

HARLOW | BUILDING
HARLOW'S
FUTURE.

REBUILD | REIMAGINE

ESTABLISHING HARLOW AS A
CULTURAL CAPITAL

2025-2028



Harlow is a place where creativity is valued and lies at the heart of our community. By 2028, Harlow will be a town where extraordinary art is everywhere, created with and for everyone, positioning us as a Cultural Capital in the East of England.

We envision a town that is modern, inclusive, and forward-thinking, with a future as bright as the people who live here. A place where innovation meets tradition, where every voice is heard, and where creativity inspire connection, pride, and progress.

REBUILD | REIMAGINE VISION

2025 – 2028

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Harlow is a post-war New Town commissioned in 1947 which is now home to around 40,000 homes and 100,000 residents. Harlow will celebrate its 80th anniversary during the life of this strategy, in 2027.

Creativity and Culture have always been at the heart of the town. Sir Frederick Gibberd wanted Harlow to be a place where people could enjoy great art on every street corner, where creativity were to be valued and given an important role in the community. As a result, Harlow has over 100 publicly accessible pieces of art including works by some of the most well renowned sculptors of the 20th Century including Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Elizabeth Frink and Auguste Rodin. Harlow is the only designated sculpture town in the UK.

Despite having extraordinary cultural assets, Harlow is in the bottom 16% of cultural participation in England. This is set within the context of high levels of socioeconomic and health inequalities experienced by residents; Harlow is the 2nd most deprived area in Essex, ranked 104th nationally, with 2 neighbourhoods in the 20% most deprived, and has some of the highest levels of health inequalities. These factors and many others contribute towards the lower-than-average levels of creativity and cultural engagement.

Despite this, there are opportunities and aspirations. The area was designated as a Garden Town project by the Government in 2017 (Harlow and Gilston Garden Town) to deliver sustainable and inclusive growth and regeneration for new and existing communities. This project will see at least 23,000 new homes and 20,000 new jobs, making Harlow the fastest growing place in the country – growing five times faster than Manchester. When fully delivered, Harlow will be bigger than Cambridge.

The cultural sector is vibrant and growing, with a rich tapestry of artists and organisations across multiple disciplines, delivering in cultural assets across the town, the voluntary and community sector is engaged in the cultural offer of the town, with charities and grassroots organisations delivering creative activity and cultural experiences for social and health outcomes. As a result, Arts Council England have identified Harlow as a Place of Strategic Interest.

The new £20m Cultural Quarter is the catalyst to build on this momentum, placing Creativity and Culture at the heart of rebuilding our town. It enables us to reimagine Gibberd's vision so that extraordinary art and cultural experiences are available to everyone.

To achieve this, our mission is to:

Secure investment to enable cultural regeneration that will help to rebuild our town, renew neighbourhoods and restore civic pride

Reimagine Harlow as a world class cultural destination and cultural capital of the East of England.

Deliver a world class creative health programme, supporting the health and wellbeing of Harlow residents through engagement with creativity and cultural experiences

Support local artists to deliver ambitious work, locally, regionally and nationally

Provide extraordinary cultural experiences and events, for all residents, in all 11 wards

Create Long Lasting Partnerships and provide strong and co-ordinated voice.

PRIORITY 1 – CREATIVE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

Harlow will be a place where creativity is valued and at the heart of our community. We want to create the conditions for all residents to have the opportunity to be creative and develop their creativity and talent.

Being creative provides a sense of happiness and supports both our physical and mental health and wellbeing. Taking part in creative activities within the community has the power to increase our social connections, increase educational attainment, support the local economy, and rebuild our town.

Taking part in cultural experiences in Harlow strengthens our community. It helps connect us with each other and feel safer whilst enabling organisations and venues to grow and develop through strengthened networks and collaboration.

We will create an environment that enables Creative People and Communities by:

- Increasing access to and participation of an exciting cultural offer.
- **Co-creation** with residents and partners to deliver a programme of creative activities that are relevant and accessible, increasing access across all 11 wards.
- Ensure all **children and young people** have the opportunity to take part in cultural activities
- Support **partnership working** between artists and the health and wellbeing sector, to increase opportunities for creative health and learning.
- Use the **Creative Health Quality Framework** across all creative health projects to ensure the work is of the highest quality

PRIORITY 2 – CREATIVE ECONOMY

Harlow will be a vibrant hub of creativity and culture, where high-quality cultural facilities, creative career opportunities, and inclusive artistic experiences thrive. We envision Harlow as a desirable destination that fosters pride in our place, enhances our reputation, and supports the economic and social wellbeing of our community. We are creating a sustainable and prosperous future for generations to come.

We will create an environment that enables Harlow's creative economy to thrive by:

- **Securing investment** to meet the needs of existing and emerging creatives and communities.
- **Cultural Led Place shaping** that will influence future developments and leverage investment via planning and section 106 agreements, channeling investment into areas that can make lasting change and improvements, supporting creativity and cultural infrastructure and delivery.
- **Rebuilding and improving cultural venues** to provide new and exciting spaces for arts and creativity.
- **Delivering ambitious cultural programmes** that appeal to both residents and visitors, enhancing participation, engagement and accessibility.
- **Talent Retention** providing viable conditions for creatives to base, develop and thrive in Harlow.
- **Integrating culture into our public realm** to place arts at the heart of Harlow's transformation, ensuring experiences can be accessible for all.
- **Good Governance empowering a Cultural Quarter Board** to steer and manage the development of a dynamic cultural destination.
- **Enhancing the evening and night-time economy** to create a vibrant, safe, and attractive town centre.
- **Developing a visitor economy** that leverages Harlow's unique heritage, natural features, and strategic location.

ACTION PLAN – CREATIVE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

ACTION	RESULT	OUTCOME
<p>Raise awareness of opportunities to take part in creativity and cultural experiences, ensuring marketing is accessible and welcoming.</p>	<p>Promotion of Harlow's cultural attractions is joined up and connected across the sector.</p> <p>Launch Harlow Creates digital presence, creating central and consistent platform for promoting cultural experiences in Harlow.</p>	<p>Increased tourism and visitor spending</p> <p>Economic growth and job creation</p> <p>A strong, coordinated and exciting voice that encourages engagement, collaboration and partnerships.</p> <p>Increased access to creativity and cultural experiences.</p> <p>Increased uptake of existing creative activity.</p> <p>Developed visitor economy</p>
<p>Develop a programme of creative opportunities with residents that delivers relevant, extraordinary art for everyone</p>	<p>A programme of neighbourhood-based arts, culture and heritage activities is delivered in all 11 wards</p>	<p>Access to extraordinary cultural experiences has been increased, enabling creative, thriving neighbourhoods</p>
<p>Roll out the Cultural Passports scheme to all primary schools.</p>	<p>Build on Harlow Creates activity to deliver a programme of schools-based arts, culture and heritage activities across primary and secondary settings</p> <p>CPD opportunities for teachers is included in programme, embedding cultural learning in schools</p>	<p>Increased access and awareness of local cultural opportunities</p> <p>All young people experience the benefits of cultural engagement</p> <p>Build lifelong engagement with culture, removing barriers to engagement</p>

ACTION PLAN – CREATIVE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

ACTION	RESULT	OUTCOME
Deliver a creative health programme, increasing opportunities for residents to be creative whilst supporting health and wellbeing outcomes	All primary aged children can take part in cultural opportunities locally	<p>Access to creativity and extraordinary cultural experiences for everyone has been increased</p> <p>The health and wellbeing of Harlow residents has been supported</p>
Join up creative health offer with health and wellbeing offer	<p>Work with social prescribers, VCSO sectors, PCNs to promote creative health offer</p> <p>Increased partnership working to unlock opportunities and funding</p>	Increased access to creative health opportunities
Provide training opportunities for creative health practitioners	Use Creative Health Quality Framework to ensure offer is consistent, high quality and measurable	Harlow's creative health offer is world class

ACTION PLAN – CREATIVE ECONOMY

ACTION	RESULT	OUTCOME
Secure investment to deliver manifesto Aims	<p>A funding strategy has been developed and delivered that includes funding applications, developer contributions and other sources of income.</p> <p>Influence future developments via planning section 106 agreements, channelling investment into areas that can make lasting change and improvements</p>	<p>Financial stability of the creative and cultural sector</p> <p>Linked to Priority 1 our creative people and communities programme is well supported, enabling high quality and consistent delivery.</p> <p>Increased confidence in Harlow's cultural initiatives, unlocking growth potential</p>
Rebuild and Improve Cultural Venues	<p>New cultural venues constructed via Levelling Up Funding</p> <p>Existing venues renovated via Harlow Council Capital schemes</p> <p>Museum improvements including extensions and new café via Heritage Lottery Funding</p> <p>Review and implementation of flexible space usage; in-house cafés linked to Council-owned cultural offers</p>	<p>Enhanced infrastructure for arts and creativity</p> <p>Increased capacity for cultural events</p> <p>Increased engagement and quality of creativity and cultural experiences for residents and visitors</p> <p>Financial resilience of cultural venues</p>
Integrate Culture into Built Environment / Public Realm	<p>Cultural economy incorporated into urban planning</p> <p>Public art installations and cultural spaces both temporary and permanent utilising visual and performance art.</p>	<p>Culture at the heart of Harlow's transformation</p> <p>Enhanced aesthetic and social value of public spaces</p> <p>Increased civic pride</p>

ACTION PLAN – CREATIVE ECONOMY

ACTION	RESULT	OUTCOME
Develop a diverse and ambitious Cultural Programme that delivers extraordinary art for everyone	Diverse range of cultural events and programmes via a large NLPG to Arts Council England with match from neighbourhood's fund.	Increased participation and engagement
		Improved quality of life for residents
	A diverse range of cultural events and programmes is delivered in the Cultural Quarter and across the town	Access to extraordinary cultural experiences has been increased, enabling creative, thriving neighbourhoods
		Increased opportunities for local artists and creatives
Strengthen local plan policy during the review process to bolster the support for arts, culture, night-time and visitor economy.	Development of arts and cultural facilities will be supported as a material planning consideration	Arts and cultural facilities will be considered and included as part of the ongoing development process
Enhance Evening and Night-Time Economy	Development of evening and night-time venues focussed in the Arts and Cultural quarter, expanding to Arts, Cultural and Heritage Sites Town Wide.	Vibrant and safe town centre Increased footfall and economic activity

ACTION PLAN – CREATIVE ECONOMY

ACTION	RESULT	OUTCOME
Local artists, cultural organisations, and heritage projects are well supported and provided with the conditions to thrive	Arts, Culture, and Heritage Enabler Grants awarded to local artists, cultural organisations, and heritage Projects Create Talent development pathways from education through to employment Partnerships with cultural organisations and businesses via business network	Increased support for the creative sector Enhanced cultural offerings and heritage preservation Creative talent retention Thriving creative economy
Establish Cultural Quarter Board	Formation of a Cultural Quarter Board, including stakeholders across the cultural sector, business and community, ensuring relevance and building trust in local decision making.	Effective management and direction of cultural initiatives across the town Coordinated efforts to achieve cultural goals.