

# SEFTON CULTURAL STRATEGY

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- Other important info/people etc

## 1.1 Introduction

In 2021, as Sefton began to emerge from the Covid19 pandemic, Sefton's Elected Members were invited to share examples of creative and cultural activity happening in their wards. Each conversation leading to another, revealed Sefton's lively - but largely hidden - creative life.

Self-organised, place-focussed, imaginative cultural activity is being made in community hubs, by groups of neighbours, gardeners, cultural groups, visual artists, theatre-makers, composers, performers, authors, crafters and organisers. All are responding creatively and making things happen in their neighbourhoods in different ways. A snapshot includes:

- an outstanding symphonic wind orchestra in Maghull
- RHS award-winning community horticulture in Bootle
- craft groups decorating Formby's alleyways
- passionate local heritage research in every township
- innovative inter-generational performing arts, led by young people
- community rock choirs and guitar groups
- an outdoor arts Viking Festival
- online clowning and puppetry with Japanese artists and older participants from across Sefton based in Ainsdale
- a contemporary circus and visual arts studio in Bootle Strand

A Cultural Strategy Steering Group, comprising council, creative and voluntary sector representatives, was formed with the purpose of shaping a new Sefton Cultural Strategy that would nurture this groundswell of diverse creative activity and bring together this community-led culture with the major regeneration opportunities.

## 1.2 What is culture?

Culture and creativity, of course, mean different things to different people.

For the purposes of the consultation the terms culture and creativity were defined as:

- the arts - art & crafts, music, drama, film, dance, literature, digital media
- heritage, built environment and natural environment
- sport in terms of its role in events, social identity and heritage

### 1.3 Why do we need a cultural strategy?

In the public survey, residents were asked to describe culture in Sefton in 3 words.

Replies suggested many positive concepts, including the diversity and variety of Sefton’s community-led offer, and the natural landscape.

Green, vibrant, varied  
Variety, inspiring, entertaining  
Unique, eclectic, stimulating  
Diverse, enjoyable, historic  
Varied, artistic, welcoming  
Great natural areas  
Coastal, community, varied  
Attractive, interesting, stimulating  
Community-driven offer  
Healthy, happy living

Other responses highlighted issues around awareness, ambition and focus.

No cohesive advertising  
Needs more oomph  
Hard to find  
Under the radar  
Aims too low  
All about Southport  
Low cost, low priority, badly advertised  
Lacking, disappointing, uninspiring  
Hidden, parochial, limited  
Underfunded, narrow, unfocused  
Limited, narrow, unambitious  
Dance is invisible  
Not enough music  
More arts please  
Not inclusive enough

This suggests the challenges in participation in cultural life for local residents, cultural audiences and creative people around cohesion, ambition, inclusion and communication.

A cultural strategy is needed to provide a shared vision and a clear plan for everyone engaged in the cultural life of Sefton, that will address these and other challenges.

## 1.4 Why now?

Sefton's **Vision for 2030** consists of 8 shared aspirations that will create a confident and connected Borough in which culture and creativity has a clear and vital role to play.

Key within this is the aspiration for Sefton to be “known for its cultural scene”, a vital part of making this a desirable place to live. With 46% participation - lowest third in UK; lack of visibility for local creatives, and little available for young people (including older young people) there are few “scenes” to tap and much development needed to achieve this goal. In terms of “something for everyone” there is a wide gap between large-scale events and small group activities (at both of which Sefton excels) in engaging our community in culture. The role of culture in Sefton is also underutilised in relation to sustainability, community cohesion and wellbeing.

A Cultural Strategy is needed to harness this potential and make clear progress against a timeline set out by this vision. Evaluation of Sefton's Borough of Culture in 2020 highlighted the need for a place-based strategy and clear governance, for more effective delivery and enhanced place-making.

Since then, Sefton has secured investment for major regeneration projects with cultural delivery and opportunity at their core: once-in-a-lifetime investments that will have huge long term impact and enable unparalleled change.

There is an opportunity to create richer cultural lives for all of Sefton's communities. Sefton's Year as Borough of Culture in 2025 will provide the ideal catalyst.

## 1.5 Research and Consultation

Sefton Council appointed CounterCulture PLC in June 2023 to conduct research and consultation to build on this informal knowledge and bring together an Evidence Base to which a Cultural Strategy could respond.

This included:

- Desk Review of key local and national policy, strategy and cultural trends
- 32 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders including Council officers and elected members, HE, public sector representatives, funding bodies, cultural and community organisations.
- 3 Culture and Community Sector Workshops, involving a total of 50 participants
- Children & Young People's consultation including a short online survey and conversations with Children & YP groups.
- A short survey aimed at key inclusion organisations and groups

In addition, an online public survey was distributed via the *Your Sefton Your Say* portal, with 444 responses. Together with community intelligence, local knowledge and stakeholder opinion, this forms a robust Evidence Base of research and consultation data on which to base a strategic response [Appendix].

However, the Steering Group felt the Children and Young People’s consultation did not achieve the level of engagement or quality of data necessary for the strategy to fully reflect the wants and needs of local young people under this key area of action. Children and Young People’s voice must be at the centre of the next stages of development and delivery of the Strategy.

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**For Strategy**                            **go to page 27**

**For next steps**                        **go to p 32 [to follow]**

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## 2.0 FINDINGS/INSIGHTS

Findings and insights drawn from the data are organised under six headings:

- Place and Time: which sets out the immediate local context
- Cultural Assets: places, spaces, collections and archives
- Creative People: the people who make culture
- Taking Part In Culture: audiences
- Cultural Ecology: the relationships between these elements
- A concluding SWOT analysis draws together the key findings in summary

### 2.1 Place and time

#### 2.1.1 Many Places

95% of Sefton's 276k residents live in urban and suburban locations:

- Bootle, Seaforth & Litherland and Netherton in the South;
- Crosby, Hightown and Formby in the centre;
- Aintree and Maghull to the East
- the Victorian resort town of Southport and its surrounding suburbs in the North.
- Villages like Lunt and Sefton pepper outlying semi-rural areas.

Each place has its own distinct character and neighbourhood culture, with very different histories, identities, demographics, spaces, geography and amenities coming into play. Many townships sit on a linear route that hugs the coastline, but connectivity between places, especially between the East and North, and to and from rural areas, is difficult, and these parts of the borough do not share this sense of coastal identity.

The “many-centred-ness” or “polycentricity” strongly influences what is available for local people to take part in. This isn't unique to Sefton, but it is very striking, especially in determining what people identify as their community, which tends to be hyperlocal, rather than “Sefton”.

In a place made up of many places, that is distinguished by lots of people doing small things, there is opportunity to develop high quality neighbourhood cultural offers. However, what is on offer can become diffuse and difficult to navigate. The challenge is to create shared focus, and a mechanism for collaboration, to bring this together as more than the sum of its parts.

### **2.1.2 Sefton is a Borough of Contrasts**

Sefton is a Borough of Contrasts not only in landscape and character.

Significant inequalities pervade. In some areas, clustered in the South of the Borough and in Southport, people face challenges around income, employment, housing, education and quality of life. Some neighbourhoods are in the 1-10% most deprived in the UK. In 2019, Sefton ranked 89 out of 317 for the most deprived English local authorities (1 being most deprived).

[ONS Indices of Deprivation 2019]

The widest gap in life expectancy in any local authority in the North West is found between the most and least affluent communities in Sefton. (14.1 years males / 12.3 years females)

In 2020/21 almost one in six Sefton children lived in relative poverty: 1 in 6 nursery and primary school age pupils; 1 in 5 secondary schools age pupils and almost half of pupils attending special educational needs schools were receiving free school meals. In our lowest-income communities there is a significant education attainment gap, which begins in early years but most evident at Key Stage 4 (lowest 1/3 local authorities).

[The Education Policy Institute, 2020, *Child Poverty Strategy*]

There is a significant role for Culture in the work needed to address these inequalities by improving life chances, quality of life and health and wellbeing. This is well documented and clearly recognised by the voluntary sector. There is opportunity to bolster good work, increase its impact and develop new initiatives through joined-up working, and by more effectively embedding culture into key council strategies.

### **2.1.3 Orbit of Liverpool**

Sefton borders Liverpool at Bank Hall/Bootle, with Aintree to the east merging into Liverpool suburbs. The vibrancy of the city - and ease of reaching it by train for leisure or work - is part of what makes Sefton an attractive place to live.

At the same time, local cultural life can be overshadowed by the sheer combined heft of Liverpool's arts institutions. Talent and energy can be consumed by the bigger cultural players. Local work, outside of institutions, can be seen as lower quality or status. Things that happen in Sefton are often perceived to belong to the city.

The challenge is to turn this proximity to Sefton's advantage by:

- working in equitable partnership with leading cultural organisations to widen opportunities for Sefton communities and creatives
- taking a seat at the table with city region partners
- taking the lead where Sefton is best placed to do so



### 2.1.4 Changing cultural ecology

Significant new capital infrastructure is being developed that will create a huge shift in cultural capacity in terms of space and scale.

The **Southport Town Plan** will radically develop Southport's cultural and digital infrastructure. The centrepiece is the new Marine Lake Events Centre (MLEC) which includes the 'Light Fantastic' water, light and sound show in the adjacent Marine Lake, unique in the region:

- £37.5 million Town Deal Funding
- £19.7 million Council Investment
- projected 500,000 visitors to the local area
- £18 million to the local economy annually

#### In Bootle:

- £20 million Levelling Up Funding secured to progress the transformation of Bootle town centre
- Area Action Plan to realise long-term vision for town
- Public consultation is underway to embed creativity and education in the redevelopment of the Strand
- Salt & Tar events space on Bootle canal-side piloted its first comedy and music weekenders. A diverse music offer drew local, regional and international audiences. 6,000 tickets sold for the music festival produced in partnership with Sound City
- Investment in the venue is supporting collaboration with Bootle community and cultural organisations

#### Pipeline development:

- A coalitional approach developed to create change in the Poet's Streets neighbourhood, led by Housing Associations
- Growing out of its creative enterprise hub, SAFE Regeneration's scheme for mixed-use development adjacent to the canal has creative community at its core

These are major shifts in the cultural capacity of our biggest towns Southport and Bootle. There will be significant opportunity, and perhaps also challenge, to use these spaces to:

- welcome local people, who may have low incomes
- utilise co-production in programming
- create opportunity for local artists and creative organisations
- support the talent/employment pathway for local young people
- ensure that all Sefton's people benefit
- create new opportunities for the future role of the Atkinson

## 2.2 Spaces and Places for Culture

### 2.2.1 Cultural Buildings

Sefton has a number of eminent cultural buildings and spaces including both civic and community-owned spaces, with two major new assets in development. Events and participatory activities happen in community-owned spaces including music in pubs, bars and school and church venues.

But dedicated buildings and spaces for creative activity are limited and unevenly spread. This is a major factor affecting local cultural capacity in key areas:

- There is limited range of regular, visible cultural offers for local audiences
- Some places lack a space that offers civic or cultural focus
- Individual artists can become isolated due to lack of workspace: proximity to other creatives generates opportunity, collaboration and capacity
- Creatives and groups have difficulties in finding spaces to both make and present work
- Spaces that are available can present issues with location, accessibility, infrastructure, technical support and cost
- Pop up and ‘meanwhile’ spaces create vibrancy but lack longevity - talent and audiences nurtured need to be retained, and mobilising spaces is resource intensive
- Significant gaps include rehearsal and performance spaces, production facilities, artists studios and making spaces
- A gap exists for a midscale music venue

### 2.2.2 Heritage

Local heritage and history are popular hooks for many of the audiences living in Sefton. This is reflected in the public survey as one of the areas where people wanted to see more and better future cultural delivery.

*“Let’s celebrate our local cultural history and how it translates into the present.”*

Sefton’s 585 listed buildings, 13 scheduled monuments and 5 registered historic parks inspire people to participate in heritage walks, talks, digital research and exhibitions.

Extraordinary Heritage Buildings include:

- Bootle Town Hall (Grade II listed)
- Southport Pier
- Southport Town Hall (circa 1850)
- Lord Street (early 19th Century)
- Plaza Cinema (1938)
- Old ChristChurch Waterloo (Grade II listed)
- Linacre Mission (late 19th Century)

The local history archive at Crosby Library contains thousands of maps, photos, books, microfiche and cine film, and is under constant request for research access. These assets are a key source for revealing untold histories, inspiring creative responses to Sefton’s distinct and sometimes unconventional stories.

Work is needed to:

- develop the archive as a more public facing facility linked to participatory projects and volunteering
- explore difficult, unusual and hidden histories
- work with groups who do not usually engage with heritage
- create digitally and innovatively

### **2.2.3 Landscape and outdoor spaces**

Sefton’s extraordinary coastline and green spaces are perhaps its strongest - and definitive - cultural asset:

- Coastline - significant and rare habitat, rich in human as well as natural history: neolithic footprint, Viking invasions, Victorian botany, tragic shipwrecks and sea rescue, civil aviation, world war stories
- Canal system through South and East of Borough, green lung in urban spaces and link to industrial past
- Parks, gardens and community green spaces are key sites for grassroots engagement and community stewardship

Landscape and green spaces are both site for cultural engagement and subject matter for creative practice and have hosted:

- Public Art of national significance Antony Gormley’s *Another Place* at Crosby Beach
- Community music festivals and outdoor theatre
- Major Events - Southport Flower Show, British Musical Fireworks Championship, Food & Drink Festivals

There is significant local appetite for more outdoor cultural activity and opportunity but access and programming must be designed around the need to safeguard and preserve the delicate ecosystem of the coast in particular.

The coastal context, too, makes visible the impact of climate change and drives home the necessity to ensure all local cultural programming is as “green” as it can be.

National context: Key local landowners National Trust and Canal & Rivers Trust are major partners or direct commissioners of cultural activity in other areas. Nationally, strategic agreements have been made to develop role of culture and natural environment (eg MOUs between Arts Council England and Forestry England/AONBs)

There is opportunity to develop a distinctive model of cultural programming that brings together culture, environment and wellbeing. This would:

- promote responsible use of the fragile environment
- enhance visitor experience out of season and lead footfall away from areas at risk
- increase young people’s engagement, volunteering and “nature on prescription”
- enrich engagement through ambitious creative commissioning in response to the urgent themes the coast makes visible - migration, seasonal change and the climate emergency
- create a model of best practice to embed environmentally responsible event/festival production and creative programming across all sectors

## **2.3 Creative People and Organisations**

### **2.3.1 Professional Artists and Freelancers:**

Creatives and cultural producers living and working in Sefton include theatre-makers, visual artists, authors, poets, dancers, singers, classical and contemporary musicians, cultural educators, digital artists, film makers, heritage professionals, curators, directors, producers and technicians and other freelancers.

They are made up of:

- established creatives achieving international acclaim based in the Borough all their lives
- relocating or returning to the Borough
- employed full-time or part-time freelance, often with portfolio careers
- young creatives living at home whilst studying creative subjects at: Hugh Baird College (Bootle), Edge Hill (Ormskirk), Southport College, KGV (Southport) Runshaw College (Leyland) or Hope, LJMU and University of Liverpool
- young creatives studying elsewhere in the UK with potential to return to Borough

Unlike the borough’s Everyday Creatives, these arts professionals tend to be less visible within local cultural life, often making work for audiences outside Sefton, with creative practices and networks focussed in Liverpool. Only 7 Arts Council England Developing Your Creative Practice (DYCP) grants have been awarded to local artists since 2021 (compared with 80 in Liverpool), which may indicate lack of traction in practices or careers, or insufficient skills/confidence in writing applications.

### **2.3.2 Creative Industries in Sefton**

Main sectors represented from research is based around technically driven digital businesses; film, TV and photography; publishing and architecture.

They are:

- are primarily micro businesses

- 2,500 workforce
- contribute over £90m to the economy annually

As with artists, the growth of activity in the Borough is affected by Liverpool's more established sector, supported incubators/workspaces/hubs/clusters. High Street regeneration projects will develop new alternative local hubs for Creative and Digital Industries (Southport's Enterprise Arcade, Bootle Strand).

### 2.3.3 Organisations

Sefton's **independent professional cultural organisations** include:

- music companies
- professional theatre companies
- community arts companies and social enterprises
- a community arts hub
- one established studio group
- youth arts organisations
- community-managed heritage buildings
- 2 community-owned independent cinemas

None of these organisations receive core funding. Stop/start resourcing through project grants hinders ambition and creative risk-taking. Economic conditions are currently particularly difficult for the creative sector.

Some arts companies are place-based, but others find more opportunity to produce their work outside the Borough. Few diverse-led organisations.

There is a gap for a larger-scale/funded professional performance producing company – and opportunity to host or incubate new theatre, live/outdoor arts or dance companies.

### **2.3.4 Sefton Council**

The Atkinson is Sefton's principal centre for the arts and is one of the most visited cultural destinations in the region. Its museum celebrates the heritage of Sefton and attracts schools from across the North West to see the Mrs Goodison Egyptology collection. In addition to its outstanding collection of Victorian art, the exhibition programme regularly features work by contemporary artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe, Chila Burman and Gordon Cheung. Its performing arts programme hosts a comprehensive selection of music, comedy, theatre from both professional companies and local performing groups.

Sefton's six public libraries deliver an annual programme of activities based upon universal library offers for reading, digital inclusion, information, and health & wellbeing. Its programme for children & younger people features story & rhymetime sessions for literacy development and its Summer Reading Challenge continues to achieve some of the best participation levels in the North West. The local history service promotes its physical and digital archives through project work, publications and heritage talks. The At The Library programme is delivered in partnership with Rule of Threes and is now a designated National Portfolio Organisation with the Arts Council.

In addition to its food & beverage offer, Southport Market is steadily becoming a popular venue for cultural entertainment. It hosts live music, comedy, films, family and community activities.

**2.3.5 Liverpool-based cultural partners** frequently active in Sefton include Collective Encounters and NPOs Open Eye, Writing on The Wall, Liverpool Biennial and Sound City.

### **2.3.6 Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector**

Sefton's VCF sector, in all its diversity, is well-positioned to be a key partner in cultural delivery:

- anchor organisations with serious cultural ambitions, working with professional artists, and using arts and creativity to deliver their core social impact work
- small community groups offering creative opportunities in their neighbourhoods
- civic societies and heritage groups

The VCF sector:

- recognises the relevance of arts and heritage activity to delivering social outcomes
- reaches some of the least-engaged and highest-need communities
- brings expertise in co-production bringing lived experience into service design
- is supported and networked through Sefton CVS

**Collectively Sefton’s Creative People and Organisations reflected their priorities as:**

- a seat at the table
- improved spaces, and support to access them
- co-operative working, sharing of skills and networks
- structured talent development
- shared information platforms: cultural directory/ clash calendar/co-ordinated communications plan
- producing and commissioning opportunities: to be able to make new work
- practical specialist advice: funding, bid-writing, business support, mentorship, contracts
- advocacy - visibility and value of professional creatives, and creative practice

These kinds of organisations are essential to Sefton’s future cultural development and should be properly engaged and supported as equal partners. Building their collective capacity to respond to local need and opportunity; and to develop programmes that meet the appetites of local audiences is a priority.

There is opportunity to:

- support a shift from small project-based activity to collective and sustained cultural programming
- map and join up activity around artforms and audiences to support collective marketing and audience development; fill gaps and increase quality
- support and underpin the sector through continued precarious times
- support and advocate for good practice in fair pay for artists

## **2.4 Taking Part in Culture**

**2.4.1** According to the *2019 Taking Part* survey, Sefton’s cultural participation is 46%, within the lowest third of Local Authority areas for cultural engagement. footnote

Reasons for this will be varied and nuanced, but include:

- Survey responses include: Lack of awareness 45% Cost 35% Transport 19%
- Cost of Living impacts - the single biggest barrier across income brackets
- Relevance, quality and consistency of the cultural offer in the Borough
- Perception
- the appeal of public cultural programmes that are available in the Borough
- big calendar fixture events may not be affordable to many local people
- grass-roots activities focussed on specific interests
- Inconsistent “public programme” offer

## 2.4.2 Audiences

Audience segmentation shows that:

- Sefton households are mainly moderately or low-engaged, with broad tastes and preferences for heritage, mainstream and popular activities
- 35% of overall households' cultural engagement is likely to be driven by family-focussed activities
- the “average” hides the contrasts in cultural access & likelihood of engagement
- households in South Sefton and parts of Southport, where inequalities are severe, are least likely to be taking part
- this needs consideration in building the cultural offer equitably and effectively: low-cost, close-to-home offers will be key.
- pockets of highly-engaged households in other areas, with preferences for classical artforms, theatre and galleries

[Audience Agency, 2023, *Sefton Area Profile Report*]

Consultation showed that residents wanted:

- more outdoor arts and events, festivals, local history and music (“big names” and “cooler bands”)
- more ambitious programming, to raise audience expectations and create demand
- anchor council spaces - the Atkinson and Libraries - to be open for different/longer hours, to meet local need, working families and young people; and contribute to Southport’s weekend vibrancy

**“We need a more modern and forward-looking set of programming and projects to be the engine for culture, connection and community.”**

[Sefton Council, 2023, *Your Sefton Your Say Culture Strategy survey*]

There is opportunity to:

- build shared audience development strategies, requiring research, and consistent offers
- raise the level of ambition of what is available, utilising Borough of Culture
- increase participation through high quality neighbourhood programming, using assets including Libraries, VCF and independent arts organisations and on high streets (Sefton has one of the highest proportions of residents living near High Streets in the UK)
- use shared audience data to develop better understanding of who is engaged and who is not, borough-wide and hyper-locally

## 2.4.3 Visitor Economy

Within the Liverpool City Region Sefton is ranked 2nd after Liverpool in terms of visitor numbers. The value of tourism in Sefton is currently estimated at £594 million. In



2022, there were almost 7 million-day visitors to Sefton, with 770,000 visitors staying within the borough. This supported 6,111 Sefton jobs in the tourism sector.

[North West Research STEAM data 2022]

As well as coast and seaside town the visitor offer includes festivals, weekenders, sporting events and shows mostly outdoors. Sefton has a number of nationally and internationally important attractions, including :

- major international sporting events - Aintree Grand National; The 2026 Open Golf hosted at Royal Birkdale Club
- the Southport Flower and Air Shows, British Musical Fireworks at Victoria Park
- Antony Gormley's *Another Place* at Crosby Beach

The tourism strategy will be refreshed in 2025 presenting an opportunity for greater alignment of culture and visitor economy, as will the major regeneration projects in Bootle and Southport. This should lead to the development of a year-round offer with visitors staying longer in the borough.

#### **2.4.4 Volunteering**

Volunteering is a significant part of local cultural participation in Sefton and makes an essential contribution to local cultural life.

- there is “a culture of volunteering”, supported by Sefton CVS (SCVS)
- a large, structured programme supporting council provision within The Atkinson, Libraries Service and Green Sefton
- volunteering plays a vital part in sustainability of community cinemas, parks and green spaces, environmental groups and community arts activities.
- over-reliance on volunteering activity can limit the scope and scale of cultural provision, and may not be sustainable in under-resourced communities.

Sefton could build on this strength through collective work to:

- capture the scale and value of cultural volunteering in Sefton
- support volunteering by underrepresented communities
- further develop the role of volunteering in creative ageing
- improve training, progression routes and paid support/co-ordination
- ensure voluntary sector jobs and paid artist employment opportunities are not displaced by volunteering

#### **2.4.5 Everyday Creativity**

Distinct from Community Arts or CICs providing participatory activities, “Everyday Creativity” relates to creative activities that people do for their own enjoyment, alone or in self-organised groups. It can be a hobby, or a side-hustle, and can lead to or sit alongside professional creativity.

[Centre for Cultural Value, 2023, *Supporting Everyday Creativity*]

Consultation shows high levels of individual participation, from community opera to bedroom DJs, yarn-bombers to large scale, established amateur theatre and a huge number and variety of creative groups.

Their wants and needs include:

- access to spaces
- modest funding opportunity
- increasing members, especially those willing to be organisers
- skill development

There is opportunity to:

- support the capacity and increase the inclusivity of groups
- develop the role of Everyday Creativity in wellbeing, social prescribing and active ageing

## **Widening Participation**

### **2.4.6 Children and Young People**

Children and young people and their cultural opportunities are universally confirmed as a high priority.

Young people's cultural assets include:

- a dedicated Youth Arts facility co-producing creative work with young people and professionals
- music studios based in schools
- core work in Libraries with Early Years, Children's Literacy and summer activities
- private dance, drama and musical theatre schools and music tuition
- Northern Morris dance groups
- brass bands
- partnership projects led by Curious Minds
- film education at community cinemas
- after-school arts clubs and groups
- VCF projects such as Bootle Children's Literary Festival delivering programming both in and out of school
- Sefton's music service is active across the Borough. Applications to deliver the Music Hub were in consideration at the time of writing
- Cultural and Creative FE and HE courses with links to universities

Young people stated that they value:

- coast and green spaces, festivals and libraries
- the role of culture in supporting their wellbeing and social skills
- sharing creative energy and experiences with others
- expanded horizons - meeting "professionals like writers and directors" and "people with different stories to tell"

and that they want:

- more places to go - creative social spaces
- more face-to-face, offline social interaction
- more evening activities for late teens aged 15-18
- culture to be affordable for young people and families

For aspiring Young Creatives, the talent pipeline goes cold after Further/Higher Education, and they need:

- guidance and support to access employment opportunities in the creative industries.
- apprenticeships, placements and mentoring
- direct access to artists as role models and as sharers of practice

“There are not many places for young people to go which drives them to the streets. We are sometimes asked to leave early if we are not with an adult  
“ I wanted to be a dancer / choreographer but when I graduated it just felt too competitive – if I’d had more career guidance or mentoring I may have continued.”

This is a challenging starting point. Years of enforced austerity has whittled down youth provision; schools find it harder to deliver cultural education; families cannot afford the cultural treats that used to be calendar fixtures; young people feel set adrift on leaving FE/HE. Sefton’s educational attainment gap is significant: cultural access and cultural education have been proven to bridge this. Without large cultural venues, to underpin a strategy to support Cultural Education Sefton will need a different new local approach.

opportunities include:

- building on existing cultural apprenticeship programmes, to make it possible for more young people to begin and establish creative careers in Sefton
- new and expanded partnerships with the NHS, Early Years and Voluntary sector
- working with existing cultural spaces increase their relevance and appeal to young people and supporting youth-led activities within them
- enabling young people to take the lead in designing the models of cultural programming that will best meet their needs
- investing in Sefton’s LCEP, which has a wide membership and vision but requires resourcing to be able to achieve its ambition
- supporting joined-up, borough-wide thematic programming to address key focus areas

New strands of work could include:

- targeted programmes to train, develop and sustain local professional artists and creatives in work with young people, and in schools
- working with youth service and voluntary sector partners to create new youth led spaces and commissioning opportunities for artists to work with young people within communities

Further consultation with children and young people is planned to co-produce the specific action plans related to this area of work.

### **2.4.7 Creative Ageing**

24% of Sefton residents are aged 65+ (ranked 24th out of 309 local authorities).

Cultural engagement can support one of the key priorities for ageing well, which aspires for: Older people will stay active, connected and involved by being part of strong communities in which they are important.

[Sefton Health & Wellbeing Board, 2020, *Sefton Health & Wellbeing Strategy: Living Well in Sefton 2020-25*]

Consultation revealed that for many people post-pandemic re-engagement has not been realised, with prevailing apprehension around leaving the security of the home environment. A significant number of older people are also carers. Many are at risk of social isolation.

Need for:

- clear information about Covid safety
- participants to feel that cultural participation is available to them, including targeted outreach
- physically accessible and dementia-friendly venues and activities
- in some communities free and low-cost activity

Opportunities include:

- Developing and supporting meaningful volunteering programmes
- Opportunities for older artists who may not have pension security to be able to practise and continue to earn a living beyond conventional retirement age

### **2.4.8 Arts and Health**

23% of the Borough's residents identify as having a disability or chronic poor health.

[Sefton Council, 2023, *Joint Strategic Needs Assessment / Health*]

Cultural engagement has a significant role to play in tackling the challenges presented by health inequalities in the Borough. Living Well Sefton works with community and cultural organisations to support and fund small project activity to promote mental wellbeing. A number of creative programmes, such as shared reading across the borough offer light touch early intervention and prevention, and signposting. MerseyCare's Life Rooms in Bootle and Southport runs regular creative courses in support of better mental health.

Social prescribing is supported by initiatives such as Active Sefton, Living Well Sefton, Brighter Living Partnership, May Logan Centre and Netherton Feelgood Factory. Link-workers operate in partnership with GP practices by connecting people to cultural activity in their communities – horticulture, reading groups, arts & crafts. There is a

need to ensure that the organisations, often small, delivering the activities are sustainable, and have capacity to meet increasing demand and expectations.

The new NHS Merseyside and Cheshire Integrated Care Board, creates an opportunity for strategic working with the Place lead for Sefton to integrate the role of culture across co-ordinated services planning.

#### **2.4.8 Underrepresented Communities**

Global Majority, sanctuary-seeking, LGBTQI and disabled communities are under-represented as both creatives and audiences in Sefton’s cultural life. Whilst consultation highlighted libraries as safe spaces for learning and participation, perhaps as a consequence of consistent, targeted work, more work is needed to increase representation in mainstream cultural spaces .

22% (61,134) of Sefton residents identify as disabled (19% in the North West and 17% in England).

[Sefton Council, 2023, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment / Health]

Sefton has a low proportion of residents from minority ethnic groups, with 95% of the population being White British, higher than rates seen across Liverpool City Region 92%, the North West 87% and England 79% (9.8%)

[Sefton Council, 2021, People & Place Profile]

Groups are heavily reliant on volunteers, and as with wider sector need development support. Groups voiced the need to to travel to Liverpool to meet day-to-day their cultural needs. 87% of LGBTQ+ respondents felt there were few places where they can socialise and meet people like themselves.

[Sefton Council, 2023, *Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2027: A Borough for Everyone*]

opportunities could include:

- targeted participation, training and skills development opportunities
- interventions to support increased visibility and inclusion in creative spaces and programmes
- developing cultural offers that ensure people from all backgrounds see themselves in programming, year-round
- consistent year-round co-produced representation in programming :not limited to special events for national calendar moments

## 2.5 Cultural Ecology

“An ecological approach concentrates on relationships and patterns within the overall system, showing how careers develop, ideas transfer, money flows, and product and content move, to and fro, around and between the funded, homemade and commercial subsectors. Culture is an organism not a mechanism”  
John Holden *Ecology of Culture, 2014*

A cultural ecology analysis describes the connections and relationships between different elements of cultural life. John Holden describes four different functions that are needed for culture to thrive in any place.

“**Guardians**” look after heritage assets. In Sefton there is a healthy mix of sectors and organisations; many with established relationships with each other:

- council services – the Atkinson Museum & Collections, Libraries & Archives, Green Sefton
- landowners/stewards of the natural landscape
- local historic and civic societies and community owned/managed Heritage buildings
- community groups safeguarding particular cultural identities, traditions and languages.
- classical music companies
- community heritage projects

The “**Guardians**” role is the most developed and established, reflecting community interest and knowledge in local history, and is a strong underpinning for the ecology.

“**Platforms**” are where present-day culture is seen and shared. They are key to generating a “scene” and drawing audiences across and into places. At Sefton’s present cultural platforms are not as plentiful or well-distributed as either audiences or creatives need and want.

- major new large-scale platforms for Southport and Bootle will significantly increase capacity for performing arts and events
- particular gaps in the East of Borough
- difficulties finding, accessing and affording suitable space
- grassroots spaces would benefit from investment and co-ordination
- festivals are a developing strength
- there is scant visual arts infrastructure, apart from the Atkinson’s galleries
- opportunities in green spaces, libraries, meanwhile and long-term use of empty property in high street regeneration and the church estate

“**Connectors**”, bring people together to make things happen, support talent, create opportunity, gather resources from within and outside a place. Connectors can be organisations or projects; or individuals - artists themselves, curators, promoters, producers, entrepreneurs in any sector and can be paid, freelancers or volunteers.

Sefton’s “Connectors” include:

- Community organisers at a hyperlocal level

- “Performers’ Network” supporting everyday creativity and community arts
- Taking Root in a connector role for community green spaces
- At The Library NPO programme, artist-led, focusing on socially-engaged practice
- Scrapyard Studios, artist-led, focussing on female and non-binary musicians and freelancers
- SAFE Regeneration in its hub and with its festival and events production

In Sefton, without the capacity brought by bigger institutions there is particular need to develop the connecting and producing role:

- at an individual level - local work opportunities for freelancers, so that they become more visible and viable.
- new talent - skills and capacity development via apprenticeships, traineeships, and FE/HE links
- dedicated Connector role/brief at a delivery level within local authority structure
- Cultural Partnership to set a vision, co-ordinate resources and plans at a strategic level

### **Nomads**

“Nomads” are local residents - the creatives and audiences, who generate and participate in the cultural life of a place.

### **Artists**

- there are creatives making work in every art form and discipline
- there are too few opportunities to move around the Borough to make or present work
- few ‘scenes’ to tap into and “Platforms” are not easy to access
- early career creatives need to build a track record of small projects or commissions, and establish peer networks: the foundations of a viable creative career
- the first 2 years out of education is crucial, especially for creatives from low-income backgrounds/communities
- artists need continued support and opportunity through the whole of their career

### **Audiences and Participants**

- low audience engagement is a key indicator that the ecology is not thriving as it might.
- investment in Platforms (spaces and programmes) and Artists will support audience development and opportunities for audiences
- targeted, co-produced approaches to ensure better representation of and by diverse communities

## **2.6 Cultural Funding**

Sefton is a Levelling Up for Culture Area

Levels of cultural grant investment are low:

- NLHF investment into Sefton is in the bottom third of Local Authorities. (“Heritage Places” Methodology, 2023) footnote
- in the 3 years prior 2020, the ACE funding investment into Sefton was just £2.32 per capita pa. (Priority Place Methodology, 2019).footnote
- from 2021 – 2023, Sefton organisations received only 12 successful Project Grants totalling £289k - 5.37% of ACE’s investment in LCR through this scheme (ACE, Dec 2023), an indicator of levels of cultural capacity.
- there has been recent success in attracting significant capital grants (Towns Fund, Levelling Up) and revenue funding (NPO) and larger NLHF projects.

There are opportunities to improve the investment profile through:

- strategic consortia funding (Place Partnership, Creative People and Places)
- collegiate place-based approaches to corporate and philanthropic giving, building on the Sefton Hive crowdfunding model
- support for local artists, organisations and groups to design their projects with greater ambition, bid-writing and impact evaluation

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## 2.7 SWOT ANALYSIS

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<p>Voluntary Sector: reach to most vulnerable; strong VCF engagement in culture; “Culture of volunteering”</p> <p>Outstanding coast and green spaces as community assets, visitor destinations,</p> <p>Established calendar of large-scale outdoor events</p> <p>Signs of emergent creative clusters of creative activity in Bootle, Waterloo and Southport</p> <p>Co-production principles as a Council mode of practice and methodology within wider sectors</p> <p>Everyday Creativity</p> <p>Heritage and local history assets</p> <p>Council: Elected member engaged and supportive Alignment of strategies with what culture can deliver</p> <p>Large civic museum and arts centre</p> <p>Library service with 6 libraries and partnership NPO to deliver creative work to support most vulnerable communities</p>	<p>Inconsistent public arts/cultural offers - most regular activity is group-based and participatory</p> <p>Low levels of cultural engagement across Borough as a whole; likely to be lower in areas still experiencing deprivation</p> <p>Too few dedicated spaces for:</p> <p>Performance or exhibition;</p> <p>Young people to take part in culture;</p> <p>studios/production//rehearsal</p> <p>Limited Library and Atkinson opening hours</p> <p>Lack of opportunity and low profile of professional artists and creatives</p> <p>Commissioning opportunities are rare</p> <p>Lack of consistent cultural opportunities for young people</p> <p>Small organisations:</p> <p>Limited capacity to collaborate beyond immediate locality/issue</p> <p>Stop/start-project based resourcing; inconsistent quality and ambition;</p> <p>Information &amp; Advocacy: visibility and value of the creative role; people don't know what is happening</p> <p>Low levels of cultural investment</p> <p>Capacity to generate or respond to opportunity, or develop pipeline projects</p> <p>Lack of value placed on culture in terms of social impact</p> <p>Lack of value placed on creative and cultural professionals and expertise</p>

<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<p>Regeneration Projects as catalysts for local cultural growth as well as economic opportunity</p> <p>Borough of Culture 2025 as opportunity to galvanise ambition and partnership working</p> <p>Polycentricity: growing neighbourhood programming - focused responses to local needs, community-led activity</p> <p>Spaces: improving neighbourhood and civic infrastructure for culture; unlocking empty spaces for cultural use</p> <p>Cultural Landscape:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment</li> <li>• Cultural commissioning</li> <li>• Outdoor Arts</li> <li>• Wellbeing</li> <li>• Climate sustainability as a USP</li> </ul> <p>Shared audience development work</p> <p>Young People: pipeline for talent development underpinned by regeneration projects</p> <p>Collaboration and collegiate working Joined up approaches, cohering existing activity and filling gaps</p> <p>Cultural Partnership: to set a vision, co-ordinate resources and plans at a strategic level</p> <p>Liverpool: working with leading cultural partners to increase opportunities for Sefton communities and creatives</p> <p>Engaging strategic partners with a cultural focus including Edge Hill University and the Integrated Care Board</p>	<p>Cost of living crisis a barrier to cultural engagement</p> <p>Places and communities “left behind” due to uneven opportunity for investment</p> <p>Perceived value of cultural activity may remain low with some decision makers and communities</p> <p>Becoming parochial: - need to maintain outward links. Pride in individual places rather than Sefton as a whole Borough</p> <p>Artists and creatives forced to find opportunities elsewhere</p> <p>Capacity and sustainability of small organisations in difficult economic times</p> <p>Young people and creative talent leave</p>

### 3. Strategy

#### 3.1 Aims and Action Areas

##### Culture Leads

**Aim: Sefton is ready to seize current opportunities for culture-led change, and generate new ones.**

Through major regeneration projects, arts programmes, community-led activity and artists' practices, culture and creativity is already changing Sefton's places, spaces and community life. Sefton will build the capacity to grasp these opportunities with vigour and impact.

[Tourism and visitor economy here]

A Cultural Partnership enables strategic collaboration towards collective goals, new channels for investment, ambitious commissioning, strategic audience development and communications. Sefton Council's role in convening, networking and advocating for culture is expanded, bridging directorates. Galvanising all of our creative communities, Sefton's Borough of Culture year in 2025 will build borough-wide ambition and capacity, with long-term legacy.

##### Creativity Everywhere

**Aim: Everyone in Sefton can take part in a rich and varied cultural life, whatever their age, whatever their means and wherever they live**

A place made up of many places, Sefton will turn polycentricity to its advantage through diverse and ambitious neighbourhood culture in high streets, parks and community venues. Town Centres and Neighbourhoods have a vibrant and visible cultural life. Confident, consistent cultural programming celebrates different identities and heritage and builds positive new narratives and an authentic sense of place. Local people and organisations can make ambitious things happen in their communities. A constellation of spaces are created, improved or unlocked for creative uses. Regeneration projects build local creative capital and Libraries are cornerstones of delivery. Creative programmes respond to local needs and reach and support the most vulnerable. Borough-wide themes strengthen connections between different spaces, projects and communities.

## **Creativity Thrives**

### **Aim: Creative People and organisations achieve their full artistic potential**

Sefton's creative people find all the opportunities, spaces, resources, networks and development they need in the borough. Artists and creatives are trusted and valued as agents of positive change in their communities. They lead, shape and imagine as well as deliver cultural programmes. Professional artists can make new work, make a living and build audiences for their creative practices throughout their career. Local exhibition, performance and commissioning opportunities provide springboards to national and international success. Cultural entrepreneurs and creative industries build innovative businesses, and form clusters that generate dynamic new activity. Everyday creativity flourishes with bespoke organisational support, communications channels and social prescribing infrastructure that connects local people with groups.

## **Dynamic Landscape**

### **Aim: Sefton's outstanding landscapes and green spaces engage local people and visitors in a new model of culture, climate action and wellbeing**

Sefton develops and embeds exemplar practice in environmentally responsible cultural production and creative programming. Local people are deeply connected with the natural landscape and the exceptional, fragile coastline is better safeguarded, protected and understood. Sefton's coastal and green spaces host and inspire ambitious contemporary commissioning, and bring people together at festivals, outdoor arts programmes, participatory projects and community events. Heritage programming celebrates the "culture of the coast" and supports wellbeing through climate action, volunteering and "nature on prescription".

## **Children & Young People**

### **Aim: From early years to creative careers opportunities for Children and Young People run through Sefton's cultural life "like Rock".**

Creative offers for Early Years and Families are joined up across places and partners to ensure there is access to high quality activities for every family in Sefton. Sefton's LCEP collaborates to strengthen cultural learning opportunity in all Sefton's schools supported by trained and talented artists and creatives. Young people have places to go, feel welcome in all of Sefton's cultural spaces and take the lead in designing relevant and engaging creative things to do. A talent pipeline establishes clear progression routes from education into employment in culture, tourism, or creative practice.

### 3.3 Roles

Achieving the aspirations outlined here will require - and enable - a more dynamic and collaborative relationship between council and community in relation to culture.

A strengths-based approach is a way of working that Sefton has embraced with the voluntary sector, with good outcomes for local communities. This should now be adopted to cultural and creative work: seeing the potential in what already exists, valuing good practice, supporting local creative capital and organisational growth.

#### Role of the Council

The current role of the council in relation to culture is multifaceted, encompassing venue management, stewardship, community development, event promotion and production, place leadership and destination marketing.

If Sefton is to respond to its new opportunities with ambition there is a need for the council to build its capacity to increase its “connector” role.

This will include:

- convening and administering the Cultural Partnership
- creating/providing capacity or resource to develop pipeline projects
- facilitating and enabling in relation to spaces including its own cultural venues and empty spaces
- identifying opportunities for culture and cultural opportunity
- championing Sefton’s culture within the Liverpool City region
- consultation and data

“You are doing the right thing in asking, and this should continue as the answers will keep changing, and agility to catch the mood and the desires of your residents will be important”

[Sefton Council, 2023, Your Sefton Your Say Culture Strategy survey]

#### Strategic Advocacy and Policy

A number of core council strategies are due to be renewed in 2024-5, presenting a chance to ensure the potential of culture to contribute to future strategic direction is fully integrated across different policy areas:

- Identify potential for cultural commissioning within major capital projects
- Directly commission and fund activity within clear policy

Commitment is needed at a sufficiently senior level to take decisions, activate opportunity and bridge and co-ordinate working across People and Place directorates.

## **Cultural Partnership**

Sefton is naturally a collaborative place, and there are strong local precedents of Place-based partnerships focussed on areas of collective strategy.

This principle should now be applied to culture, through the initiation of a Borough-wide, cross-sector Cultural Partnership that will provide collaborative leadership and enable partners and stakeholders to shape, support and deliver the goals of the strategy.

This kind of partnership is vital if Sefton's cultural ecology is to become better connected, be authentically representative and achieve critical mass.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the Cultural Partnership is to create strategic capacity and connectivity and practical action:

- enable more open and collaborative relationships
- ensure better representation of different sectors and communities
- support greater ambition quality and creative risk
- joint programming and joined up approaches to arts, heritage and culture
- provide advocacy for culture
- provide structure and capacity to respond to and generate pipeline of opportunity
- open up new possibilities for funding and investment

### **Terms of Reference and Membership**

The Cultural Partnership should be independently, rather than Council chaired.

In the first instance it is proposed that the Cultural Partnership Membership builds on the initial Cultural Strategy Steering Group. However, the first task is to review and expand membership to better reflect both the cultural and creative sector and the wider communities of the Borough.

The group should include representation from:

- Senior Council Leadership with representation from decision-makers at both People and Place Directorates
- Health and Education
- Youth representation – via youth organisations, or young people supported to participate
- lead Voluntary Sector Organisations with commitment to culture
- independent Arts, Heritage and Culture organisations
- leaders from diverse and under-represented groups

Membership should include diverse perspectives, different artforms and representation from different areas of the Borough.

Proposals for Membership and Draft Terms of Reference are in preparation

**ENDS.**

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### **3.4 Next Steps – to follow**

#### **Continued consultation**

#### **Cultural Partnership**

#### **Visioning/ Action Planning**

#### **Borough of Culture 2025**

- BOC recommendations
- Catalyst not a pageant
- Key feedback and wants from consults
- Issues with 2020
- Opportunities - investment
- long term step change in what we
- Small grassroots neighbourhood based projects in a year of activity with collective celebration