival rates. High-growth firms play a stronger role in job creation than in other clusters and churn rates are generally low.*' Given the evident regional strengths and the focus of this Plan, a goal should be to position Solent as a nationally recognised and coherent creative cluster, with the potential for wider regional opportunities.

A1. A STATEMENT OF AMBITION

All of the partners recognise that that this Plan has to offer a compelling overarching approach to identifying and supporting the opportunities for the cultural and creative economy. This **'prospectus for change'** approach is seen by all as a key foundation to **drive renewed innovation, wealth creation and community impact.**

This Plan seeks to complement existing local strategies. Much of this Plan is inspired by and directly linked with local, regional and national strategies.

Delivering the Cultural Plan demands that the partners become an ever more effective **growth coalition** for the region. The consultation that has informed this Plan has underlined the importance of delivering shared ambitions to:

- Enrich collective understanding of the value that culture and creativity adds to places, their businesses, and communities.
- Strengthen partnership working with commercial and public partners, e.g. to uplift talent development, digital skills, wellbeing, visitor economy, inclusive growth (see Addendum D6).
- Explore new ways of working to build networks, resources and channels.
- Use the delivery of this Plan to show how partners can innovate through regional partnerships.

Building on these foundations

The Solent has the building blocks to deliver scalable impacts. This Plan responds in kind to this capability, inspiring partners to adopt ever stronger approaches to creating social, economic and environmental benefit. **This Plan sets out values and actions that can support cultural players to realise their ambitions – helping Solent become an exemplar for cultural and creative commerce, growth, and exchange.**

Footnotes

1 J. Mateos-Garcia and Hasan Bakhshi, 'The Geography of Creativity in the UK: Creative Clusters, creative people and creative networks.' NESTA & Creative England, (2016.7).

2 Velez-Ospina, J. A., Siepel, J., Hill, I., & Rowe, F. (2023). 'Determinants of rural creative micro-clustering: evidence from web-scraped data for England (Version 1).' University of Sussex.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.24271525.v1>.

3 DCMS and Frontier Economics (2022) 'Understanding the growth potential of creative clusters.' London: DCMS.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-the-growth-potential-of-creative-clusters>

4 The recent DCMS and Frontier Economics report grouped the 55 creative clusters into the following categories: 'Creative Capitals' (the largest clusters); 'Creative Challengers' (larger cities with large creative industries specialisations); 'Creative Conurbations' (Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs) typically on the outskirts of London); 'Creative Districts' (TTWAs with particular specialisations but not in cities); and 'Incipient Clusters' (TTWAs with growing levels of activity).

5 The PEC by using data from the websites of 200,000 creative industries businesses and organisations, we identify creative 'microclusters' at the street, neighbourhood, and town level.

6 J. Siepel et al. 'Creative Industries Radar: Mapping the UK's creative clusters and micro-clusters.' Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre (2020.8).

https://pec.ac.uk/research_report_entr/creative-radar-mapping-the-uks-creative-industries/

7 Velez-Ospina, J. A., Siepel, J., Hill, I., & Rowe, F. (2023.27). 'Determinants of rural creative microclustering: evidence from web-scraped data for England (Version 1).' University of Sussex.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.24271525.v1>.



FOLIO, NEW FOREST

Folio New Forest comprises c.300 arts organisations, freelancers, businesses and social enterprises. It has enabled a stronger, unified voice for the cultural and creative sector, pushing forward programmes such as schools engagement, a local cultural development board, and the sharing of resources, assets and expertise. The network is helping the New Forest better communicate itself as a creative place, through schemes such as the Creative Marque.

Image: Forest Arts

<https://www.folionewforest.org>

A2. CONTEXT

A2.1 CORE CONTEXT

The Solent's creative economy is significant. It generates £1.5bn GVA for the Solent economy. It employs over 41,500 people (8% of total jobs in the region), which is more than the creative sectors of both Brighton and Bournemouth combined (whilst still being a much smaller share of the workforce).

These places project strong and appealing cultural identities, encouraging talent to stay and relocate. In prioritising the growth and development of this sector, Solent (and its many cultural hotspots) can become recognised as the central south cultural powerhouse (see Addendum D6).

There are numerous examples of excellence, and cultural and creative clusters of size and scale. Overall, the area's reputation is not yet fully reflective of the rich asset base, nor the critical mass, and therefore the potential of the region. The creativity and innovation which can be fostered by the cultural and creative sector, can help all sectors within the Solent to develop and realise their potential. Partners have been doing a very good job of working in Solent's cities, towns and rural communities. Now it can come together as a cultural region.

A2.2 WHY NOW?

Powerful local and regional development plans are in place. These set out clear ambitions for transformational change for the Solent economic area, connecting culture to social, economic and

environmental development. This Plan responds to these shared ambitions directly:

- The UK's capital of coastal renaissance, harnessing new technologies and approaches to revitalise and level up economic opportunity across all of our coastal communities.
- A thriving visitor, creative and cultural economy, capitalising on the Solent's superb natural beauty and rich maritime history.
- Developing a world-class talent base, through a co-creation approach to help people at all stages of their career and across all communities to participate, build a sense of place and local identity. Furthermore, to build the talent pipelines and skill development opportunities they need to respond to new technology and drive an innovative knowledge-based economy.

A2.3 THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE LANDSCAPE

Devolution has been an important backdrop for this Plan, with a focus on prioritising the culture and creative industries as part of Growth Plans and supporting health, wellbeing, environment and innovative partnerships.

This plan was developed initially for the Solent economic area but with the intent of widening the opportunities across porous boundaries. For example, this might include partners in Winchester, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. This also mitigates against possible future changes to economic and political governance across the region.



CREATE SOLENT

CREATE Solent is a current business ecosystem for the creative industries, designed to benefit the sector, those working in creative roles, and students in creative industry subjects. It seeks to promote the Solent economy by developing a world-class talent base – helping people at all career stages to build their skills – creating the necessary business environment to encourage innovation and foster collaboration.

www.createbritain.com/Profiles/createsolent

A2. CONTEXT

As part of the research process to build this plan, an analysis was undertaken by Culture Counts of the creative economy⁷. Alongside other local studies, the research found:

- Creative industries represent over 30% of employment on the Isle of Wight, almost double the regional and national average.
- Over the period 2010 to 2015, all local Solent authorities experienced at least a 25% increase in creative employment. Gosport saw a rise of 89% whilst Southampton and Fareham saw rises of 60%. Better connectivity between Gosport and Portsmouth could further boost this growth.

Strategic cultural investments have been secured from a variety of national bodies. These include, but are not limited to:

- Arts Council England's (ACE) designated Priority Places for 2021-27 include Gosport, Isle of Wight, New Forest and Portsmouth. These are places which historically have had lower ACE investment and engagement.
- The ACE 2023-26 National Portfolio award saw investment in the Solent region from ACE rise from £3.395m to £5.692m per annum, with seven new organisations joining the Portfolio.
- ACE's Museum Estate and Development Fund £2.23m award to Southampton City Art Gallery and £498k award to Dino Isle; Libraries Improvement Fund £150k award to Isle of Wight Library Services and £100k to Portsmouth Libraries; Cultural Development Fund £2m award to Department; Capital Investment Programme £500k award to The Guildhall Trust and £225k award to Ventnor Exchange.
- £16.7m investment into Fareham Live, to be operated by Trafalgar Theatres.

- Local authority investments, such as £6.7m by Southampton City Council in Heritage Asset Repair Programme.
- Heritage-led awards, from arms-length bodies including Heritage England and National Lottery Heritage Fund, such as Holly Hill Woodland Rediscovered project (NLHF to Fareham Borough Council).

The Solent region includes assets and attractions owned, operated or designated by: Local authorities, English Heritage, National Trust, National Museum of the Royal Navy, National Parks, RSPB, UNESCO, Natural England, Forestry England and Royal Armouries.

A2.4 WHY INVEST IN CULTURE TO DRIVE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFIT?

Good culture-led regeneration delivers a range of impacts (see chart overleaf). Numerous reports detail *'the extent to which many arts and cultural organisations have responded to the (pandemic) crisis with creative improvisation, reimagining and strengthening their civic role'⁸*.

These partnerships are most effective where co-creation, cross-sector working, and the use of pilot programmes are used to deliver value in the communities they serve, and the economies and environment that sustain them.

⁷ Creative sector definitions in accordance (DCMS methodologies).
⁸ *Economic contribution of the Arts*, Creative Industries Council, 2020



PORTSMOUTH HISTORIC DOCKYARD

Portsmouth is the home for 500 years of world-famous naval history, with nine attractions including HMS Victory, The Mary Rose, and the National Museum of the Royal Navy Portsmouth. Water taxis connect the cultural heritage offer between the Historic Quarter in Portsmouth and Priddy's Yard, Gosport. A full year-round programme provides historians, communities, makers and artists with opportunities to reveal and interpret the stories in the locations, vessels, artefacts and archives.

<https://historicdockyard.co.uk>
<https://portsmouthhq.org/events>

A2. CONTEXT

Solent is ready to apply its collective strengths to develop and deliver a place-specific Cultural and Creative Plan, extending it across porous boundaries to support wider economic diversification, and social and environmental outcomes.

"We are pleased that local authorities are increasingly recognising the ability of the arts and culture sector to generate positive change in their areas."

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

National policy thinking, as set out by this Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation report, highlights some of the critical markers to which the Plan can respond.

CORNERSTONES OF CULTURE

"What will need to change... is the way in which we collaborate to do it – no single organisation now has the funding, staff time or skills to do this alone. So councils, cultural organisations, and our partners in central government will need to keep working together to support each place to be the most vibrant, best place it can possibly be. That means pooled and aligned funding streams, open and transparent conversations with communities about what they need, and a shared vision that everyone works towards."

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair
LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, 2022

www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport/cornerstones-culture



Culture-led regeneration achieving inclusive and sustainable growth, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Local Government Association, 2019

AMBITION: Social and economic impacts to develop through culture and heritage



Assessment of which approaches might be most effective for Solent



ASSETS & CAPABILITIES: Strengths to build on (or weaknesses to address) in delivering social value and culture-led wealth creation



A photograph of a person with short, curly hair, wearing glasses and a large, colorful pom-pom earring, looking at a large digital artwork. The artwork consists of a dense field of small, multi-colored dots (red, green, blue, yellow) on a black background, forming abstract patterns. The scene is lit with a purple glow. A white vertical line is drawn on the right side of the image, separating the person from the artwork.

B. VISION

B1. VALUES & PRINCIPLES

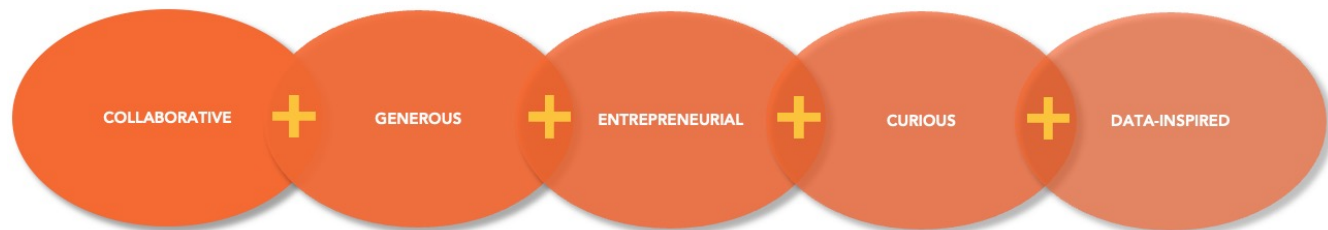
B1.1 FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE PLAN

This Cultural Plan is based on how different sectors, communities and industries come together to be successful as places. A delivery plan needs to put this principle into action. As such it is worth revisiting how growth can be targeted through principles of scale, sustainability and ambition.

- 1. Scalable.** Not every 'growth' initiative works for every type and size of cultural and creative activity. What is achievable by cultural players – councils, independents, publicly-funded, commercial enterprises, third-sector – needs care when setting out action with targets, resources and schedules.
- 2. Regenerative.** Solent has a mature cultural and creative sector and supply chain. Numerous networks and clusters help to drive place-based delivery, not least as part of the legacy of Southampton's bid to become UK City of Culture 2025 and Portsmouth's forthcoming centenary celebrations in 2026. This is a comparative strength. The action plan that will follow will feature tasks that continue to build sustainability as a sector. The role of cross-sector partners will be central to this.
- 3. Ambitious.** A Plan should be ambitious. But what does this mean in practice? It should create an environment for appropriate risk-taking. By being collaborative and coordinated regionally, risk can be mitigated and successes built on more effectively. This will include regional initiatives and also very local ones, perhaps piloting innovative practice that can then roll-out across different places.

B1.2 OUR SHARED VALUES

In taking forward the development and delivery of this Plan, the key partners can commit to work together, across places, districts, agendas and sectors to be:



We will understand the different strengths of each place within the Solent, and how **exchanging expertise and resources** can enable the whole region to grow. The Solent economic block can become more than the sum of its parts with a common purpose that works interdependently. No isolated islands!

With two cities of sanctuary, and a history as a **gateway for trade and exchange**, this region welcomes and embraces the opinions, ideas and heritage of all. Culture is proudly a highly neuro-diverse sector. Generously sharing resources and expertise enables a **pipeline of talent & creativity**.

We will embrace a **spirit of entrepreneurialism**, working across sectors to harness and develop creative commerce and inclusive growth.

Trying new things, working with new partners, openness to change and new working practice. Identify, recognise and support the **potential for creative enterprise and talent to transform lives and places**.

Be data informed, **combining local, regional and wider knowledge** with a careful analysis of relevant data and other local sources of cultural and creative industry, heritage, visitor economy and wider regeneration-based evidence.

B2. VISION

B2.1 A SHARED VISION

This vision statement is not intended as a public-facing 'poster' statement, but rather a practical foundation stone for implementing this Plan. It provides a benchmark for activities to ensure that Solent stays on track in terms of direction, quality and ambition.

The Solent – and its communities – is the UK's most dynamic alliance of creative and cultural commerce and exchange.

B2.2 NURTURING OUR CULTURAL AND CREATIVE ECOSYSTEM

We'll achieve this Vision by ensuring that the mass of cultural and creative workers in Solent are well-connected. Connected to new opportunities to help them develop their work and make a bigger difference to quality of life and wealth creation across the region. Culture helps to define a place. The cultural and creative sector is a distinctive asset that bridges commercial, community and place-shaping with a strong focus on the social economy. In other words, **social enterprise through cultural entrepreneurship** – helping start-ups and enterprises grow through access to spaces, resources and expertise.

The cultivation of talent creates real opportunities for how cultural programmes can help connect the creative economy to the wider economy. This creates new opportunities and talent pathways – the universities are great examples of this – across diverse parts of Solent's economy.

Creative people enrich their communities, the economy and environment. They also help to build the appeal and image of a place as a great place to live, work, study, relax. In other words, a place narrative, which is part of progressing devolution.

Solent offers creative disciplines a vibrant home. This is something to increasingly build into place promotional communications – exactly the sort we already see from employers, universities and inward investment prospectuses. Data, viewed at a local and regional level, can further reveal how creative communities and clusters are developing, helping the region create the conditions for long-term success.

Another key pillar is cultural leadership. Everyone wants a say, but who will lead? The UTLA leadership is building the platform for a regional cultural and creative partnership network that seeks to be inclusive and expansive, flexible and adaptive to the changing context – empowering the sector to lead and deliver.

As a place partnership, they are very well-placed working across destinations and strategic agendas. This enables support to step up and make a difference based on local expertise and experience.

B2.3 A MANIFESTO?

"If 'The Solent' is a construct, then let's create it."

This comment from recent consultation summed up how a regional approach can be more ambitious, regionally. This isn't an 'either / or' of course.



SoCo MUSIC
Cut Through The Noise

Not only does SoCo deliver socially-engaged work for children and adults with various challenges (special education needs, poor mental health, issues with substance misuse, experience of the criminal justice system) but it also seeks to develop the commercial music sector via partnerships with the likes of PRS, and production and release of new music from local aspiring music professionals.

<https://socomusicproject.org.uk>

B2. VISION

There are a number of strong cultural strategies already in play across the region, and this sits alongside those and the strategies of other key players such as universities and connected heritage, visitor economy and economic plans.

A Cultural Plan for the Solent can complement local programmes and further act as a catalyst for growth. The Solent exists as a geographical place, and a functioning economic entity, comparable to metropolitan city and other devolved regions. The Solent is a gateway for creative commerce – with global reach. This is an important asset to be developed and invested in as part of the Devolution programme.

This plan is a 'call to action' to create:

- New ways of working with existing and new networks, partners, resources and channels.
- Space for cultural people and organisations to achieve.
- The conditions for an emerging destination narrative to gain traction and energy through its rich culture.
- A redefinition of excellence, shaped by the distinctiveness of the Solent region.
- An expansive view of what the cultural and creative sector can achieve.

This Plan is designed to focus on creating the conditions for progress and growth where a regional approach can add value and deliver positive impacts that are not always possible at a local level.



VICTORIOUS

Large commercial music festivals can cause frustration in local communities, from issues such as traffic congestion, waste, noise pollution and increased pressure on local services – all of which can be mitigated by the festival developing deep and meaningful partnerships with the local community.

Victorious Festival does just this, delivering a huge range of positive community impact, including:

- 30+ apprenticeships per annum to local students, learning about the events industry
- Staff volunteering at local events such as the We Create Markets.
- 'Road to Victorious' programme for local new musical talent, offering paid touring opportunities, studio time, mentoring and video sessions.
- Offering free pitches to local food vendors, and a readmission policy to encourage audiences to spend time and money in the local economy.
- Providing local makers opportunities to trade at the Festival via Portsmouth Creates.
- Lending events infrastructure to local community events (fencing, gazebos...)
- Monetary donations to local charities, grassroots sports and community groups, and offering raffle prizes, paying for sports kits and sponsoring shirts.

<https://www.victoriousfestival.co.uk>



C. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

C1. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

C1.1 SUPPORTING CREATIVE SMES, ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURIALISM

Provide the conditions, advice, support and advocacy needed for the cultural and creative industries to thrive. Utilise the Solent's existing community, commercial and enterprise expertise to develop and drive innovation.

C1.2 CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL EDUCATION

Build the understanding of creativity as an essential skill requirement for all of the Solent's key sectors, and demonstrate how cultural education can be a vital driver of aspiration and inclusive growth, with a strong focus on engaging young people, and supporting skills, talent and education outcomes across the region, into career and entrepreneurial achievement. Build on existing work from cultural and creative players.

C1.3 TRANSDISCIPLINARY WORKING PRACTICES

Support businesses and cultural and creative industries to collaborate, promoting the opportunities created by co-location and knowledge exchange.

C1.4 INTER-LOCAL WORKING PRACTICES

Understand that a regional approach values the individual strengths and expertise of places and partners within Solent and the wider area – and encourages more connectivity and innovation. Create space for bespoke local approaches, whilst ensuring learnings are shared regionally to amplify potential impacts.

C1.5 CULTURAL TOURISM AND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Celebrate a place rich in culture and creativity, building Solent's reputation as a destination for residents, creatives and visitors.

Bring culture at the heart of the visitor experience offer, e.g.:

- Screen tourism, connecting with heritage, food & drink;
- Connecting coastal destination offers with cultural offers;
- Building in cultural experiences to wider visitor itineraries.
- Connecting to short break itineraries, including port transfers / cruise market.
- Investing in museums, galleries, visitor attractions.
- Attracting national and international events.

C1.6 PRIORITIES INTO ACTIONS

The following tables set out possible actions. These are subject to consultation and refinement with cultural and creative leaders and alignment with current place plans. Some are modest, some could be 'quick wins', some are much longer-term, and some will require new investments to be secured. All are intended to accelerate the discussion towards a full action plan, complete with defined KPIs and measures, resources, roles and timeframes. This will be helpful in shaping and contributing to the Devolution ask. Within this list are some notable investable propositions, which will form the basis for an investment strategy, supported and enabled by the UTLA leadership.

These are highlighted with an icon.







SOUTHAMPTON BIPC

The Business and IP Centre is part of the British Library's national network, sponsored by Arts Council England and DCMS. It is a dynamic, entrepreneurial hub which supports start ups and SMEs providing professional expertise, advice and access to resources and networks enabling them to thrive. Its location in Southampton Central Library and the work around skills, literacy and a welcome space for all, the BIPC has attracted a diversity of people (gender, ethnicity, ability and neuro-diversity) complementing the Young Adults Employment Hub and Adult Hub also based in the Library. There is huge potential for BIPC to roll-out across the region.

bipcsouthampton.org

C1. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

C1.1 SUPPORTING CREATIVE SMES, ENTERPRISE & ENTREPRENEURIALISM 	
POTENTIAL ACTIONS	
Mid-term / developmental	Support the development of screen / film media in the region in line with the opportunity to open a Film Office . Take forward recommendations from feasibility study, targeting skills development, cultural tourism, economic growth as a creative industry with strong environmental values that align with regional policy and practice. 
	Support the development of creative markets , pop-up shops and other creative trade opportunities – meanwhile sites, festivals, fairs & events, collaborative and cross-over programming, online. Successful programmes in locations including Ventnor, Isle of Wight and Portsmouth can be reviewed with a view to ongoing support and event models being exported regionally over time. 
Long-term / systemic	Pilot and develop (shared) spaces across Solent for culture and creative industries to locate and grow e.g. creative innovation / incubation / resource hubs , such as BIPC. 

C1.2 CREATIVE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT & CULTURAL EDUCATION 	
POTENTIAL ACTIONS	
Mid-term / developmental	Embed and incentivise skills development opportunities for young people from early years and throughout their educational journey, via existing programmes. Maximise opportunities to embed young people as participants in the creative and cultural sector e.g. through youth boards, placements and mentoring. The sector can help address skills gaps , improving core competencies.
Long-term / systemic	Support and connect to SME training hubs and creative skills development programmes , including in digital and createch, and those which support high street regeneration.
	Use culture and creativity to help build the Solent knowledge economy, building a dynamic research-led observatory for the region. Guided by the sector, higher education partners should be central to design and development. Review other sectors where cultural activity can have positive impact e.g. health and wellbeing, environment and landscape, and ensuring cultural leadership is represented (with reciprocity).



SOUTHAMPTON CITY ART GALLERY

Built in 1939 as a result of the 1911 Chipperfield Bequest, the Art Gallery has a Designated 5,000-strong fine art collection of national significance and international renown. The collection tells the story of western art from the Renaissance to the present day including many Turner prize nominees and winners. It has a longstanding partnership with the National Gallery and Tate, and regularly loans collections across the world. An important regional cultural asset, its potential has yet to be realised with plans for a major regeneration programme to attract national and international visitors and support the cultural and creative economy.

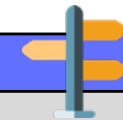
Image: *Creating a National Collection*, 2021 (c) Joe Low

C1. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

C1.3 TRANSDISCIPLINARY WORKING PRACTICES	
POTENTIAL ACTIONS	
Short-term / immediate	Ensure cultural and creative leaders are represented on decision-making bodies to embed and prioritise culture and creativity, e.g. Portsmouth Historic Quarter sitting on the UK Shipbuilding Skills Taskforce, and Southampton Forward on the city's Renaissance Board.
Long-term / systemic	Develop formal action research partnership with higher education institutions to commit to longitudinal collection and analysis of data and research to evidence the impact of the cultural and creative industries across the Solent region over time, and inform programme and investment planning.



C1.4 INTER-LOCAL WORKING PRACTICES	
POTENTIAL ACTIONS	
Short-term / immediate	Ensure the role of culture and creativity is fully integrated within regional and local strategic documents , policies, frameworks. This is a task already at the heart of the leadership of the UTLAs, as evidenced in many key strategies.
Mid-term / developmental	Facilitate development of networks, mentoring, partnerships , and 'buddy' partnerships across the region to enable sharing of best practice and knowledge. A light-touch buddy model could increasingly connect the region and accelerate skills growth, innovation and drive economies of scale.
Long-term / systemic	Develop a cross-pollinating ' pilot & roll out ' model across the region, based on agreed strategic priorities and local initiatives (e.g. Pivot Point pilot programme in Eastleigh rolled out to other areas as appropriate).
	Support and enable better regional connectivity , especially across the UTLAs. This is to achieve a fully connected regional approach to information, shared digital resources and platforms, communication and use of locations for sector activities. This does not require a new top-down network architecture, but rather connecting all parts of the region up to maximise opportunities, including connecting to a sector 'observatory' (see C1.3).



BRAVE ISLAND Cultural education on the Isle of Wight

Run by Ventnor Exchange, Brave Island is a network for young people on the Isle of Wight, providing opportunities to explore careers in a range of creative industries. Opportunities span mentoring, visits, masterclasses, commissions and funding support. Ventnor Exchange also provides masterclasses and courses for adults, and runs Ventnor Fringe – supporting the development of the creative economy on the Island.

<https://braveisland.uk>

C1. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

C1.5 CULTURAL TOURISM & DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT	
POTENTIAL ACTIONS	
Short-term / immediate	<p>Maximise the impact and relevance of key events for audiences and local businesses by strategically embedding cultural activity in cross-sector major event programmes, e.g. National Windsurfing Festival, Cowes Week, Southampton International Boat Show).</p> <p>Bid for key events to be hosted in the Solent region, using culture and creativity to add richness to the proposition.</p>
Mid-term / developmental	<p>Support digital transformation in the cultural and heritage sectors at a place level, e.g. by helping cultural and heritage professionals develop digital skills, systems and connectivity to better support their core delivery and programmes. Start with a digital maturity audit to gauge capacity and capability gaps. Tap into the extensive resources of the Digital Culture Network.</p>
	<p>Build partnerships with cruise operators and hoteliers to promote local attractions. This could also drive creative production and programming, e.g. events, participation. This will be enhanced by the improving digital marketing and distribution capabilities of the sector, and the ability to engage as a sector.</p>
Long-term / systemic	<p>Work with higher education institutions as creative partners to utilise arts, culture & design as an attractor for prospective students, as well as supporting and investing in place-based cultural products that attract students and their families to visit, stay and enjoy.</p>



DARK COSMOS CREATIVE

A visual effects company, DCC has worked for the likes of the BBC & Sky. DCC is based in Portsmouth due to the work-life balance, and to recruit talented students graduating from the University of Portsmouth to support the company's growth. The burgeoning film industry and expanding creative industries in the region value these assets, and are a priority growth area for the wider Solent region.

Dark Cosmos deliver for clients as diverse as the BBC, FX and the University of Portsmouth – whose Centre for Creative and Immersive Extended Reality (CCIXR) is a world-leading facility in the latest XR technologies.

Image: courtesy Dark Cosmos Creative
www.darkcosmoscreative.com
www.port.ac.uk/research/research-groups-and-centres/ccixr

C2. THE ROLE OF LEAD PARTNERS

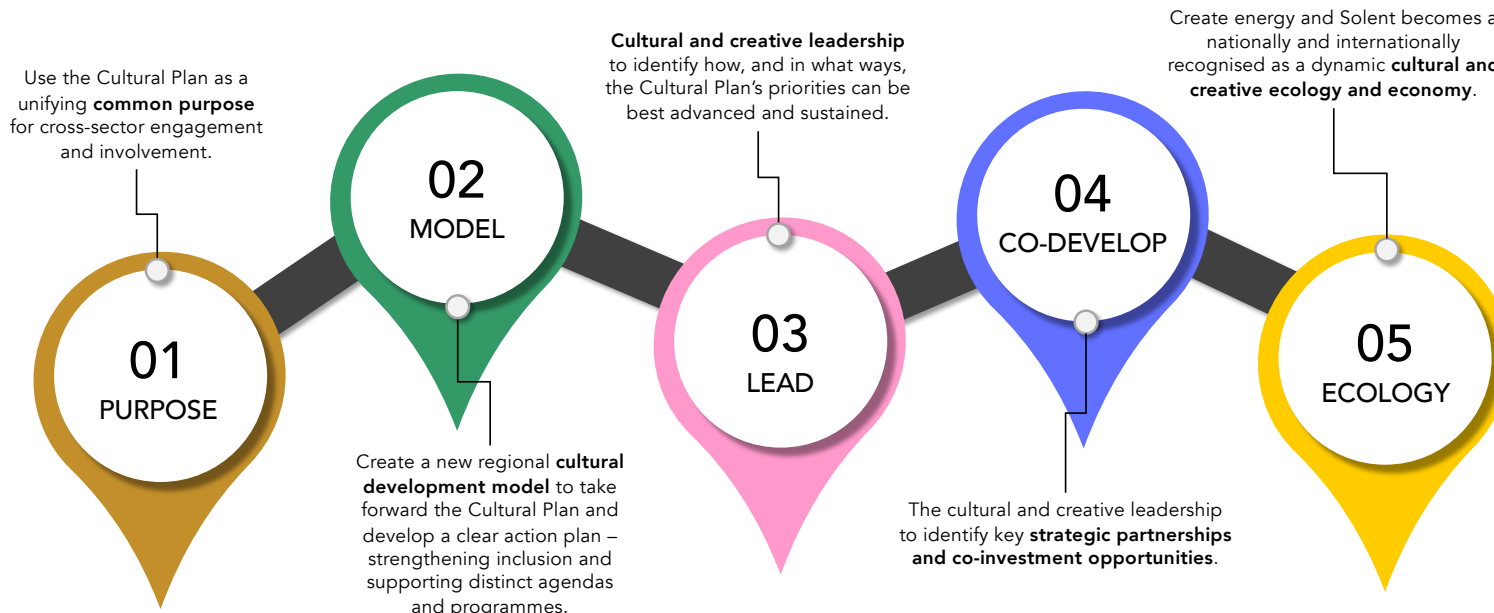
C2.1 A STRATEGICALLY ALIGNED PLACE IN THE SECTOR

The UTLA partners initiated this plan as a starting point, mindful of the wider economic, social and environmental gains from a sector that has the potential to grow significantly. As a strategy for Solent, it requires an embedded partnership approach. This is already a part of the Solent Growth Partnership model. It will also need to reassure that a regional Cultural Plan complements (and not contradicts or duplicates) strong existing local cultural strategies.

Cultural and creative industries are drivers of regeneration, and the social, economic and environmental value it creates. In partnership

with the sector and the surrounding districts and communities, UTLAs are able to respond with significant tools, expertise and support to drive demonstrable impacts, including nurturing cultural and creative entrepreneurship. These three lead partners are a focal point for cultural development, co-designing (with Solent-wide partners including local authorities) and delivering local and region-wide responses. This should aim to avoid over-centralised controls and administrative burden.

This strategic partnership will lead, manage, facilitate, advise, support and where needed 'get out of the way' of agents who can act with more immediacy. There are natural areas of control and



NEW CARNIVAL COMPANY

Formed in 2011, they have reimagined the island's carnival traditions (dating back to 1887). The New Carnival Company is active year-round but stages two major events – the Isle of Wight Mardi Gras in summer and brings light to winter with the lanterns and art installations of Merry and Bright. The programme is directly inspired by the island's people, environment and heritage. Building local civic engagement and pride alongside global ambition and reach defines the company. Working closely with local communities, their aim is clear – to provide "excellence in learning and raising the aspirations of adults and children through carnival and celebratory arts."

Image: Tracy Curtis
<https://newcarnival.co.uk>

C2. THE ROLE OF LEAD PARTNERS

centralised activity – building databanks, knowledge exchange and development programmes such as skills training. The cultural sector and local creatives will always look to civic and sectoral bodies to provide leadership and support in such areas. **This is not to be confused with control or funding – and communications and engagement will be consistent on this.**

IT'S ALL ABOUT CONNECTIONS

Joining up the agendas. Cultural development will be supported through regional-local networks and a regional facilitation role. This will access cross-departmental services in local authorities.

Joining up the data and research. A wider research view (local-regional to national-international) will build audience insight, help to track local and wider market trends, and build useful comparators to inform planning.

Joining up bid development. Risks can be mitigated in programme design and delivery, built on a stronger evidence base and the use of localised pilots and action research. This will increase the total investment potential for the region – especially for place partnership bids with culture, heritage and tourism at their heart.

Joining up the players. This is a case of visibly demonstrating ease of exchange of information and ideas. An ever more connected sector can explore more opportunities to share resources, co-design and co-deliver cultural (development) programmes.

Building networks and access points. This approach will enable more engagement with new and harder-to-reach audiences, building awareness and understanding of what Solent's cultural sector has to offer its diverse communities and audiences. This requires support for existing networks – both local authority run and independent.

C2.2 A CLEAR MECHANISM

The UTLA partnership will act as convenor, facilitator, champion, advocate. This needs a clear mechanism as part of the Solent Growth Partnership. This already has secured the appropriate seniority of representation with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This will also benefit from clear reporting that connects to existing networks.

With this leadership group in place, it can continue to connect to investment planning, Arts Council England and other arms-length bodies, local government, sector and cross-sector actors and with the flexibility to associate and co-opt further resource required. For example, if the development of a regional cultural observatory was pursued, then higher education need to be part of the leadership group for that specific delivery programme.

There can be a fluidity to this approach, ensuring the culture sector (and partners in health, education, commerce etc.) are part of an ongoing series of strategic conversations to drive shared agendas. In other words, a 'hub and spoke' approach to a regional cultural compact – adding value and dynamism rather than bureaucracy.



MAST MAYFLOWER STUDIOS

MAST Mayflower Studios has embarked on a journey to become a Theatre of Sanctuary, reinforcing Southampton's status as a City of Sanctuary (2017) and joining both of the city's designation as Universities of Sanctuary. The process involves making the theatre's work more accessible to refugees and asylum seekers, and working in partnership with local charities and support services. The city's Libraries service was also the first such service to become 'libraries of sanctuary' in the south-west region (2020).

<https://www.mayflower.org.uk>

C3. TOWARDS ACTION PLANNING

The Action Plan should cover an initial 24-month period, with (bi-) annual reviews and updates through the lifetime of the strategy through its governance body, led by the UTLAs. The Year 1 focus is to get up and running. Year 2 is more about implementing plans, building on Year 1 activities. As lessons are learnt, and new opportunities emerge, proposed actions should be reviewed and updated.

The ongoing development of the working Action Plan should be a collaborative process. This framework is a starting point – it can be remodelled to fit action plan formats already in use.

The Action Plan is structured according to strategic priorities.

Specifically, where possible, it should:

- Set realistic targets;
- Identify the actions needed to achieve the target;
- Allocate responsibility to task leaders and supporters;
- Define timescales:
- Identify methods for evaluating the success rate and impact of each activity against the relevant target;
- Suggest indicative costs where possible.



a space arts

a space arts has built a reputation for developing artists, audiences, public art and reanimating underutilised spaces around Southampton, such as God’s House Tower which won the RIBA South Award 2022. The RIPE programme supports graduate artists from Winchester School of Art, both of the city’s universities – retaining creative talent in the city. The Lucky Dip exhibition series removes barriers to access and inclusion by awarding bursaries through a lottery process.

<https://aspacearts.org.uk>

PRIORITIES TO ACTIONS	Priority	Timescale	Lead / partners	Resource	Evaluation
Aim					



ctconsults.

The Intelligence Agency

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