

# Establishing Harlow as a Cultural Capital



<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	10 July 2025
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Danielle Brown, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Community
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Rebecca Farrant, Director – Culture and Community
<b>Contributing Officers:</b>	Rory Davies, Head of Culture and Heritage  Chris Purvis, Senior Community Health and Wellbeing and Culture Officer  Ben Simanowitz, LGA Graduate
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Forward Plan:</b>	Forward Plan number I017787
<b>Call In:</b>	This item is subject to call in procedures
<b>Corporate Missions:</b>	Rebuild Our Town Renew Our Neighbourhoods Transform our Council
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All

## Executive Summary

- A** In respect of the corporate mission to 'Rebuild Our Town', the Building Harlow's Future plan states that the council will *"build the Arts and Cultural Quarter and establish Harlow as a Cultural capital"*.
- B** In line with that outcome this report provides a summary of our framework to *"provide extraordinary cultural offerings that are recognised across the East of England"*. This report requests the approval this framework for unified delivery of arts, culture and heritage in Harlow. This provides clear priorities for cultural placemaking and focussed

action plans that will promote the potential of the town's creativity. The framework is a partnership between the council and the town's arts, culture and heritage sector.

### **Recommended that:**

- A** Cabinet approves the framework 'Rebuild: Reimagine - establishing Harlow as a cultural capital' at Appendix A.
- B** Cabinet approves the use of £55,000 from discretionary services fund to create a heritage and culture grant scheme.

### **Reason for decision**

- A** In respect of the corporate mission to 'Rebuild Our Town', the Building Harlow's Future plan states that the council will *"build the Arts and Cultural Quarter and establish Harlow as a Cultural capital"*.
- B** To ensure that the council has a clear direction for the Arts, Culture and Heritage ecosystem in Harlow and ensuring that our delivery in this sector support the council's missions.
- C** To ensure that the funding made available through the enabler grant scheme makes a positive impact for Harlow.

### **Other Options**

- A** The council could choose not to have a strategic approach to achieving its outcome or could focus on the actions of the council alone. These options have been dismissed due to the importance of partnership working across the sector. This approach ensures there is a golden thread through delivery of arts, culture and heritage in Harlow and supports the council to Build Harlow's Future.

### **Background**

1. The lack of strategic approach for the arts, culture and heritage sector in Harlow has led to a lack of investment, this has meant resident engagement has remained below some of the lowest engagement figures nationally.
2. The creation of the framework and action plan has been led by the council with sector and public engagement. Between October 2024 and January 2025, the council and Rhiannon Faith Company delivered stakeholder engagement activity to gather the local communities' thoughts on culture and creativity in Harlow.
3. The scoping work included 24 interviews with key stakeholders, public engagement workshops, an open day, and a resident questionnaire with over 120 responses

## Issues/Proposals

4. Our findings told us a thriving cultural sector is considered vital for the well-being of residents, the local economy and Harlow's identity. However, a number of barriers currently limit cultural engagement and prevent these benefits from being fully realised.
5. It is paramount that we secure investment to transform Harlow into a cultural capital, which will improve wellbeing through creative health programmes, support local artists, deliver inclusive cultural experiences across all wards, and build lasting partnerships with a strong, unified voice.
6. To achieve this, we propose two priority areas,
  - a) Creative People and Communities
  - b) Creative Economy.
7. These areas give focus to addressing the needs of the sector and our residents as well as providing growth to the local economy.
8. To deliver on these priorities there is an action plan for each area, the action plans contained in Appendix A, offer action, result and outcome and show transparency of the results and long-term outcomes.
9. Enabler grant funding to support cultural and heritage organisations and assets within the town will seek to address the gap in available investment based on assisting them to contribute towards the outcomes in the action plan. The funding will act as a catalyst for the third and commercial sector within Harlow to achieving the outcomes within the action plan. Achieving these actions collectively will put Harlow in a strong position to attract additional funding in future to support long term cultural place making.
10. The framework is a partnership document, and the actions will be delivered by the council and the sector.
11. The action plans will be monitored to assess performance; this will be monitored annually in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.
12. The action plans will be achieved over the period 2025 – 2028.

## **Implications**

### **Equalities and Diversity**

The Equalities Act 2010 has been carefully considered by officers, and impact assessment was conducted (E712168376) There is potential for this delivery of this to benefit protected characteristic groups.

### **Climate Change**

This report has no direct impact on climate change.

### **Finance**

The Medium Term Financial Plan, provides the required resources to deliver the recommendations above. It is requested that £55,000 is utilised from the discretionary service earmarked reserve to create a cultural enabler scheme, which will be a one off use of expenditure to help enable the “cultural capital”. The framework will support external investment into the town.

Author: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Director – Finance and Section 151 Officer

### **Governance**

There are no governance implications arising directly from the adoption of a framework and establishment of a grant funding facility. Careful consideration will need to be given to how the grant funding facility is operated in terms of there being a clear access criteria and applications process as well as mechanisms to ensure funding provided is used as intended, outcomes are monitored and evaluated and that there is the provision to recover grant funding in appropriate circumstances.

Author: Daniel Dickinson, Director – Legal and Governance (Interim) and Monitoring Officer

### **Appendices**

Appendix A – REBUILD | REIMAGINE, Establishing Harlow as a cultural capital.

### **Background Papers**

None

### **Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

None