



Arts and culture-led regeneration

Date: Tuesday 5 March

Time: 2pm – 3pm

Venue: Room B, 1 Parliament St

Speakers

Anna Francis, Associate Professor of Fine Art and Social Practice at Staffordshire University and co-director of the Portland Inn Project, Stoke-on-Trent

Rebecca Blackman, Director Engagement and Communities, Arts Council England

Nova Marshall, Newington Big Local, Ramsgate.

At a glance

Arts and culture are increasingly recognised for their contribution to individual wellbeing, community and local economic development, and positive social change.

The latest data dive¹ commissioned for the APPG shows that 'left behind' neighbourhoods (LBNs):

- Have fewer cultural assets compared to the English average; 88% of LBNs have a lower density of cultural assets and 86.2% have a lower density of leisure assets
- Receive less cultural investment than other equally deprived areas, this includes grant funding from Arts Council England and the Department for Culture Media and Sport
- Have lower levels of businesses and employment in the creative, arts and entertainment activities sector than other deprived areas and England
- Show lower participation in arts and culture activities than those in other deprived areas or nationally.

¹ OCSI, [Arts and Culture Data Dive](#). Funding data is taken from 360 giving and is primarily based on the location of organisations receiving grants rather than the beneficiaries of the spending. In some cases, LBNs may have benefited from grants to organisations based elsewhere but operating in the area (e.g., town centre-based charities delivering services in a local peripheral estate).

Arts and culture-led regeneration

“Culture and the experiences it offers can have a deep and lasting effect on places and the people who live in them. Investment in cultural activities and in arts organisations, museums and libraries helps improve lives, regenerate neighbourhoods, support local economies, attract visitors and bring people together.”²

Let’s Create: Arts Council England’s Strategy for 2020-30

Strengthening the social and cultural connections of people to the places where they live has been an enduring feature of neighbourhood regeneration.³ An emphasis on culture and creativity can help support regeneration that is genuinely community-led and responsive to local needs and interests, rather than approaches which result in gentrification and the displacement of existing residents.

Creative activities can help to engage a diverse range of groups, including those who may be ‘harder to reach’ – such as young people not in education, training or employment – and because they are a means of addressing issues without attaching any stigma to the people taking part. Creativity and culture can also play key role in generating community spirit and positively changing perceptions of areas.⁴

On an individual level, arts, cultural and community engagement have been demonstrated to have a broad range of impacts on wellbeing – from improved life satisfaction, to better physical and mental health.⁵ These activities can also contribute to a more active and engaged community by enhancing civic pride, building skills and knowledge, and providing enjoyment for residents.⁶

Arts and culture in ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods

OCSI analysis conducted for the APPG highlights limited access to the benefits from arts and culture in ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods. 88 per cent of ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods have fewer cultural space assets – including libraries, museums and galleries, historical sites and permanent art displays – per person in their local area compared to the national average.

Density of cultural, leisure, and green assets			
	‘Left behind’ neighbourhoods	Other deprived areas	England
Density of cultural assets	46	95	82
Density of leisure assets	565	1229	927
Density of green assets	374	502	493

Source: AddressBase 2023/Active Places Databases 2023

² Arts Council England, *Let’s Create: Strategy 2020-30*

³ Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, *A return to neighbourhood regeneration? Reassessing the benefits of a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal*, 2023, p. 29.

⁴ Local Trust, *Building Big Local Futures: Towards legacies for people and places (Paper 2)*, 2022.

⁵ What Works Wellbeing, *Cultural, arts and community engagement can benefit wellbeing, but how do our neighbourhoods influence our participation?* (PDF), 2022.

⁶ Local Government Association, *Culture-led regeneration: achieving inclusive and sustainable growth*, 2019.

These civic assets play an important role in community life, providing places for people to meet, make connections and organise social activity. They also give residents things to do, often at no or little cost, which are important to how positive a community feels about their local area.⁷

Over the past three decades, 'left behind' neighbourhoods have received lower levels of Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) grant funding per head than other deprived areas and England – with urban neighbourhoods receiving the highest levels.

At the same time, the largest funder of arts and culture in England – local authorities – are facing increasing constraints on their capacity to provide funding for these non-statutory services.⁸ Recent analysis by the County Councils Network found that councils across England have had to reduce their budgeted cultural spend by £472m – or 30% – between 2010/11 and 2023/24.⁹ Separate research from the Local Government Information Unit indicates that arts and culture services are among the most likely to be cut by local government.¹⁰

Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS): total funding amount awarded



Source: Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) 2023

7 APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods, [Levelling up local outcomes: The importance of community spaces to neighbourhood regeneration](#) (PDF), 2023.

8 Arts Council England, [Working with local authorities](#)

9 County Councils Network, [Cultural Services: Ensuring that there is a cultural heartbeat in every county area](#), 2024, p. 4.

10 Local Government Information Unit, [The State of Local Government Finance 2023](#) (PDF), 2023, p. 18

Community-led approaches

Community-led social and cultural infrastructure at a hyperlocal level can radically improve socioeconomic outcomes for communities, especially those who are currently missing out within the current model of cultural investment.¹¹

The Creative Civic Change (CCC) programme was an experimental funding programme delivered by Local Trust, the National Lottery Community Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation between 2018 and 2022. Modelled on the Big Local programme, CCC offered flexible, long-term funding, in-area mentoring and a substantial peer learning programme to fifteen areas across England.

The programme supported these communities to shape, lead and commission arts and creative interventions to make positive social change where they lived. It was transformative for people, places, artists and funders and demonstrated that creativity is a vital tool for communities to problem solve and imagine a better future.

These projects enabled local people with creative skills to see themselves as creatives, artists and leaders. In Corby, CCC group Creative Kingswood and Hazel Leys became deeply embedded within their community and well networked with key local stakeholders, including their regional arts organisation, Made With Many. One of their projects was their Community Shed, a free to use workshop with facilities for woodwork, metal work, 3D printing, computers and much more, creating both a physical space and opportunity to learn new skills. Their other projects involved creating local green space, a skate park, and delivering a series of street art commissions on the estate.¹²

Policy context

The 2022 Levelling Up White Paper – the document which set out government’s plans to spread opportunity more equally across the UK – states that “tackling disparities in access to culture and delivering a truly national cultural offer should be a defining feature of levelling up” with plans for “boosting investment in culture where it’s been absent for too long.” This was accompanied by a variety of funding schemes – including the Levelling Up Fund and the Community Ownership Fund – and initiatives to develop local infrastructure, increase community ownership of local assets, promote town centre regeneration, and drive investment in deprived places.¹³

As a key pillar of the levelling up funding landscape, the £2.6bn UK Shared Prosperity Fund included multiple interventions relating to arts and culture. However, recent APPG analysis has found that much of this investment has been channelled by local authorities to crisis response and residents in many ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods in England are not seeing funding reach their communities, nor are they being offered the chance to help steer investment in their local area.¹⁴

¹¹ Local Trust, *Submission to DCMS’s call for evidence on cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda*

¹² Local Trust, *Restoring and strengthening communities in Corby*

¹³ *Levelling Up the United Kingdom (PDF)*

¹⁴ APPG for ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods, *Sharing Prosperity: Community renewal and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (PDF)*, 2024