

LEICESTERSHIRE'S CULTURAL ASSETS

An Output of the Visioning a Cultural and Creative County:
Developing Leicestershire County Council's *Cultural Strategy*
(VCCC) Project

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Introduction

It is a time of crisis for regional government.

The Local Government Association (LGA) estimates that English councils are facing a funding gap of almost £3bn over the next two years due to inflation, the National Living Wage, energy costs and ongoing increasing demand for services (LGA, 2023). Across the country, local authorities are being asked to do more with less. This year Nottingham City Council, Woking Borough Council, and Birmingham City Council have announced their bankruptcy, with 7 councils receiving a section 114 notice since 2020.¹ With the recent announcement of Birmingham City Council's bankruptcy, several councils (many of whom are in proximity to Leicestershire including Derby City Council, Coventry, and Stoke-on-Trent) have warned of financial distress (*The Guardian*, Sept 5, 2023).

It is therefore a particularly significant moment to emphasise the value of cultural services within the wider remit of Leicestershire County Council (LCC). Emphasis should also be placed on the vital role that local community events and related engagement play in overall cultural services provision.

Typifying the situation, in December 2023 Leeds City Council announced budget proposals for 24/25 to save £58.4m due to local government budget cuts that will have significant and long-lasting impact on cultural and heritage sites across the city. They included: reducing opening hours at community hubs and libraries, reviewing fees for the hiring of community centres, the closure of Pudsey Civic Hall venue, ending the lease of Thwaite Watermill Museum, and an overall reduction in council staffing by 750 full-time equivalent posts (*Leeds.gov.uk*, 5 Dec 2023).

Mapping the cultural assets at LCC

Cultural asset mapping is a “a process of collecting, recording, analysing, and synthesising information in order to describe the cultural resources, networks, links, and patterns of usage of a given community or group” (Creative City Network of Canada, 2010). It is a significant step in the writing of a blueprint to inform the development of a new Cultural Strategy for LCC. According to the LGA, an audit of existing cultural assets can help “to understand the current cultural offer of an area and how it contributes to the local economy” (LGA, 2020: 9). It incorporates an asset-based approach, seeking to harness the skills, knowledge, connections, and potential that already exist within the communities of Leicestershire.

This living document seeks to inventory both LCC's tangible assets – arts and heritage resources – and its intangible assets – the stories, traditions, and relationships that contribute to Leicestershire's identity and sense of place. As LGA has noted, a council is not directly “in charge” of its local creative economy but must work with a wide range of independent businesses and other organisations, representative bodies, and networks to achieve change and increased impact (LGA, 2020). We therefore map LCC cultural assets alongside those wider, independent

¹ A section 114 notice is a legislative tool used in England and Wales to signal a council does not have the resources to balance its budget.

assets that are flourishing within the County alongside council-led cultural activity. In addition, to align the agenda of LCC's future cultural strategy with that of the aspiration for the creative industries more widely across the County, the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) highlights the need "to understand the regional context of the creative industries and their broader trends" so as to grasp possibilities for creative clustering in different regions of the UK.²

This document therefore builds a holistic picture of the cultural, social, political, and economic aspects of Leicestershire's cultural and creative activity in relation to the needs of LCC's constituents.

Before embarking on this task, it is important to provide some useful contextual information. It is worth mentioning that Leicester City sits in the middle of the County meaning it is a major draw for participants attending cultural activities at the Curve Theatre, Haymarket Theatre, and Phoenix Cinema and Arts Centre among others. Cultural venues across the rest of the County may find themselves competing for participants with the City. Also worth mentioning is that Leicester City Council produced a [Cultural and Creative Industries Strategy](#) in July 2023 – one of whose overarching goals is to set up a cultural hub as a place for businesses to utilise. If this materialises, it remains to be seen what impact this might have on businesses located in the County.

Outside of conventional cultural venues, a number of cultural events are now being held at non-traditional sites. For example, the National Forest holds the Timber Festival. Traditionally a motor racing circuit, Mallory Park holds outdoor concerts. Leicester City is increasingly utilising its parks and open spaces as venues to enable more people to attend. As part of a broader strategy to revitalise and regenerate Melton Mowbray, the town is using empty shops in the Bell Centre as an innovative pop-up hub called 'Melton Creative CoLLective' to enable local creatives to show off and sell their artwork. Artwork has ranged from paintings, crochet and fibre art to crystals, aromas and jewellery (Rennie, 2022).

What to expect

Using a framework originally designed by LGA in their 'Creative Places' strategic guide, this document draws on the opinions and information provided by multiple LCC stakeholders to map and measure Leicestershire's cultural and creative economy. It consists of four principal parts: Inputs, Supply, Demand, and Impacts. A graphical presentation of the framework follows below in Figure 1.

² 'Creative Clusters' are defined by NESTA as "a geographic concentration of creative businesses and workers, often linked to similar value chains, that collaborate and compete with one another" (LinkedIn, 2017, n.p).

Mapping & measuring your local creative economy – framework with worked examples

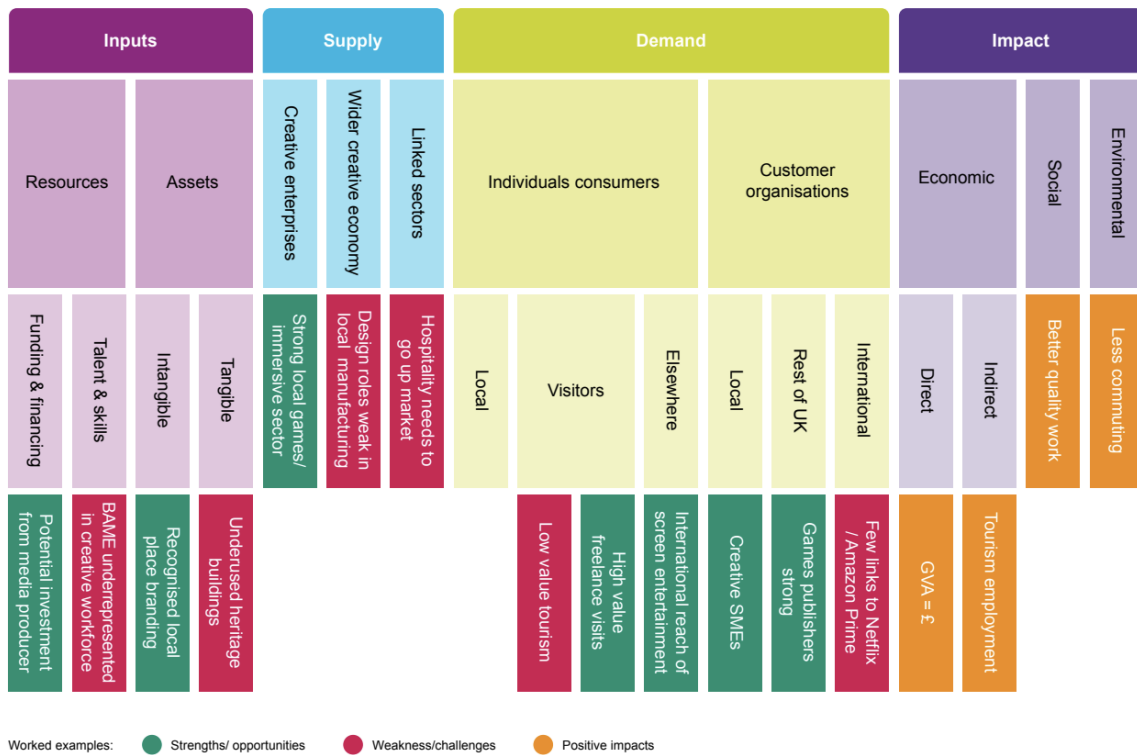


FIGURE 1: LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION. 2020. ‘CREATIVE PLACES: SUPPORTING YOUR LOCAL CREATIVE ECONOMY

PART 1: Inputs

What are LCC's Cultural Assets?

LCC's cultural remit spans its Museums, Libraries, Collections, Record Office, Creative Learning services and participation work linked to the sites, services, and assets. LCC's cultural assets include the tangible – physical artefacts produced, maintained, and transmitted intergenerationally in a society (RICHERS, 2014) – and the intangible – “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their Cultural Heritage” (UNESCO, 2003).

Budgets

According to Franne Wills, Head of the Communities & Wellbeing Service at LCC, the budget committed to cultural provision for the County is currently £5.7m per annum (personal correspondence, September 2023). In addition, the Libraries & Heritage service generates roughly £1.5m in income across its services which is invested back into the service, making the gross cost approximately £7.2m. These figures do not include any grant funding which the service receives from a wide range of funders – in 2022 the Libraries & Heritage service was awarded National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status by Arts Council England (ACE) leading to more than a £750K boost uplift between 2023-26. Meanwhile, Museums Development East Midlands³ receives £340K per annum (see below) and LCC also has several Friends Groups⁴ which make financial contributions towards specific projects of activity. For example, [Friends of the 1620s House & Garden](#) support the running and developing of the site and help deliver a programme of events and activities, most recently funding a Wellbeing Café.

Ongoing Council support for cultural provision continues to generate financial and civic benefits across LCC.

Tangible Assets

Museums and Heritage Sites

LCC is responsible for 5 physical museum and heritage sites across the County. Each of these venues are accredited museums, running a range of events and activities for all ages:

- **Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre & Country Park**, set in the South West of Leicestershire, tells the story of the Battle of Bosworth and its place in the Wars of the Roses.

³ MDEM supports improvement and resilience within the sector and to lead and empower museums to be ambitious, confident and sustainable by providing needs-specific, quality opportunities for learning, exploration, participation and networking. It does this by facilitating, enabling and providing appropriate support and opportunities based on identified need to ultimately benefit audiences.

⁴ Friends Groups for various LCC museums and heritage organisations work to support the Council in the running and development of its sites.

- **1620s House and Garden** at Donington-Le-Heath is a surviving example of a family home built in the 13th century and modernised in 1618. It is set in 17th century style gardens with an orchard, herb gardens and a small maze.
- **Melton Carnegie Museum** traces the social and economic history of Melton and includes exhibitions on the town's world-renowned Stilton cheese and pork pie industries as well as the history of fox hunting. Housed in the town's former Carnegie Library, the building became the town's museum in 1977.
- **Harborough Museum** – which LCC runs in partnership with Harborough District Council – celebrates Market Harborough's long history as a centre of trade and industry at the crossroads between Leicestershire and Northamptonshire. The Hallaton Treasure is showcased in the museum – the largest hoard of British Iron Age coins, as well as a silver-gilt first-century Roman parade helmet, jewellery, and other objects, discovered in 2000.
- **Charnwood Museum** – which LCC runs in partnership with Charnwood Borough Council – reflects the history, geology, archaeology and industries of Charnwood and surrounding areas. It is situated in Queen's Hall, a former Victorian swimming baths for Loughborough.

Collections

Across its physical sites, as well as in the Resources Centre, LCC has approximately one million objects relating to the people, places, natural history, and archaeology of Leicestershire. These collections were formed from the core collections of the Leicester Town (and later City) Museum (which date from 1849 onwards) and the Melton Mowbray Museum. Since 1997, the Heritage Service's collecting has focused on the life of the County of Leicestershire with objects and artefacts curated according to the following themes: Home and Family Life, Working Life, Natural Life, Cultural Life, and Sporting Life. Although only a small proportion can be on display at any time, Heritage Service's collections are used daily by students, researchers, volunteers, artists, and anyone with an interest in them. The Service also has a dedicated collections management and conservation team who support the care and management of the archive and museum collections.

Libraries

LCC's Library Offer Roadmap 2022-25 states its vision "to improve wellbeing and opportunity for the people and communities of Leicestershire, by providing access to reading, learning, information and culture through physical and digital spaces, in line with the Libraries Connected Universal Library Offers".⁵ LCC is responsible for 16 county council libraries, 3 mobile libraries, a prison library, and supports 35 community libraries – which, since their launch in 2015, have been mainly run by independent charitable organisations and some parish councils. All 16 county libraries have Local Studies Collections, as do some of the community-managed libraries.

The community-managed libraries provide a particularly rich resource for this research for they operate as community hubs as much as offering library services. They are predominantly run by volunteers, who work tirelessly to ensure good governance, manage the day-to-day working of the library, and deliver a range of

⁵ The Universal Libraries Offers include Culture and Creativity, Health and Wellbeing, Information and Digital, and Reading, see <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/universal-library-offers>

activities and programmes for the local community. This is not without its challenges – the research team notes regular issues including succession planning, alongside recent rises in utility costs. Section 106 agreements (planning obligations between Local Authorities and property developers) have been helpful in raising the profile of existing services in respective local communities, with several community-managed libraries making concerted efforts to reach those new to the area. Each community-managed library operates according to a different operational model, with mixed abilities to generate income, and variable levels of digital literacy amongst its volunteers. A couple of libraries in particular have been lauded for their success, including Ratby Library which saved itself from closure through community action, and Measham Library, which runs a range of activities for the community including a walking group, a stroke and disability club, knit and stitch and a reading group.

To ensure that they continue to thrive, LCC's community-managed libraries need more awareness and recognition.

The Record Office

LCC's Record Office works in partnership between three authorities to be the repository for the public record and archive collections relating to the Counties of Leicestershire and Rutland and the City of Leicester. Its collections include village history files, reference books, local history publications, copy photographs, research files, local historians' information, as well as diocesan and regimental archives. It is a National Archives Accredited Archive Service, housing over a million written, printed, recorded and digital items including photographs, moving images and sound, across 5 miles of shelving. It also has a virtual component through Find My Past and Image Leicestershire.

Intangible Assets

Participation, Volunteering and Audience Development Team

Activities undertaken by this team build on the physical cultural assets hosted and supported by LCC's Museum, Heritage, Libraries, Collections and Learning Services. Its outreach work inspires new cultural activities and connections within Leicestershire communities, created by and for local people. For example, since gaining NPO status, the team has launched a Cultural Youth Forum for 11–18-year-olds to help make heritage, libraries, and cultural activities more relevant and interesting to other young people.

Volunteers

The success of LCC's cultural services owes debt to the expertise of 500+ volunteers, who undertake unique and varied opportunities across its five museums as well as its libraries, collections, and community hubs.

Alongside traditional forms of volunteering such as doing guided tours and assisting with collections documentation, other forms of volunteering include the Community Curators scheme, where local participants have embraced the opportunity to define their goals and decide how cultural activities are designed, delivered, enjoyed, and shared. Recent examples include 'Sikh Herstories' at Bosworth Battlefield where the team has been working with a group of Sikh ladies from Leicester. Meanwhile, a

Community Connectors Panel has been established to make sure that LCC's cultural assets reflect the needs and aspirations of the diversity of communities living in Leicestershire's distinct boroughs. Community Connectors support a range of activities and exhibitions in the service's museums. LCC's strong tradition of involving volunteers means that events such as the annual Volunteer Sharing Day are very festive occasions, empowering volunteers to showcase what they do and the impact gifting their time has on their communities.

LCC also supports constituted groups of volunteers affiliated to its service such as Loughborough Library Local Studies Volunteers (LLSV) who run the Local and Family History Centre (LFHC) at the town's Granby Street library as well as look after the Local History Archive at Loughborough Library. LCC also supports Leicestershire Shared Reading (LSR) which run shared reading groups which engage older and isolated people with literature, enabling new connections, improving mental wellbeing, and offering stability and support.

Museum Development East Midlands (MDEM)

MDEM is part of a national network of Museum Development providers across England. It receives £340K funding from Arts Council England annually and is hosted by LCC, with its offices housed at County Hall. MDEM offers a continually updated programme of activities and support targeted at the needs of accredited museums and those with Working Towards Accreditation status in the region. MDEM runs a suite of development programmes, grant funds, training opportunities, support for county forums, advice, information, and one-to-one support to help deliver Arts Council England's strategy.

Creative Learning Services

LCC's Creative Learning Service (CLS) is one of the most comprehensive of its kind in the UK. Designed to foster a love of independent learning in primary, secondary and Special Educational Needs (SEN) pupils, it supports Leicestershire schools with a wide range of resources and sessions to stimulate reading for pleasure and creative learning across the curriculum. It also runs professional development sessions for school staff to develop knowledge, skills, and confidence in working with art and artefacts to creating a reading culture. There are 1,580 artefacts available for loan from LCC's Museums and Artworks Collections, and CLS offers a range of packages for schools with different needs and budgets.

Creative Leicestershire

LCC supports opportunities to collaborate, test new services, and resolve challenges to growth across the creative sector through its Creative Leicestershire flagship service and the WebinArt programme. These programmes provide access to a range of advice and support – helping creative enterprises survive and grow and are a vital catalyst connecting people through networking opportunities, strengthening supply chains, and retaining knowledge (Creative Leicestershire, n.d).

Century Theatre

Based in Coalville, Century Theatre is supported by LCC. Following its unique origins as a travelling theatre that toured the country in the post-war years, including spending time in Keswick in the Lake District where it was nicknamed the 'blue box',

the organisation permanently settled in Coalville in 1997 (Leicestershire County Council, 2023). According to Evan Rees – the organisation’s Officer and Lead Technician – Century Theatre’s audiences not only ‘come from Coalville and North-West Leicestershire, but from a very much wider range of areas of the County and of the broader East Midlands’ (Leicestershire County Council, 2024, n.p).

Future Plans

The Council are currently exploring the potential to build a new Archives, Collections and Learning Hub on existing premises at County Hall. This would bring together archive, museum, and library collections into a single facility with public access – collections which are split between 7 storage facilities across the County, some of poor standard and currently without access facilities. Particularly for the Record Office, which has reached capacity at its current location, the need to address future storage requirements is urgent. These plans present an opportunity to unify collection assets in a single location, for example the technical drawings of the ‘Auster Aircraft’ made by Taylorcraft Airplanes Ltd., a small Leicestershire company which became one of Britain’s most important makers of light aeroplanes between 1939-69. These drawings are currently in the Record Office at Wigston, but the aircraft themselves are in a museum store elsewhere. Similarly, the documentation archive of the Thomas Cook collection is held at the Record Office while the objects – such as stained-glass window, costume, and memorabilia – are held in museum stores. A new Archives, Collections and Learning Hub offers the opportunity for students, researchers, and the public to access this material in a single location and would represent a significant capital investment in the future care, preservation, and access to the County’s rich heritage.

What are the County’s Cultural Assets Beyond LCC?

The following highlights some of the independent galleries, museums, art centres, networks, festivals, archaeological sites, National Trust properties, and English Heritage sites operating across Leicestershire external to the remit of LCC. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

Independent galleries across Leicestershire

- Atkins Gallery run by Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council: a gallery and exhibition space, creative studio spaces, and creative businesses
- Dotty Gallery in Twyford: an independent gallery with focus on silver jewellery and ceramics.
- Ferrers Gallery near Ashby: an independent centre for arts and crafts.
- Gallery18, Loughborough
- Goldmark Gallery, Uppingham: an established independent gallery.
- Kooroon Gallery, Bottesford (venue now closed but still a pop-up)
- Made Gallery, Uppingham: a gallery selling jewellery and gifts.
- Modern Painters, New Decorators, Loughborough: an artist-led organisation in central shopping centre; part of Loughborough Lates and with an ‘annual members’ exhibition.
- Sable Studio Gallery in the Moira Furnace Museum, Swadlincote.
- Sock Gallery, Loughborough Town Hall: an exhibition space.

- Tarpey Gallery, Castle Donington: a contemporary commercial fine art gallery.
- Ten2 Gallery, Hinckley: features art classes, café and a shop.
- Wingates Gallery, Harborough: an established independent gallery.
- Wistow Gallery, Wistow: a gallery which emphasises local artists and makers.
- Woodbine Contemporary Arts, Uppingham.

Independent museums and heritage sites⁶

- Moira Furnace Museum and Country Park
- Old Rectory Museum, Loughborough
- Foxton Canal Museum, Foxton
- Hinckley & District Museum
- Armourgeddon Military Museum, Bosworth
- Mountsorrell and Rothley Community Heritage Centre, Loughborough
- Ashby-de-la-Zouch Museum
- Rutland County Museum
- Stonehurst Family Farm and Motor Museum, Loughborough

Creative Networks

- Harborough Artists Cluster
- Leicester Society of Artists (and Rutland)
- Leicestershire Art Alliance
- Market Harborough Art Club
- The Arts Society Rutland
- Art Space Loughborough
- Association of Leicestershire Artists
- Crown Hills Arts Society
- Leicestershire Pastel Society

Art trails, open studios, and arts festivals

- Ashby Arts Festival
- Ceramics in Charnwood: an art market for ceramics.
- Up to the Beacon Sculpture Trail
- Rutland Open Studios
- Arts Fresco Street Theatre Festival, Market Harborough
- Love Architecture Festival
- Neville Holt Opera

Archaeological sites

- Abbott Penny's Wall
- Burton Lazars
- Fosse Way
- Greyfriars

⁶ Here, it is worth mentioning the Leicestershire and Rutland Heritage Forum (LRHF). Although LRHF is completely independent of LCC and receives no direct support, it is for all museums and heritage organisations covering both counties and the city of Leicester. It seeks to provide information, support and networking opportunities for its members, as well as building links with partner organisations and offering representation for its members at a strategic level. It has over 40 member organisations, largely run by volunteers and hosts the Leicestershire & Rutland Heritage Awards.

- Hallaton Treasure
- Jewry Wall
- King Lud's Entrenchment and the Drift
- Knaptoft
- Knave Hill
- Moira Furnace (which also has a museum, see above)
- Ratae Coritanorum
- Raw Dykes

In addition, there are 81 sites of 'special scientific interest', 21 parks and open spaces, one main nature reserve – the Leicester and Rutland Wildlife Trust – and 26 local nature reserves. There are two National Trust properties: Staunton Harold and Stoneywell, and two English Heritage sites: Ashby de la Zouche Castle and Kirby Muxloe Castle.

Performing Arts

Outside of Leicester city centre there are a range of independent performing arts venues, including:

- Melton Theatre, Melton Mowbray
- Century Theatre, Coalville (as mentioned earlier, it is supported by LCC)
- Kilworth House Theatre, Lutterworth
- Concordia Theatre, Hinckley
- Loughborough Town Hall
- Harborough Theatre
- Charnwood Arts

Creative Businesses and Creative Studios

While there are 11 market towns in Leicestershire, the towns of Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Hinckley, Harborough, Loughborough, and Melton Mowbray have particularly high numbers of small to medium-sized creative businesses. In a 2015 report, it was estimated that two thirds of creative jobs were spread out across the County (as opposed to the city) with Market Harborough, Charnwood, and Hinckley (especially activity in the Atkin's Building) having the largest concentrations (ERS, 2015: 4). Helen Harris, LCC's Economic Growth Manager, established a Market Towns Subgroup which recognises how "culture plays a big role in increasing the footfall in the town centre" of these areas (personal correspondence with Helen Harris, 2023). Tourism-related activities programmed adjacent to LCC's cultural provision include Digital Trails, Leicestershire-by-the-Sea activities, and targeted creative marketing campaigns to raise footfall.

Last year the East Midlands Creative Consortium, EMC² (funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport), announced its £1.2m [Create Growth](#) fund to help creative regional businesses in Leicestershire with scaling up.

At the time of writing, LCC's Creative Leicestershire team have been awarded an Arts Council England grant to launch the 'Creative Spaces – Animating Local Towns' project to showcase creative spaces in 5 market towns across Leicestershire. The aim is to use free spaces owned by local authorities in each town to show creative businesses and practitioners how to utilise spaces creatively and innovatively. It will

include creative business support, small roadshows, the development of networks and creative forums, as well as an overview of skills opportunities and needs in each area. This is an example of LCC taking advantage of and proactively working with local independent venues following the pandemic.

Continuing to build collaboration between LCC's cultural assets and creative business will support many of the priority areas in LCC's [Strategic Plan](#), not least Great Communities and Improved Opportunities.

Other players adjacent to the cultural sector in Leicestershire

- University of Leicester
- De Montfort University
- Social prescribing / the NHS
- Further Education (FE) sector
- Voluntary Action Leicestershire

PART 2: Demand

Who is Leicestershire?

In terms of its populace, Leicestershire does not stand out from other regional averages. According to census data, Leicestershire has a population of 712,371 people (ONS, 2021). This figure has significantly increased in the last 20 years, having stood at 611,200 in 2001. Leicestershire covers an area of 2,083 square kilometres, across seven district and borough councils. What makes Leicestershire unusual is that at its heart lies Leicester, a city described as “super-diverse” with 59% of the population from minority ethnic backgrounds (*The Guardian*, 29 November 2022). Through personal correspondence with Richard Wilding from the Business Intelligence team at LCC, we have gathered the following data on the populace of Leicestershire.

This information is useful when considering *who* exactly LCC’s cultural provision is for, and thus how a cultural strategy can be created that accurately (and adequately) responds to the specific needs of the populace.

Changes to Leicestershire since the last census demonstrate that the population is:

- Growing, with noticeable increases in the older population
- More ethnically diverse
- Less religious
- More highly qualified
- More likely to be living in rented accommodation.

These changes will now be reflected on in more detail using PESTLE analysis: an approach commonly used in business management to understand the key external factors of an organisation – Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Environmental. This approach has been adopted to guide LCC in strategic decision-making for developing a new cultural strategy.

Political factors

Local politics

Leicestershire County Council is currently Conservative controlled. Since the last county council election in 2021, 42 seats belong to the Conservatives, 9 seats to Liberal Democrats, and 4 seats to Labour (LCC, 2023). In the most recent district council elections (May 2023), the Conservatives in Northwest Leicestershire lost their majority, considerably dropping their seats in Melton and Harborough. Labour won 17 seats with no single party having an overall majority (*Leicester Mercury*, 5 May 2023). Liberal Democrats make up the main opposition. For context, Leicester City Council remains a Labour majority, with Peter Soulsby as Mayor/leader for the next 4 years.

Political geography

The East Midlands comprises the counties of Derbyshire, Leicestershire, south and east Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland, and the major regional cities of Leicester, Derby, and Nottingham. Since last year there has been a

focus on the potential devolution of Nottingham and Derbyshire in a joint mayor plan that would exclude Leicestershire (*The Guardian*, 5 Sept 2022). Think tank [Centre for Cities](#) has described this as a “step-back” for the government’s own Levelling Up agenda as well as for the local economy of Nottingham and Derby (Sept 2022). Such macro-level economic strategising suggests an uneven distribution of value placed on different parts of the East Midlands, not least the undervaluation of Leicestershire within broader national political dialogues.

DCMS-55

According to a report commissioned by the DCMS, the government is responsible for supporting 55 creative clusters – conglomerations of creative businesses in the same geographical area – across the UK (Frontier Economics, 2021). Pertinent to this inventory, a recent report by PEC explains that “apart from the East Midlands” DCMS-55 clusters account for the majority of creative industries turnover in all of the UK’s regions” (2023: 16). In the East Midlands, Northampton is the only Travel To Work Area (TTWA – more detail on this below) listed as a creative cluster by the DCMS, and while the cities of Nottingham, Leicester and Derby together account for 67% of all East Midlands turnover and 62% of creative employment, they are not on the DCMS list. This does not suggest that the creative industries of the East Midlands are less prolific than other regions but that – for a multitude of reasons, especially relating to specialisation codes deployed by DCMS – they have not been as formally recognised they might have been by government.

[There is a crucial need to address this issue in future local cultural policy.](#)

Economic factors

Macroeconomics

A recent report by Centre for Cities defined the overall economy of the Midlands as “spiky”, referring to the way it is concentrated in and around the eight largest urban areas which, despite accounting for less than 10% of the region’s land area, are clusters for 53% of employment and 50% of output. The report estimated that the Midlands economy was underperforming by £18 billion per year ([Midlands Engine](#), 2023). That said, there are several factors which indicate the relative prosperity of Leicestershire, such as:

Home ownership

In Leicestershire a higher % of people own their own homes, either outright or with a mortgage, than the national average (73.4% vs 61.3%). The % of households renting privately has increased from 5.5% in 2001, to 13.2% in 2021. However, this remains below the national average of 18.2%.

Labour market figures

The % of the population who are economically active (excluding full-time students) is 59.1%, which is higher than the national average. There are marked distinctions in the % of economically active people in different towns, with the percentage of the population in Blaby working more than those in Charnwood. 144,414 people identify as retired in Leicestershire, making up 24.6% of the population. There are 33,929

students, who make up 5.8% of the population. 3.4% are looking after home or family, while 2.9% identify as sick or disabled. According to Business Intelligence software used at LCC, there were 1,865 people working in the cultural sector in Leicestershire in 2021 with the most common roles being in library and archive activities alongside motion picture, video, and television programme production. The latter is particularly insightful given a named sentiment of LCC's 2001 cultural strategy to "address the lack of film and media production in the County" (2001: 18). Further analysis gathered by Richard Wilding suggests that there were 1,799 people employed within the creative sector in 2021, with the most popular roles being graphic designers, arts officers, producers, and directors, and product, clothing, and related designers (Creative Arts Cluster Overview, p3).

Education

The County has a lower % of people with no qualifications (16.7%), than the national average. It has a lower % with level 4 (degree level) qualifications: 32% compared to a national result of 33.9%. However, this is an increase compared to 26.1% in 2011. Overall, 187,737 people have a degree. Full-time students and school pupils are marginally lower in Leicestershire than the national average, with highest proportions of school children in Charnwood and Oadby and Wigston. There are significantly lower proportions in other areas, reflecting ageing population structure.

Sociological factors

Demography and migration

Since the 2011 census the population of the East Midlands has grown by 7.7%, with the population of Leicestershire increasing by 9.5% (ONS, 2021). The largest population increase in the whole of the region has been seen in Harborough which has grown by 14.3% (ONS, 2021). There has also been increased migration into the county from outside – 54,392 people migrated into Leicestershire since 2011, an 8.4% change. There is a preponderance of single-family households – only 2% live in communal accommodation, and the lion's share of households are single families, who make up 67.3% of the population.

Age

As mentioned above, since the 2011 census the population of Leicestershire is ageing, with the over 65s now making up 20.8% of the population. The median age in England is 40, but in parts of the county such as Harborough or Hinckley & Bosworth it is 45 years old.

Ethnicity

While Leicester itself is renowned for its ethnic diversity – 41.1% of residents were born outside of the UK – Leicestershire remains predominantly White, with 87.5% of the population identifying as such. The largest non-white group identifies as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh, making up 8.2% of county. In comparison to the national average of 17.4%, only 9.7% of Leicestershire residents were born outside of the UK. However, since 2011, there has been a 3.9% increase in the BAME population. This has been most notable in Blaby, Charnwood, and Oadby and Wigston, which are the Leicestershire towns with the largest proportion of the population with a non-UK national identity.

Language and cultural identity

Leicestershire is predominantly English speaking. In contrast to the national average of 90.8%, 95% of the population in Leicestershire speak English as their main language. In Leicester city this is 70%.

In 2018, there was estimated to be over 25,000 people with Polish roots living in the county ([Project Polska](#), 2018). After the Second World War, the British Army established five Polish resettlement camps in the area. Overall, Leicestershire is significantly less diverse than Leicester, with a round 10% of the populace belonging to ethnic minority groups (Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland Health and Wellbeing Partnership, 2023).

Religion

Since 2011, the % of residents in Leicestershire identifying as having No Religion has increased to 40.3%, higher than the national average. The main religion remains Christian, with 45.7% identifying as such. The next most common religious denominations are Hindu (3.7%) and Muslim (2.3%).

Health and Wellbeing

48.3% reported very good health in 2021 census. In comparison to national averages, slightly more people reported good and fair health than low or bad health. The number of individuals identifying as disabled was 16.6%, which is slightly lower than national average of 17.3%. In Leicestershire, there are more people giving 9 hours or less unpaid care each week than the England average, but fewer providing higher numbers of hours of unpaid care.

Technological factors

Historically, the digital divide in the East Midlands has been one of the higher scoring areas in the UK. In 2018, the ONS found that 11.5% of the population were internet non-users, compared to 20.2% in 2012 ([ONS](#), 2018). Building on this data, a Leicestershire and Leicester Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) survey was undertaken in 2021 to better understand digital poverty in Leicestershire. Its review included solutions such as targeted interventions in areas of food poverty (which is an issue often co-existent with digital poverty), buddying schemes, internet access for all via libraries and other public buildings, an equipment loan system, recycling and refurbishment of IT equipment and integrating digital skills into English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses ([LLEP](#), 2021)

Legal factors

Equal opportunities

There is robust leadership of the equalities agenda at LCC and other major institutional players in the county, such as NHS Leicestershire. LCC has Stonewall Top 100, Disability Confident Level 2 and Mindful Employer accreditations. Charities such as [Equality Action](#) operating in the area (Loughborough-based) join ongoing advocacy work in the region.

Environmental factors

Bill Bryson described Leicestershire to be “as beautiful as the Cotswolds but nobody knows about it”. Leicestershire is home to several sites of Outstanding Natural Beauty including the Vale of Belvoir, the National Forest – which spans 200 square miles of Derbyshire, Leicestershire, and Staffordshire (and which includes the ancient Charnwood Forest) – as well as the River Soar, the principle river in the county. There are 76 miles of Roman roads.

LCC has a Net Zero Policy with a high-level action plan for reaching its target to decarbonise the County by 2045. Emphasis is on changing patterns of consumption in vehicle mileage and fuel type; retrofitting buildings and switching heat sources; regional-scale energy transition to renewable energy; engaging with the circular economy to a greater extent; enhancing ecosystems and green spaces; raising awareness of decarbonisations (LCC, 2021: 68).

[As a well-networked and far-reaching service operating at multiple levels across the County, LCC’s Libraries & Heritage service has the potential to play an impactful role in consciousness-raising for decarbonisation goals.](#)

The crest of the county council, and the emblem of Leicestershire County Cricket Club and Leicester City FC is the red fox. Leicestershire is considered to be the birthplace of fox hunting with Melton Mowbray and Market Harborough having associations with the now-illegal sport, as has neighbouring Rutland. Leicestershire was the final English county to have its own flag revealed featuring a fox (*The Guardian*, 22 Jul 2021).

Public transport

Demand for cultural provision in Leicestershire is compromised by deteriorating standards of public transport in the county, which present a significant and ongoing barrier to participation. Analysis of the local bus network undertaken in 2018 found that 93.3% of the population live within 800m of a local bus service (LCC 2021: 12) yet there has been “a steady decline in the number of bus passenger journeys per head of population in Leicestershire, reducing by 26% from just under 27 in 2009/10 to just under 20 journeys per person in 2018/19” (ibid, 2021: 9). This has been linked to a reduction in local authority support (ibid 2021: 8) – resulting in less frequent services, lack of up-to-date bus timetable information, and the removal of under-used services – as well as the growth in car ownership and usage (ibid 2021: 9). This does not just impact cultural access but also sustainability agendas, as LCC’s Strategic Growth Plan notes: “rurality presents challenges for medium and long-distance public transport, meaning it can be difficult to enable opportunities to travel by sustainable modes” (LCC 2022: 22).

LCC has created a Bus Service Improvement Plan, the vision of which is for the bus network “to seamlessly connect people...in a way that is reliable, affordable, environmentally friendly, easy-to-use, safe and inclusive” (LCC, 2021: 6). In late 2022 Midlands Connect announced the Midlands Rail Hub, a rail improvement scheme to enable faster, better, and more frequent connects across the Midlands, which includes planned engineering upgrades in Nuneaton, Wigston and Leicester.

Interestingly, PEC's recent research on the UK creative economy has placed emphasis on using Travel To Work Areas (TTWAs) as a geographical tool for mapping the link between where economically active residents in an area work, and where they live (PEC, 2023). Leicestershire's declining transportation links may be contributing to the region's low ranking as a creative industries hotspot.

PART 3: Supply

Who are the Creative and Cultural Communities of Leicestershire?

With additional support from Richard Wilding in the Business Intelligence Service at LCC, the research team made use of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's (DCMS) industry codes to understand the economic position of the creative and cultural sectors in Leicestershire and Leicester. DCMS definitions include civil society, the creative industries, cultural sector, digital sector, gambling, sport, telecoms, and tourism. As such, statistics gathered have a very broad scope and are suggestive only of the state of play in the cultural and creative sector in Leicestershire.

Cultural and Creative Businesses

Research undertaken by LLEP in 2021 found that there are more than 2,500 Creative and Cultural businesses in Leicester and Leicestershire. These statistics were based on a 2019 pre-pandemic survey, with most creative businesses being classed as micro-sized – businesses with 9 employees or less (LLEP, 2021). Indeed, 89% of businesses in Leicestershire are defined as micro-sized, with improvements in survival and start-up rates (LCC 2021: 23).

Richard Wilding's findings show that in 2022, based on DCMS's 31 Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes for the cultural and creative industries, there were 2,110 businesses classified as cultural or creative. The most popular forms of business were what could be identified as linked or adjacent to the cultural and creative activities we are considering in this document⁷: computer consultancies, specialised design (largely of manufacturing equipment), and computer programming. Notably, 95 companies were defined as Artistic Creation businesses, 40 were Performing Arts, 20 Library and Archive and 20 Cultural Education.

⁷ Analyses of the economic benefit of cultural and creative activities typically focus narrowly on the economic value generated by the outputs of cultural and creative businesses. We think it is more beneficial to assess the economic value of those activities more widely. For instance, this could encompass income and employment generated by other businesses when cultural and creative events are being held. Examples in this supply chain at any one time can include restaurants and cafes. Where applicable, this can include others such as transportation companies, accommodation providers, and vendors of various kinds.

Business Counts 2013-22: Creative Industries

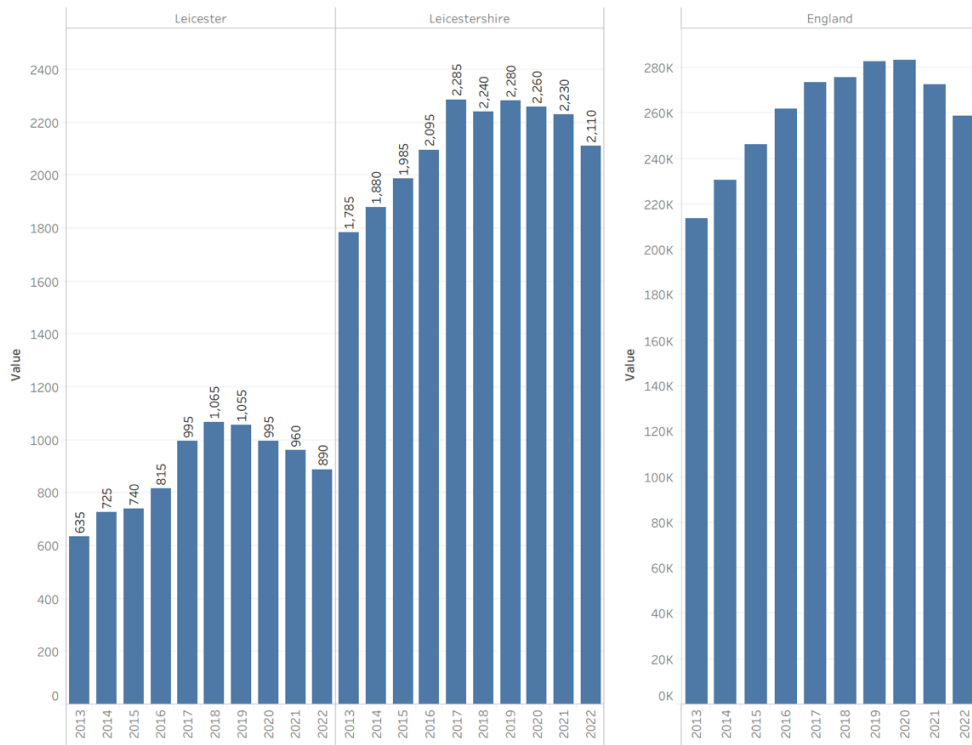


FIGURE 2: CULTURE & CREATIVE SECTOR BUSINESS COUNTS BY BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, 2023.

Employment

Numbers estimated to be employed in the Cultural Sector, 2021

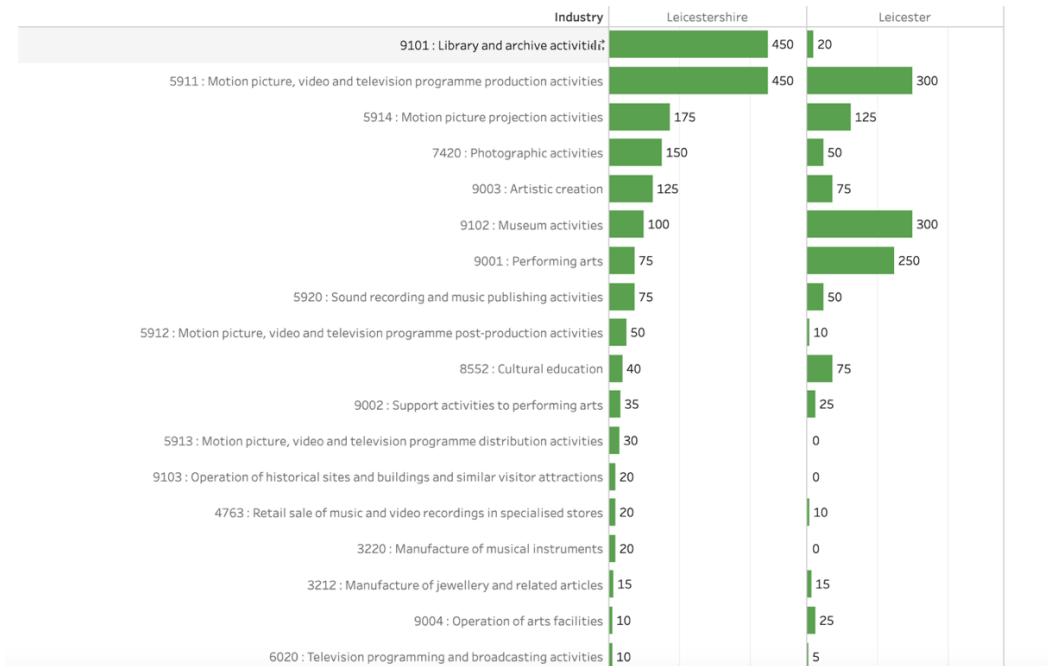
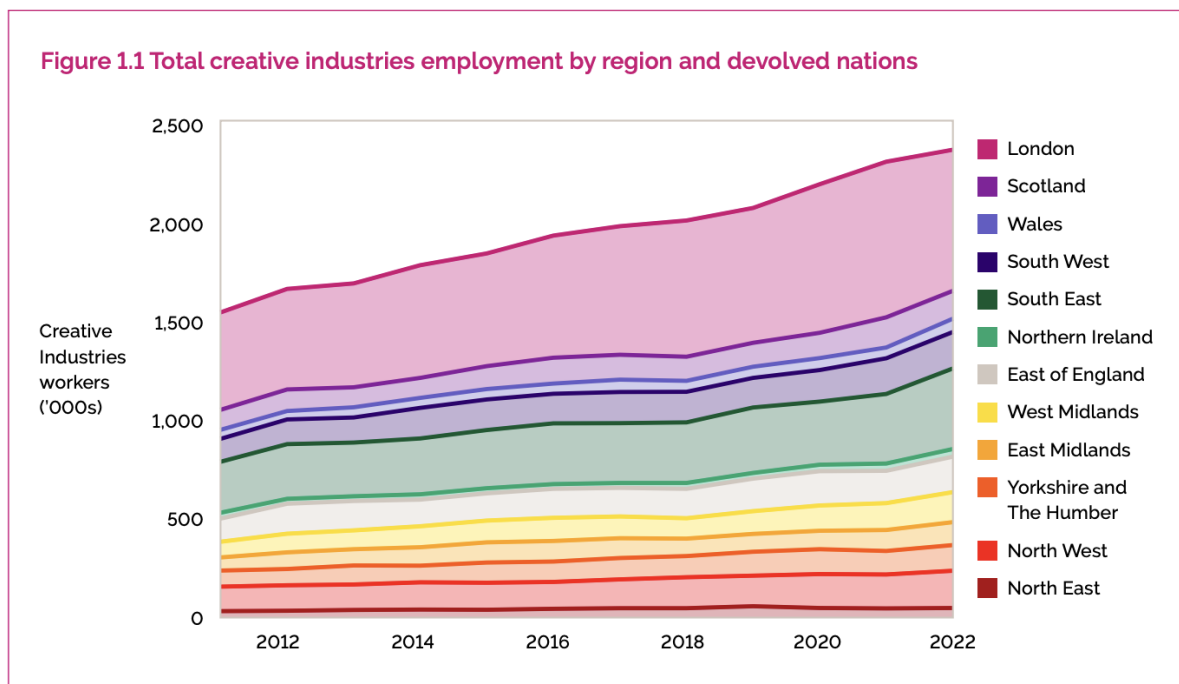


FIGURE 3: CULTURAL SECTOR EMPLOYMENT IN LEICESTERSHIRE AND LEICESTER BY BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, 2023.

According to the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre (PEC), each creative job in the UK adds at least 1.96 non-tradeable jobs over a 20-year period (PEC, 2021). Based on this calculation, by 2041 Leicestershire will have 3,526 creative jobs.

In a survey undertaken by Creative Leicestershire at the end of 2021, 69% of respondents identified as sole traders, with 15% describing themselves as limited companies (Creative Leicestershire, 2021). 16% of respondents said they employed between 2-10 people in their company. 39% of all respondents said that Covid had greatly impacted their ability to make money. A useful visualisation of total creative industries employment in the region has been devised by the PEC (see Figure 4).



Source: Authors' elaboration on DCMS sector economic estimates from *Annual Population Survey* and *Labour Force Survey*.

FIGURE 4: TOTAL CREATIVE INDUSTRIES EMPLOYMENT BY REGION AND DEVOLVED NATURES – GRAPHIC PRODUCED BY PEC’S FOR GEOGRAPHIES OF CREATIVITY REPORT, 2023

Individual practitioners

The statistics outlined only tell part of the story. Research undertaken by Creative Leicestershire in 2015 identified 8,000 people working in the Creative Industries across the County with many artists and makers working alone. The size of Creative Leicestershire’s online community suggests the real size of artists and creative practitioners living and working in the area – it has 15,000 followers across all its social media channels with 1,500 subscribers to its monthly newsletter. As mentioned, it has been suggested by members of Creative Leicestershire that significant numbers of creative practitioners coalesce in the market towns of Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Melton Mowbray, Harborough, Hinckley, and Loughborough.

Ruth Singer's (2019) research report 'Made in Leicestershire' commissioned by Creative Leicestershire, focussed on what artists needed to make a living in the county. Singer's report underscores the difficulties of capturing the exact number of professional working artists and makers in the region and stated:

We estimate that there are probably 250 active artists and makers who generate the majority or all their income from their practice. There are hundreds more who practice art regularly and sell some work but it is not their sole income, including many selling on a small scale online and in local shops...There are many others working in heritage crafts, traditional art and fine art who have not been within the remit of Made in Leicestershire and/or choose not to engage with services or are not aware of them (Singer, 2019: 4).

The research found "a very varied picture of part, full-time and freelance work" with nearly 50% of respondents stating they undertake freelance work, 60% do not have another job outside their practice and the rest work full or part time at another job. The report continues "76% of respondents were sole traders and 75% had been in business for over 2 years with 26% having been in business 13 years or longer" (ibid: 6) – these statistics are significantly higher than research undertaken by Creative Leicestershire in 2021. For around 50%, freelance or employed teaching was a significant income stream (ibid: 7).

Cultural and Creative Demographics

Research undertaken in 2019 by CAMEo (Cultural and Media Economies Institute) at the University of Leicester, in partnership with CVAN East Midlands, found that for the creative economy in the East Midlands, the region's visual arts workforce is predominantly white, with 8% identifying as BAME (2019: 6). The visual artists of the East Midlands were found to be engaged in a diverse array of art forms and practices. While fine art is a major activity, the report claims that a "diversity of practice is suggestive of a healthy and vibrant creative ecology" in the region (ibid: 6). Questions on the educational backgrounds of practitioners revealed that most artists had been trained rather than self-taught; 84% of respondents were educated to at least undergraduate level and 47% had obtained a postgraduate qualification (2019: 11). Significantly, barriers noted by practitioners included: a rural home location with limited public transport connections (which can be exacerbated by a disability), caring and family responsibilities, managing multiple other jobs, and/or a lack of studio provision in their locale (2019: 20).

Part 4: Impact

As discussed extensively elsewhere, it is not always easy to measure the impact – economic, social, political, cultural, environmental, and educational – of cultural activity.

Gross Value Added (GVA)

GVA is a productivity measure which measures the value that producers have added to the goods and services they have bought. In 2021, GVA from Arts, Entertainment and Recreation in Leicestershire was £105m, with £142m GVA in Leicester city. This figure comprises only 0.6% of total GVA in Leicestershire, which demonstrates the healthy productivity of other industries within the county.

Cultural Participation

Levels of participation in LCC's cultural provision continue to increase. There were 680,000 visits to libraries and heritage sites in 2022-23. In 2022, there was a 41% increase in new library members and 6,000 children participated in the Summer Reading Challenge. Further cultural participation figures are listed as follows:

- 1) 102,386 visits to the 5 LCC museums were recorded.
- 2) CLS engaged with over 100,000 pupils, students and teachers.
- 3) LCC Libraries & Heritage Service benefitted from 16,046 volunteer hours.

Creative Industries

As noted above, *Geographies of Creativity*, a recent report by PEC which looks at the potential of creative corridors across the UK, demonstrates that neither Leicester nor Leicestershire is currently home to one the UK's 55 creative clusters as identified by the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport and Frontier Economics in 2022. While they write of the potential of the Sheffield and East Midlands corridor, they state their "analysis shows that creative industries employment in this potential corridor is lower than in other regions" (2023: 39).

However, what are emerging are new kinds of creative businesses, particularly [film production](#) and [games](#). This has been spurred on by Town Deal funding such as we have seen in Loughborough, as well as input from the Create Growth Programme.

Part 5: Visualising Cultural Activity in Leicestershire

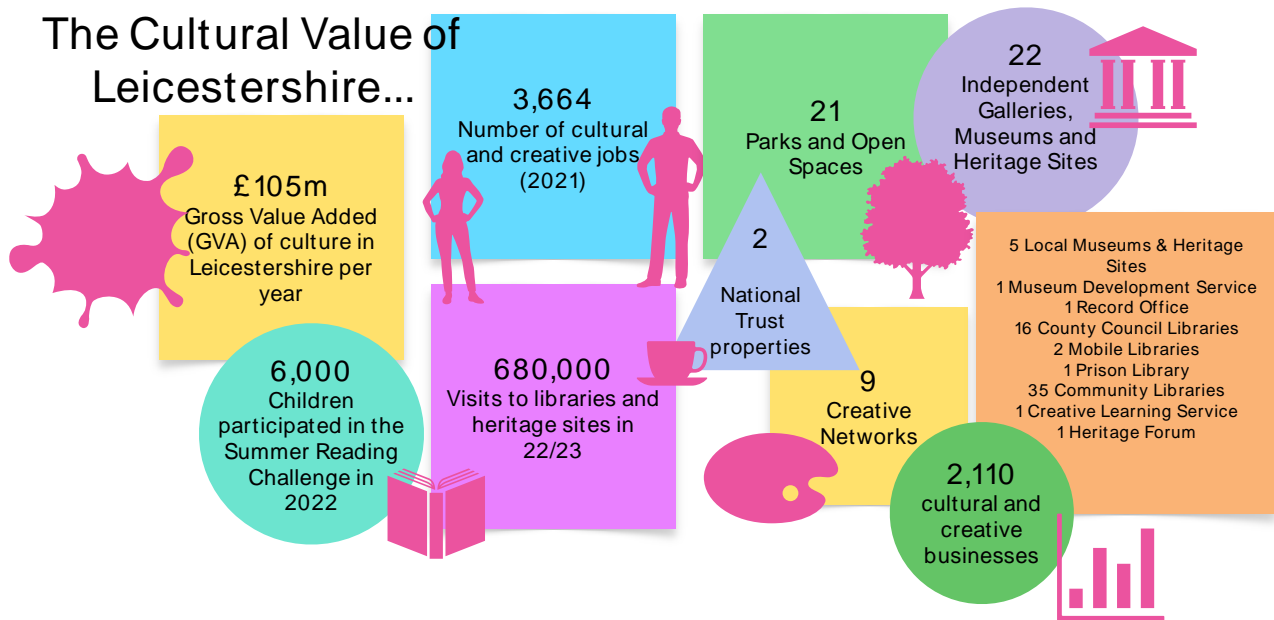


FIGURE 5: INFOGRAPHIC (SAMPLE)

PART 6: Conclusion

This document has sought to inform the development of a blueprint for Leicestershire County Council's new Cultural Strategy by presenting – as much as has been possible – an expanded take on what constitutes cultural and creative activity in the County, as well as where possible opportunities and challenges reside. It has not shied away from assessing the Council's own cultural assets alongside independent assets that co-exist alongside, perceiving the benefit of a more joined-up approach to thinking about the cultural life of Leicestershire.

Further, this document seeks to present culture and creativity in Leicestershire in the language and intentions of the Council's Strategic Growth Plan, which emphasis on its stated actions:

- Our libraries, heritage, country parks and adult learning programmes will provide accessible community facilities, exhibitions and parks and outdoor activities with a wide range of learning opportunities
- Support communities to engage in cultural and heritage activities and develop their own bespoke programmes of cultural events and activities
- Support schools with a wide range of resources, pupil sessions and professional help to stimulate reading for pleasure and creative learning across the curriculum
- Preserve and provide access to resources which can be used to research Leicestershire's history
- Maintain the County's natural history, artefacts, specimens, information and objects as well as the stories of the people who have made Leicestershire their home for thousands of years
- Offer a wide range of online adult learning courses in venues across Leicestershire. (2022:11)

Factors beyond the scope of this project

Inevitably, there are areas of research which are beyond the scope of this document, but which future research might address. One key factor repeatedly flagged during this project related to the infrastructure of LCC – specifically the extent to which its internal legacies and current practices helped or hindered the aspirations of its services.

In addition, as mentioned at the beginning of this document, regional councils are in a state of extreme financial crisis. A key issue for LCC at the time of writing is supporting communities across the County to be resilient when they are struggling to maintain resilience themselves.

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