

DRAFT Birkenhead  
Culture and  
Heritage  
Strategy  
2021-2040

FOR CONSULTATION

**Counterculture Partnership LLP**



**NOVEMBER 2021**

*Image by Mark McNulty for Wirral Council*



# INTRODUCTION

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# BIRKENHEAD: PAST AND PRESENT

Birkenhead boasts a proud industrial, maritime, civic and cultural heritage of international significance: from shipbuilding, urban design and transport innovation to art, craft, film, music and literature.

Minutes from Central Liverpool but with access to the wonderful Wirral coast and countryside, modern Birkenhead is a hotbed of talent with its own distinctive identity, creative scene and cultural offer.

Often described as the Brooklyn to Liverpool's Manhattan: close, connected, complementary... a distinctive and defiantly different Left Bank.

It is a town with many cultural and heritage assets to speak of, and many stories to tell. Birkenhead is a place of firsts, born of ambition and shaped by pioneers.

The Birkenhead 2040 framework represents a once in a generation opportunity to continue that ethos and to transform and regenerate the town.

Building on these strengths, Birkenhead is looking to the future with restored confidence, a characteristically tenacious attitude, and a bold new vision which has culture and heritage at its heart.



c. The Singh Twins, commissioned for 'The Wirral I want to be a part of'

## BIRKENHEAD: CULTURE AND HERITAGE ASSETS

- Some of the most noteworthy public spaces in the region, such as Birkenhead Park (the inspiration for New York's Central Park), Hamilton Square with its beautiful listed Georgian architecture, and a stretch of Wirral Waterfront with a rich history and unrivalled views across the Mersey to the Liverpool skyline.
- A dense and varied stock of buildings of historical and architectural importance including Birkenhead Town Hall, Birkenhead Priory and around 150 other listed buildings.
- Committed stakeholders – Wirral Council, the creative and cultural sector, education providers, business and community groups, regional and national partners.
- A distinctive place in the evolution of public transport, as home to the first street tramway in Britain, the Mersey Ferry and the first tunnel beneath a tidal estuary – further establishing its economic, social and cultural connections to sibling Liverpool.
- A variety of visitor attractions, cultural venues and creative spaces - from museums, libraries and galleries through to contemporary arts centres, co-working hubs, theatres, multi-screen cinemas, music venues and family-friendly events and festivals.
- A burgeoning creative cluster, boosted by the successful legacy of Wirral Borough of Culture 2019 and growth in industries such as music, film & TV and digital technologies.
- Passionate and talented local practitioners working in all artforms



*Image by Mark McNulty for Wirral Council*



# WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CULTURE AND HERITAGE?

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**Culture** means many things to many people and is often used to refer to food, religion and other forms of heritage... we use it to mean all those areas of activity associated with the artforms and organisations in which Arts Council England invests: collections, combined arts, dance, libraries, literature, museums, music, theatre and the visual arts.

Arts Council England (2020) Let's Create

**Creative Industries** are those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.

DCMS (2020) Sectors Economic Estimates

**Cultural Industries** are those industries with a cultural object at the centre of the industry.

DCMS (2020) Sectors Economic Estimates

**Heritage** refers to all inherited resources which people value for reasons beyond mere utility.

English Heritage (2008) Conservation Principles

*Image by Mark McNulty for Wirral Council*



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# HOW HAS THE STRATEGY BEEN DEVELOPED?

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## PHASE 1: JANUARY – MARCH 2021

- Project initiation and stakeholder mapping.
- Desktop review of relevant data and literature, including published and unpublished policies, plans, proposals, frameworks, strategies, research and data.
- Mapping research to identify, map, classify and evaluate Birkenhead's creative, cultural and heritage assets and opportunities – with particular focus on the Birkenhead Regeneration Framework (BRF) area.

**OUTPUT: DETAILED EVIDENCE BASE REPORT**

## PHASE 2: APRIL – JUNE 2021

- Stakeholder engagement and consultation
- Benchmarking case studies
- Strategy development and mobilisation planning

**OUTPUT: DRAFT STRATEGY**

## PHASE 3: JUNE 2021 – NOVEMBER 2021

- Internal consultation as to emerging priorities and aligning these with key projects and Council plans

**OUTPUT: JOINT WORKING IN PLACE ACROSS KEY SERVICES**

## PHASE 4: NOVEMBER 2021 – EARLY 2022

- Agreement of draft strategy and priorities
- Work with partners and stakeholders to agree roles and actions
- Engagement with creatives and communities to secure support
- Final approval and launch of strategy

*Image by Mark McNulty for Wirral Council*



# CULTURE AND HERITAGE: NEED AND OPPORTUNITY

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## Infrastructure

- Addressing asset gaps and issues
- Managing development risks and constraints
- Improving conditions and perceptions
- Improving physical connectivity and visitor experience
- A lack of high-quality public art and animation
- Striking a balance between conservation and development

## Creativity

- Connecting skills, talent and opportunity
- Developing future skills and talent
- Making local culture and heritage more visible
- Extending and improving funding, commissioning and procurement opportunities for local talent and business

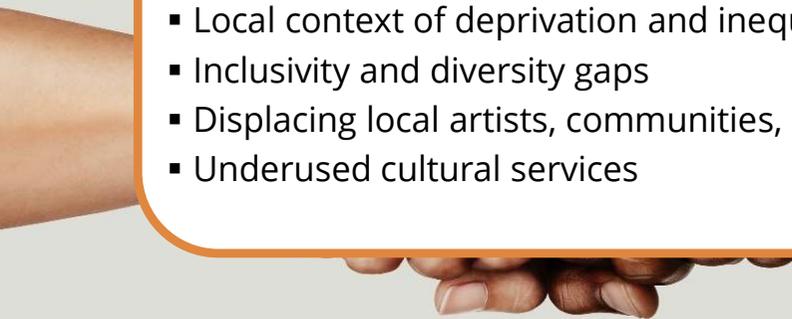
# Issues and Challenges

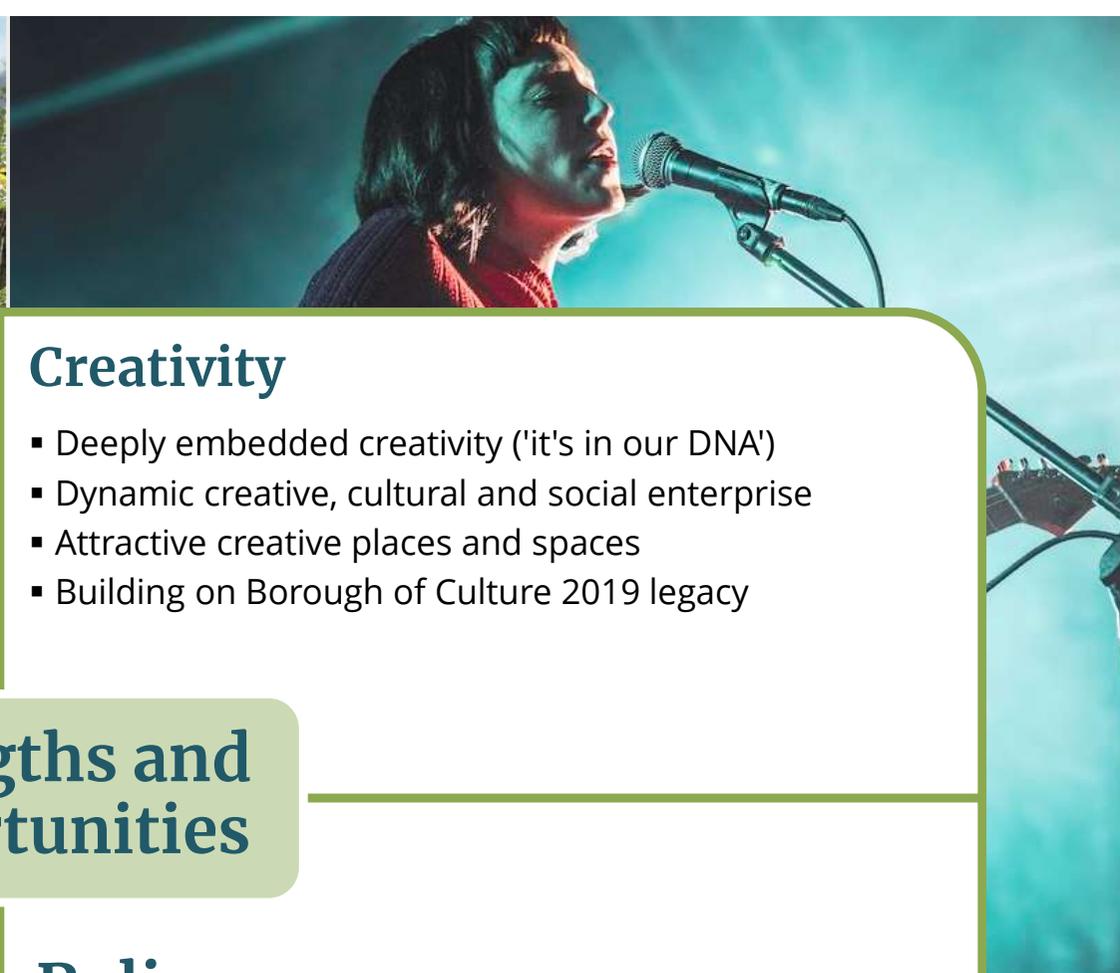
## Communities

- Local context of deprivation and inequality
- Inclusivity and diversity gaps
- Displacing local artists, communities, businesses
- Underused cultural services

## Policy

- Cross-borough collaboration
- Delivering scale of ambition and realising critical actions
- Ensuring strategic capacity and local authority policy-making is joined up to achieve sector opportunities
- Leveraging private investment in culture and heritage





## Infrastructure

- Strong, unique culture and heritage assets
- Major new capital investments and regeneration projects in the pipeline
- Underutilised retail and community spaces, and opportunities for meanwhile use
- Proximity and connectivity to Liverpool (and City Region)
- Scale - big enough and small enough to make it happen

## Creativity

- Deeply embedded creativity ('it's in our DNA')
- Dynamic creative, cultural and social enterprise
- Attractive creative places and spaces
- Building on Borough of Culture 2019 legacy

# Strengths and Opportunities

## Communities

- Pride, passion and energy
- The will to succeed
- A 'grow your own' attitude
- A community and voluntary sector which harnesses culture and the arts to improve wellbeing

## Policy

- A bold new vision
- Strong local commitment
- Regional and national strategic partnerships
- Cross-portfolio relevance and alignment



*Image by Mark McNulty for Wirral Council*



# STRATEGY OVERVIEW

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## Birkenhead 2040: Iconic, Cultural

In 2040, Birkenhead has emerged from the long shadow of its neighbour across the Mersey to become Liverpool's true cultural counterpoint: a world-famous visitor destination of comparable merit.

Historic buildings, pioneering public parks and the majestic waterfront – all of which inspired the world in the nineteenth century before experiencing post-industrial neglect and deprivation in the twentieth – have been restored, reimagined and reanimated through major public art commissions, ambitious event programmes, inclusive community projects and dynamic creative enterprise.

New arts venues, visitor and heritage attractions, creative workspaces and community hubs have also come into being, made possible by the vision, passion, capability and commitment of local stakeholders working closely and collaboratively with regional and national strategic partners and with a commitment to building community wealth.

By night and day, Birkenhead bustles and buzzes with the sights, sounds and smells of art and music, creative industry and innovation, food and drink, and much more – attracting growing numbers of visitors, businesses and professionals from around the world while sustainably improving health, happiness, prosperity and prospects for local people of all ages and backgrounds.

# Strategy Themes and Priorities 2021 – 2026



Image by Mark McNulty for Wirral Council

<b>Strategy Theme 1 Destination Birkenhead: Place, Space, Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Develop a visitor destination offer that does justice to Birkenhead's unique assets</li><li>▪ Improve local connectivity, wayfinding and visitor experience</li><li>▪ Implement the new vision and strategy for Birkenhead's great museums and galleries</li><li>▪ Find creative uses for existing spaces as well as creating exciting new ones</li><li>▪ Enhance Birkenhead's public spaces and cultural offer through ambitious, strategic creative programming</li></ul>
<b>Strategy Theme 2 Creative People and Cultural Communities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Develop stronger links between talent, skills and opportunity</li><li>▪ Improve access to funding and support</li><li>▪ Strengthen education and training</li><li>▪ Get communities on board through inclusive action and engagement</li><li>▪ Use art to define different neighbourhoods</li></ul>
<b>Strategy Theme 3 Mobilising Stakeholders and Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Build local capacity and mechanisms</li><li>▪ Adopt a coordinated regional approach</li></ul>

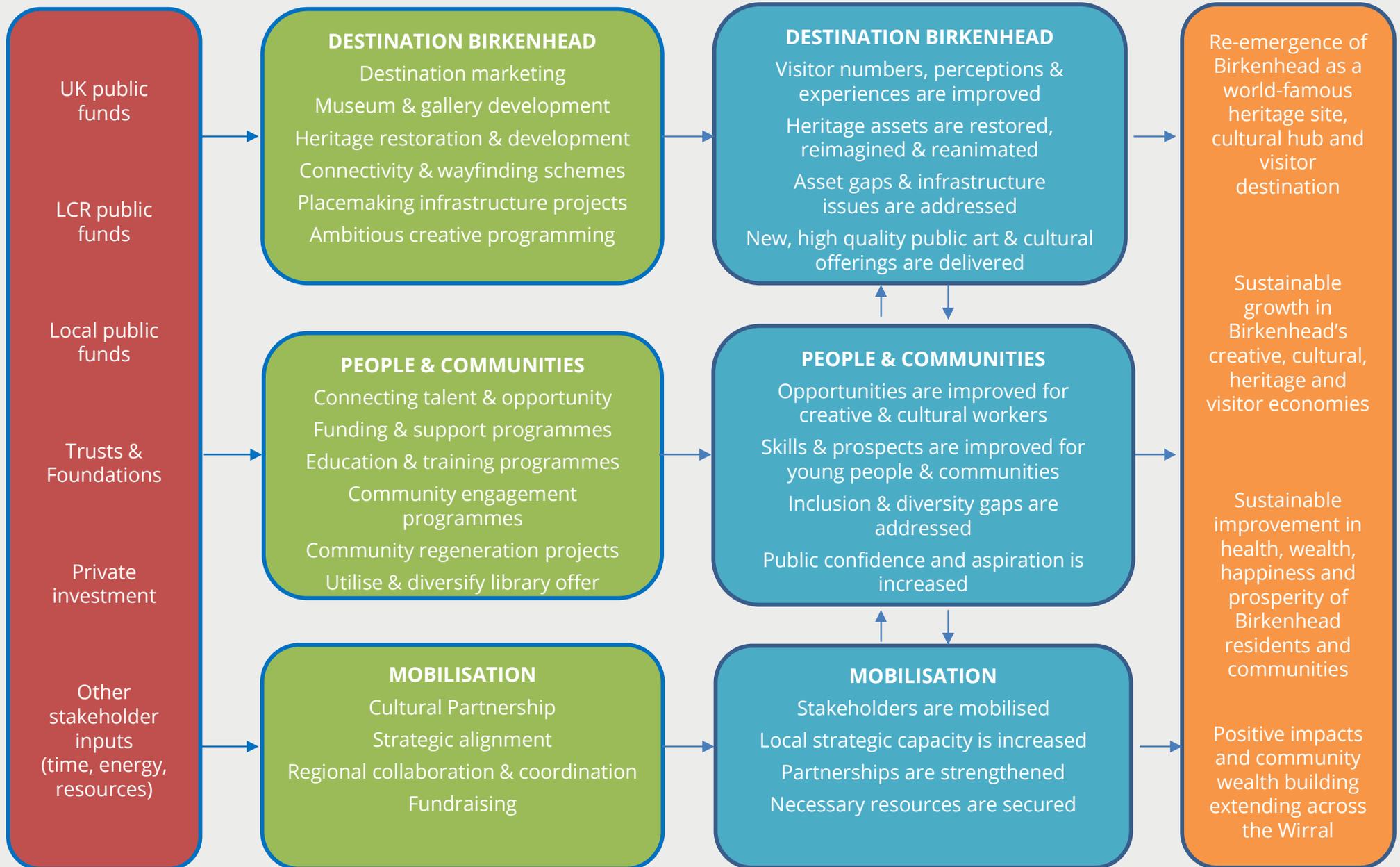
THEORY OF CHANGE MODEL

Inputs

Actions

Outcomes

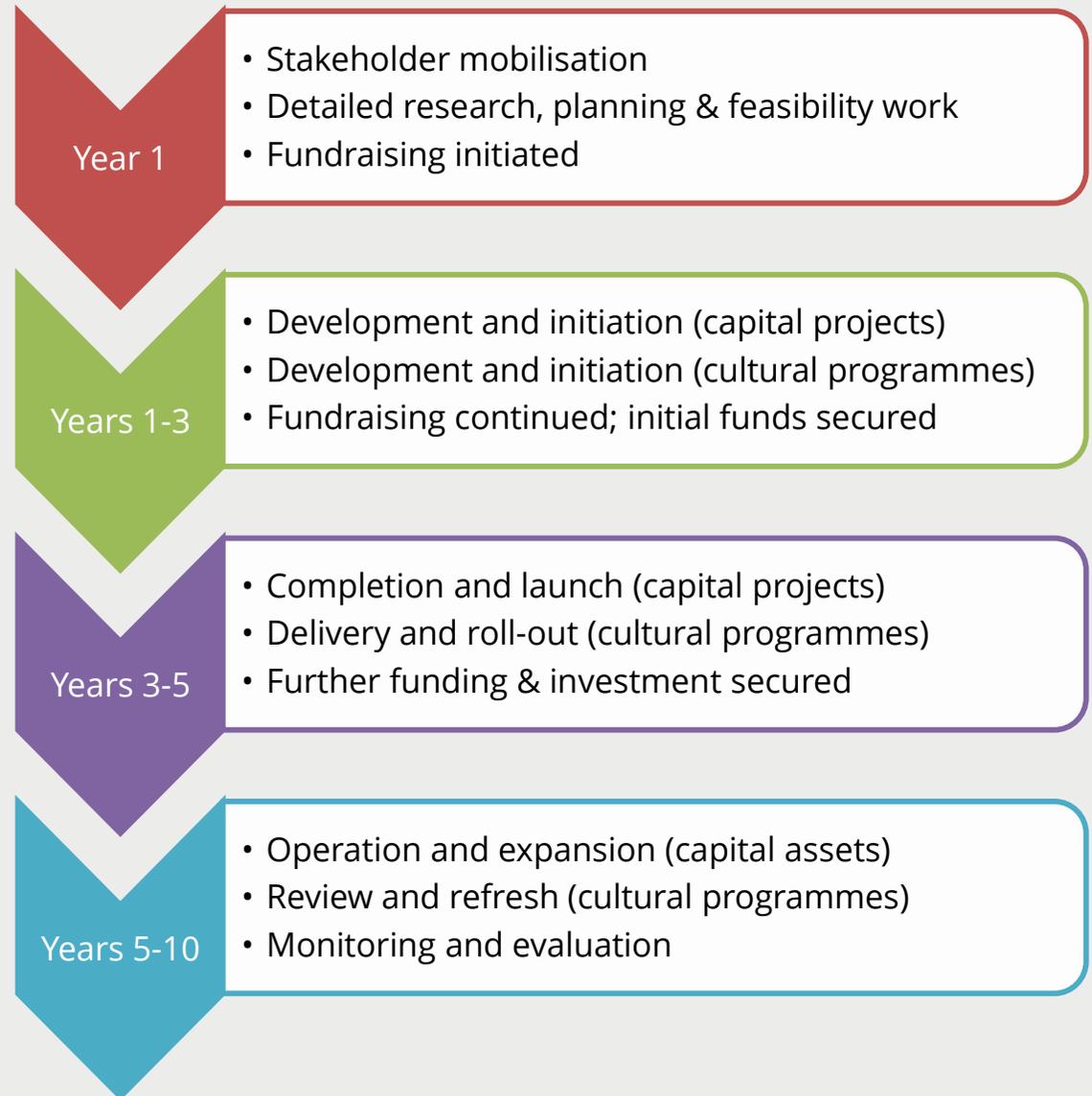
Impacts



## Indicative Funding Sources

- Architectural Heritage Fund
- Arts Council England
- DCMS
- Future High Streets Fund
- LCR Borough of Culture
- LCR One Percent for Culture
- LCR Strategic Investment Fund (SIF)
- Levelling Up Fund
- Life Chances Fund
- National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Private sector investment
- Social Investment
- Towns Fund
- Trusts and Foundations
- UK Community Renewal Fund
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Wirral Council

## Indicative Timetable



*Image by Mark McNulty for Wirral Council*



## STRATEGY THEME 1

### DESTINATION BIRKENHEAD: PLACE, SPACE, EXPERIENCE

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## Priority 1.1: Develop a visitor destination offer that does justice to Birkenhead's unique assets

Making Birkenhead's town centre and waterfront more attractive as places to make and experience culture will be essential to attracting talent, audiences and visitor footfall. This will require a holistic approach, leveraging the area's culture and heritage assets but also improving public realm, connectivity, and mobilising the business community to plug gaps in the residential, retail, hospitality and leisure offers. Realising the potential and connectivity for the asset base will also rely on more people living in the centre and policies around skills and jobs to encourage this, working with partners in the wider city region. Wirral's food and drink providers are seen as a unique part of the Borough's culture. Promoting and enhancing them through events and festivals in public spaces will help bring Wirral residents and others into Birkenhead.

### Key Projects and Opportunities

- Eureka! Mersey
- Transport Shed
- International Battle of the Atlantic Centre at Woodside and public realm improvements
- Exploring partnership opportunities for major events
- Liverpool City Region Destination Marketing Programme

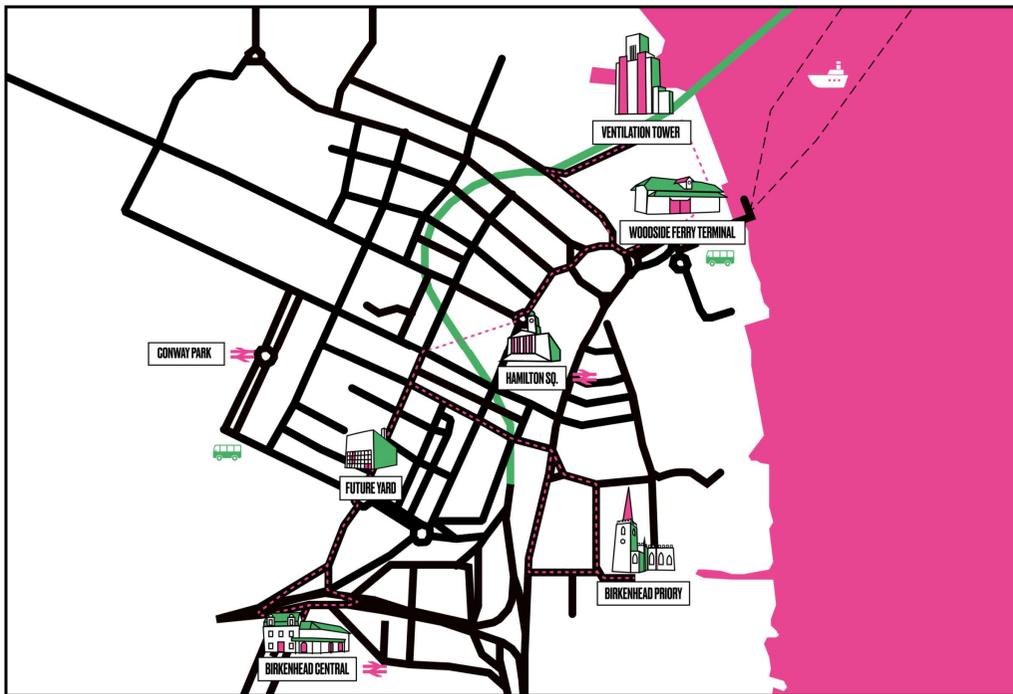




## Priority 1.2: Improve local connectivity, wayfinding and visitor experience

There is a clear need to improve wayfinding and connectivity to and between Birkenhead's culture and heritage assets. Consideration will be given to signage, safety and creating an attractive and coherent visitor experience that links strongly to the new narrative and USP.

This could include imaginative signage schemes and linking the Williamson better to Birkenhead Park and new infrastructure projects. Better connectivity with other heritage assets and enhanced physical linkages in relation to Lady Lever Art Gallery will also be considered.



## Key Projects and Opportunities

- Town Deal Waterfront Animation and Connectivity project
- Public Realm Design Guide (currently in development)
- Exploring opportunities to link existing and new culture and heritage assets through trails and programming (e.g. Leftbank Soundtrack, Birkenhead Park 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022)
- Liverpool City Region public art development and placemaking opportunities

Image courtesy of The Williamson



## Priority 1.3: Implement the new vision and strategy for Birkenhead's great museums and galleries

Birkenhead's museums and galleries offer was identified by stakeholders as being among its strongest assets and a high priority for support. As part of developing the new vision and strategy for Wirral's Museums Service (currently draft), the strategic alignment and role of the town's existing museums and galleries will be reviewed in respect of delivering the Birkenhead 2040 Framework and new culture and heritage infrastructure projects. Via this work, the vision for museums and galleries will be strategically connected into the wider future plan for Birkenhead to realise capital investment and to harness new opportunities. The Williamson Art Gallery and Museum for example has the potential to increase loans and international links through a long-term plan which focuses on improving its ability to present significant collections alongside existing facilities which already work well for music, learning and community activities.

### Key Projects and Opportunities

- Wirral Museums Service Strategy (currently draft)
- Partnering with transformational regeneration projects which will enhance Wirral's museums and galleries offer such as: Transport Shed, Waterfront Animation and Connectivity (which includes funding for the Priory) and Woodside Masterplan
- Exploring programming opportunities, e.g. Borough of Culture 2024

## Priority 1.4: Find new creative uses for existing spaces as well as creating exciting new ones

Options will be explored to repurpose underused heritage, retail and community buildings with a focus on addressing gaps in provision and ensuring any new spaces are affordable, accessible, secure and sustainable.

There are several examples of the successful use of heritage buildings as venues for contemporary cultural events and activities and this will be encouraged where there is mutual benefit. In Spring 2021 for example the digital AND Festival used the Hydraulic Tower at Wirral Waters for a temporary installation. This is about encouraging meanwhile use to create permanent change. An appropriate model will be sought to coordinate alongside work with Liverpool Film Office where usage relates to film and TV production. Working with key heritage organisations such as Conversation Areas Wirral and Wirral History and Heritage Association will also be critical to ensure heritage and conversation assets are used and managed appropriately.

The 2040 Framework and Town Investment Plan include a number of emerging and exciting new culture and heritage infrastructure projects including:

- Dock Branch Park
- Transport Shed
- Future Yard
- Argyle Street Creative Hub

Wherever new capital interventions are proposed, there will be a focus on quality design, coherent planning and implementation, and developing the wider offer to encourage visits. New projects will be exemplars of low carbon and sustainability, harnessing local creativity and best practice innovation.





Image by Mark McNulty for Wirral Council

## Priority 1.5: Enhance Birkenhead's public spaces and cultural offer through ambitious, strategic creative programming

Wirral's year as Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture in 2019 was a great success with audiences responding enthusiastically to the programme. Looking ahead to the next Borough of Culture year in 2024, there are opportunities to build something interesting and sustainable in the longer term.

This might include working with City Region organisations to bring signature events to Birkenhead Park and the waterfront or developing a new signature event, attracting audiences that would not usually visit the town. Care will be taken not to displace existing activity and to work in partnership to support rebuilding the sector post pandemic.

Programming will also enhance other parts of the urban environment through street art and commissions – with a focus on fun, and ensuring local artists are engaged and benefit wherever possible.

### Key Projects and Opportunities

- Liverpool City Region Cultural Compact and City Region partnerships
- Birkenhead Park 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- Borough of Culture 2024
- Left Bank Collective (including Future Yard, MAKE)



## STRATEGY THEME 2

# CREATIVE PEOPLE AND CULTURAL COMMUNITIES

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## **Priority 2.1: Develop stronger links between talent, skills and opportunity**

Action will be taken to further build networks within Birkenhead's creative and cultural sector and to improve connectivity between creative talent, skills, infrastructure and audiences – locally and regionally. This will include linkages into the wider Liverpool City Region creative ecosystem, for example tapping into initiatives such as the LCR Music Board and seeking opportunities to strengthen arts development.

## **Priority 2.2: Improve access to funding and support**

Funding and support available to creative and cultural practitioners and businesses will be reviewed to ensure provision is accessible and fit-for-purpose. This will begin by making maximum use of regional and national support schemes, e.g. working with Arts Council England to promote funding and facilitate opportunities as well as developing bespoke local initiatives where appropriate.

## **Priority 2.3: Strengthen education and training**

Local education and training provision for culture and heritage will also be reviewed, to ensure provision maximises the opportunities for learning linked to regeneration projects. Particular consideration will be given to building links between education and training and providers and local creative businesses, to encourage career pathways. This will include developing curriculum opportunities, for example building on the best practice approaches already being undertaken by Wirral Met, and developing the role of Wirral's Local Creative Education Partnership (LCEP).

## Priority 2.4: Get communities on board through inclusive action and engagement

Keeping Birkenhead's diverse residents and communities engaged, included and on board with this strategy will be essential. Culture and heritage provide tried and tested mechanisms for engagement, never more essential than now as the borough builds back following the pandemic. This will be achieved by working with and through stakeholder groups, including representatives of the voluntary sector organisations and residential and minority communities, with regular communication to build and sustain momentum. Examples of this include working with Conservation Areas Wirral in support of the borough's blue plaque scheme.

Seed funding will be identified for community-based culture and heritage projects that align with the strategy and deliver economic, social or environmental impact, to be matched by "sweat equity" in the form of commitments of time, energy and other resources from community members where cash contributions are not feasible. Delivering this priority will also involve working with Public Health and other partners to maximise opportunities for creativity to be reflected in wellbeing programmes.

## Priority 2.5: Use art to define different neighbourhoods

The Council will seek to work proactively with property developers, encouraging and supporting them to include culture and heritage in their plans, using art to define neighbourhoods and differentiate postcodes. This priority will also be reflected in the work on area masterplans for other parts of the borough as well as Birkenhead.





## STRATEGY THEME 3

# MOBILISING STAKEHOLDERS AND RESOURCES

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## Priority 3.1: Build local capacity and mechanisms

For this strategy to succeed it is essential that it achieves and retains buy-in at the highest levels, and that strategic leadership is in place with networked cultural knowledge, skills and the ability to influence and align policy, mobilise stakeholders and coordinate action. This will be supported by a local Cultural Partnership which builds on existing relationships and seeks to develop new ones, involving decision-makers and experts from across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The Partnership will focus on how to improve alignment of operational and strategic thinking across the partnership with regards to culture, heritage and the creative and visitor economies, both in Birkenhead and wider Wirral.

## Priority 3.2: Adopt a coordinated regional approach

There is both a need and an opportunity for the volume and quality of local bids for regional (LCR) and national funds to increase, demonstrating strong strategic links to wider regional policies, including tackling inequality and leading place-shaping – in a way that feels genuine, organic and authentic and responsive to communities. A focus on making, engineering and local art and collections could be a strength within this context. This will be delivered through proactive engagement with the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Growth Board, LCR Cultural Partnership, LCR Cultural Compact and other strategic partners.



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