

Herefordshire Cultural Strategy 2025-2030

Executive Summary

Herefordshire stands at a pivotal moment in its cultural development. Building on five years of significant progress toward achieving the aims of the previous cultural strategy, led by the Herefordshire Cultural Partnership (HCP), the revised strategy sets out an ambitious yet practical vision for how culture can drive economic growth, enhance wellbeing, and strengthen communities across our distinctively rural county.

This strategy has been developed by the Herefordshire Cultural Partnership in collaboration with Herefordshire Council and a wide range of stakeholders. It builds on the achievements of the 2019-2024 Cultural Strategy while responding to the changing context for cultural development locally, regionally, and nationally.

The Rural Context: Challenges and Opportunities

Herefordshire's rurality presents both unique challenges and distinctive opportunities for cultural development:

- **Geographic Dispersion:** As one of England's most sparsely populated counties, Herefordshire faces significant challenges in cultural provision, with communities separated by considerable distances and limited public transport
- **Seasonal Disruption:** Environmental factors, including flooding, regularly impact cultural participation and delivery, requiring adaptive approaches to programming and engagement
- **Digital Connectivity:** Variable broadband access creates barriers to digital cultural engagement in rural areas, while also offering opportunities for innovative solutions
- **Community Assets:** Market towns and villages maintain strong local identities and community spaces that can serve as cultural hubs when properly supported
- **Natural and Historic Environment:** Herefordshire's outstanding landscape and cultural heritage provides both inspiration and settings for distinctive cultural experiences that cannot be replicated elsewhere

These rural characteristics demand bespoke approaches to cultural development that conventional urban-focused strategies cannot address.

The Opportunity

Herefordshire's cultural sector represents a vital economic and social asset. Our research reveals:

- **Economic Impact:** The creative and cultural sector comprises 800 registered businesses, alongside a substantial creative workforce estimated at 4,500, some 2.5 times that reported

in official employment statistics, reflecting the prevalence of freelance working. Research suggests GVA per capita in the sector is twice the average for the county.

- **Cultural Assets:** A rich ecosystem of cultural organisations, from the new Museum of Hereford to internationally recognised festivals to community-led initiatives, spanning urban and rural settings
- **Growth Potential:** Significant opportunities to enhance Herefordshire's reputation as a destination for cultural tourism, creative business, and cultural participation
- **Social Value:** Culture's proven contribution to health and wellbeing, community cohesion, and quality of life across the county

Partnership Leadership

Joint working between Herefordshire County Council and Herefordshire Cultural Partnership has demonstrated effective leadership for the sector and county as a whole:

- **Securing Major Investment:** the Council's commitment of £8.5 million toward the complete refurbishment of Hereford Museum and Art Gallery in Broad Street, and the relocation of Hereford Library to Shirehall, levered in additional £8 million planned from the Stronger Towns fund, £5 million from National Lottery Heritage Fund and 750k from Arts Council England. HCP led a successful partnership bid for £730k from Arts Council England, Government UKSPF funding, Herefordshire Council and local fundraising for the groundbreaking Our Place creative health programme, demonstrating the Partnership's capacity to attract significant external funding
- **Coordinating Business Support:** the Council used UKSPF funding to deliver targeted support for creative businesses through Mountain Perspective, helping over 120 creative enterprises develop sustainable business models
- **Enabling Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Bringing together cultural organisations, health providers, educational institutions, and community groups to address shared challenges
- **Developing Rural Models:** Pioneering approaches to cultural delivery that respond to Herefordshire's rural context, creating replicable models for other rural areas
- **Advocating for the Sector:** Providing a unified voice for culture in strategic conversations about Herefordshire's future through The Shire website and networking events such as The Herd

This sector-led, partnership-based approach has proven more effective than traditional 'top down' sector support models, allowing for greater agility, broader engagement, and more diverse funding streams.

Strategic Approach

Our approach is guided by a **Pro-Herefordshire Mindset** that celebrates our county's distinctive rural character while addressing its unique challenges. This philosophy underpins five interconnected priorities:

1. **Children and Young People:** Developing creative skills and career pathways that reflect the realities of Herefordshire's rural creative economy, focusing on portfolio careers and entrepreneurship
2. **Creative Economy:** Supporting creative businesses to grow sustainably through targeted business support, collaborative approaches to skills and talent development, and innovative workspace solutions that overcome rural isolation
3. **Cultural Democracy:** Ensuring all communities can shape and access cultural opportunities through co-creation, community ownership, and addressing rural access challenges
4. **Cultural Tourism:** Positioning Herefordshire as a distinctive rural cultural and heritage destination through coordinated marketing, digital innovation, and development of the festivals and events offer
5. **Creative Health:** Pioneering culturally led approaches to wellbeing that build on Our Place's success in working with communities in Golden Valley, Leominster and South Wye to address health priorities through creative engagement in widely varying rural, market town and peri-urban settings

Implementation Framework

The strategy will be delivered through a partnership approach that recognises the complementary roles of:

- **Herefordshire Cultural Partnership:** Providing strategic leadership, facilitating collaboration, and advocating for the sector
- **Herefordshire Council:** Supporting cultural development through policy alignment, enabling access to spaces, and strategic investment
- **Cultural Organisations:** Delivering high-quality cultural experiences, engaging diverse communities, and developing talent
- **Community Partners:** Ensuring cultural provision responds to local needs and opportunities

Measuring Success

By 2030, successful implementation of this strategy will deliver:

- Increased participation in cultural activities across all communities, with particular focus on underserved rural areas

- Growth in creative employment and business sustainability across the county
- Enhanced reputation of Herefordshire as a distinctive rural cultural destination
- Improved wellbeing outcomes through creative health initiatives that address rural isolation
- Stronger, more resilient cultural organisations, creative businesses, sole traders and infrastructure that can withstand external, seasonal and geographic challenges

Call to Action

This strategy represents a shared commitment to Herefordshire's cultural future. It calls for:

- **Investment:** Strategic funding to support implementation of key actions that address rural challenges
- **Collaboration:** Enhanced partnership working across sectors and geographic boundaries
- **Innovation:** New approaches to addressing the unique challenges of rural cultural participation and provision
- **Advocacy:** Championing the value of culture to Herefordshire's economic and social wellbeing

By working together to implement this strategy, we can ensure that culture continues to thrive at the heart of Herefordshire's communities, economy, and identity, creating a model for rural cultural development that can inspire other areas facing similar challenges.