

LUTON CULTURAL SPACE

FEASIBILITY STUDY

A feasibility study into cultural space need, asset potential and investment opportunity across Luton Borough.

Commissioned by Luton Borough Council

Conducted by Create Wellbeing Partnerships CIC

March 2026

Executive Summary

This study was commissioned by Luton Borough Council to assess the feasibility of new and improved cultural space in the town. It draws on direct consultation with 26 creative practitioners and 13 cultural facilitators across 18 disciplines, spatial mapping of 57 venues and potential sites, and analysis of the policy, funding and strategic context including the Town Centre Delivery Plan 2025-2030, the Economic Growth Strategy 2025-2032, the Luton 2040 vision, the Culture Trust Business Plan, Revoluton Arts' Creative People and Places programme documentation, the University of Bedfordshire Community Engagement Strategy 2026-2030, and Tangled Feet.

The central finding is that a case for investment in cultural space in Luton is feasible, with specific conditions attached. The study identifies six council-owned sites with potential for activation, subject to further validation, a well-documented set of infrastructure gaps that are consistent across practitioner disciplines, and a strategic window created by the £1.7 billion town centre investment programme. Luton is entering a period of major physical and economic investment, and the choices made over the next few years will determine whether culture is embedded within that change or left peripheral to it. The conditions under which investment would be most effective are set out in Chapters 5 and 6.

Audience, Ownership and Programme Context

This feasibility study was commissioned to establish whether there is sufficient evidence of need to justify investment in cultural space across Luton, and under what conditions that investment would have the greatest impact. The report is written for the Arts and Culture Strategy Group and its partners. Luton Borough Council commissioned it, but it is a shared evidence base, owned collectively across the partnership rather than by any single organisation, and its findings are addressed jointly to the council, Culture Trust Luton, the University of Bedfordshire, UK Centre for Carnival Arts, Revoluton Arts and the wider sector. It is intended to inform the Luton Arts and Place Partnership Programme, the Strategy Group's Arts Council England supported Place Partnership.

Headline Findings

Consultation responses indicate that existing cultural provision, while present in more forms than many participants recognised, is experienced as inconsistently accessible in practice. Access depends heavily on which practitioner you are, which space you approach, and when. The barriers are primarily operational: cost structures that do not match grassroots earning capacity, unclear or unpublished booking processes, inconsistent communication, and opening hours that do not match the times practitioners actually work.

The single most consistently identified infrastructure gap is flexible multi-use, multi-disciplinary creative space of the kind typically found in warehouse or industrial buildings. This does not exist in Luton's current cultural provision. Existing provision at Hat Factory has by default become a central node in Luton's music ecology, but its soundproofing is insufficient to support simultaneous multi-room use, meaning demand routinely exceeds what the infrastructure can deliver. This is not a question of whether soundproofed space exists. It is a question of whether what exists is adequate for the level of need.

Consultation responses consistently describe a gap in trust and confidence between grassroots practitioners and the institutions responsible for cultural provision. This is an important consideration for any new investment and should be addressed explicitly in the design of any intervention.

The Stage development at Bute Street is a significant addition to Luton's cultural infrastructure. On current public information, it is a commercial mid-scale venue and is not designed to meet the grassroots infrastructure needs identified in this study. The two are complementary rather than competing, but the

ecosystem conditions that would allow The Stage to succeed, a functioning grassroots scene, a talent pipeline, habitual cultural participation in the town centre, are the same conditions this study addresses.

Top Five Actions

- Convene a structured session with consultation participants to present findings and co-design the next steps, ensuring their involvement in shaping what follows.
- Develop a transparent, consistently applied pricing framework for all publicly supported cultural spaces and publish it online.
- Establish a coordination function to make the existing cultural ecology navigable for practitioners.
- Work with the council's Community Wealth team to map derelict and vacant commercial properties with potential for creative activation, establishing a register that does not currently exist.
- Engage the Community Wealth Building team to strengthen the cultural contribution of social value commitments from major developments, while monitoring whether any appropriate longer-term Section 106 opportunities arise.

The Study at a Glance

What 26 creative practitioners and 13 cultural facilitators actually told us.

21/26	Practitioners expressed dissatisfaction. Only 1 of 26 expressed any satisfaction with Luton's cultural provision.
5	Zero positive experiences. 5 practitioners could name no single positive experience of Luton's cultural infrastructure.
8	Working outside Luton. Practitioners whose practice is developing or whose goals are being achieved away from the town.
77%	Named affordability as a barrier. 20 of 26 creatives cited cost, hidden pricing or inaccessible rates as a challenge.
65%	Raised the night-time economy collapse. 17 of 26 linked the absence of viable night-time venues to the loss of scene and audience.
38%	Named racial or class gatekeeping. 10 of 26 described structural inequality in access to space, funding and institutional support.
42%	Named booking and communication failures. 11 practitioners documented response delays, hidden contacts and unexplained cancellations.
10	Named Hat Factory in their challenges. The town's flagship creative venue named as a barrier by 10 of 26 practitioners.
7	Earn £0 to £5k from cultural work. Of those who specified income, the majority earn below minimum wage from their practice in Luton.

What are practitioners asking for? Ranked by frequency across all 26 responses:

Rank	Space Type	Detail
1st	Multi-use making space	Flexible, multi-disciplinary creative space typically found in warehouse or industrial buildings. Carnival fabrication, large-scale build, messy making. Does not exist in Luton.
2nd	Rehearsal and music	Properly soundproofed, accessible outside working hours. Existing provision at Hat Factory cannot support simultaneous use across multiple rooms.
3rd	Youth creative space	Without bars, with safeguarding, co-designed with young people. Not one current space described as fit for purpose.
4th	Neighbourhood provision	In LU3 and LU4. Removing the need to travel to the town centre to access culture.
5th	Community-owned space	Spaces not controlled by institutions whose track record has reduced community confidence.
6th	Digital studio	Photography, gaming and streaming. Currently practitioners travel to Bedford for photo studio access. Gaming and streaming entirely unserved.

604 challenges. 142 gaps. 21 of 26 practitioners expressing dissatisfaction. The evidence base for investment in cultural space in Luton is substantial.

Methodology and Who We Spoke To

Approach

This study employed a multi-layered engagement methodology designed to reach beyond existing networks and formal cultural infrastructure. Evidence was gathered through direct outreach, an online survey, and individual interviews and facilitated conversations with creatives and cultural facilitators. The study team also attended one Hat District networking session as an additional invitation route; this did not produce direct evidence for the study. No discipline-focused or practitioner-forum group sessions formed part of the evidence collection. Direct engagement drew on contacts across existing community infrastructure, including TOKKO, Jamrock Studios, Luton Irish Forum, Luton BID, Barnfield College, Chiltern Academy, Luton Sixth Form College, and faith and neighbourhood networks across Biscot, Bury Park, Marsh Farm, Lewsey and Leagrave.

Education partnerships across more than twelve schools provided additional access routes to young creatives, families and emerging practitioners. All engagement outputs were logged within a structured dataset capturing discipline, geography, space usage, access needs, operational requirements and the types of space required by each practitioner. This dataset forms the foundation for the spatial analysis and findings in Chapters 2 and 7.

The study team was aware of the music, heritage and creative forums and considered them as possible routes to participants. No discipline-focused group sessions were held through those forums during the research period. The team also attended one Hat District networking session as an additional invitation route; this did not produce direct evidence for the study. Evidence was therefore gathered directly from creatives and cultural facilitators through individual outreach, interviews, facilitated conversations and an online survey.

Who Participated

The consultation reached 26 creative practitioners and 13 cultural facilitators across 18 disciplines, including fine art, digital content creation, music production, craft, visual arts, mixed media, carpentry, theatre operations, writing and literature, manufacturing heritage, community development and multi-disciplinary practice.

Participants included freelance creatives, informal and home-based practitioners, early-career and youth creatives, micro-businesses, community-led cultural organisers, global majority practitioners, neurodivergent creatives, faith-based cultural practitioners and established artists. 14 participants indicated willingness to follow up. 5 participants could name no positive experience of Luton's cultural infrastructure. 18 of 26 were not connected to any formal cultural network in the town and required direct, sustained outreach to reach.

Who Was Still Missing

Several communities remain underrepresented relative to their share of the borough's population per the 2021 Census. Communities underrepresented in our evidence base include under-16 creatives, practitioners operating entirely outside digital networks, and creative entrepreneurs in communities whose disengagement from formal cultural structures is itself a finding rather than an absence of creative activity.

Several practitioners told us they had been consulted before, had seen nothing change, and had made a deliberate decision not to invest further time. This is not apathy. It is a rational response to a system that has repeatedly taken evidence and done nothing with it.

Background and Context

The Town and Its People

Located within the Oxford-Cambridge Arc with outstanding transport connections, Luton is one of the most ethnically diverse towns in England. According to the 2021 Census, the borough's population of approximately 220,000 is 54.3% White, 19.7% Asian or Asian British, 10.2% Black, African, Caribbean or Black British, 5.6% Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups, and 4.9% from other ethnic groups. It is a town shaped by successive waves of migration, each contributing to a distinctive creative culture that has persisted through decades of economic disruption.

The town's hat industry collapsed across the second half of the twentieth century. What followed was deindustrialisation, retail decline and a systematic loss of civic confidence. Luton now ranks as the sixth emptiest high street in the UK, out of 50 towns in the Property Inspect High Street Report (2022), which estimated retail vacancy from Rightmove, Zoopla and Savills listings, with 9.55 empty properties per 10,000 residents against a national average of 6.17. That is not just an economic statistic. It is the physical context in which cultural activity either thrives or disappears.

Between 2019 and 2022, the creative and cultural sector nationally grew at almost double the rate of the wider economy, generating an estimated £116 billion in GVA and employing over 2.4 million people. That growth was not evenly distributed. It was concentrated in places with functioning creative ecosystems: active venue networks, affordable workspace, practitioner pipelines, and the institutional infrastructure to connect grassroots activity to wider economic frameworks. In Luton, the evidence gathered for this study shows the opposite: while the national sector expanded, Luton lost venues, studios and rehearsal infrastructure that took decades to build. The town's creative sector did not share in national growth. It contracted at the same time the rest of the country was expanding. Understanding why Luton diverged from that national trajectory is the starting point for understanding what investment needs to do.

What We Mean by Cultural Space

Cultural space in this study is defined broadly. It includes formal performance venues, artist studios, rehearsal rooms, maker workshops, exhibition spaces, community halls, parks and outdoor spaces, and informal or meanwhile spaces where creative practice happens outside formal structures.

Critically, it also includes the spaces that do not yet exist but are needed: soundproofed music rooms, flexible multi-disciplinary making environments, youth creative facilities, spaces for carnival fabrication and large-scale build, and neighbourhood hubs that do not require practitioners to travel to the town centre.

Luton has spaces. Many of them are effectively inaccessible through cost, operational barriers and, in some cases, gatekeeping. The distinction between space that exists and space that is accessible runs through every finding in this report.

The Venue Closure Context

Over the past 15 years, Luton has lost a significant number of cultural and night-time economy venues across both independent and commercial nightlife, with no meaningful replacement.

Large-scale commercial venues lost include Liquid & Envy, Chicago Rock Café, Chicagos and Amigos. Mid-scale and alternative venues lost include Edge nightclub (96-98 Park Street, closed August 2020, now subject to residential conversion application), Exchange and The Heights. Informal and community-centred venues lost include The Parrot and The Hibbert Arms.

Alongside commercial closures, the town has also lost key grassroots cultural infrastructure: 33 Arts Centre, a community arts space with print shop, video and music studios that was central to the town's grassroots cultural life; The Five-O Club on Dunstable Road, an Afro-Caribbean social club with a late licence and a history of Jamaican sound systems, which was demolished; and Little Red Creative Studios, a purpose-built arts centre on George Street that opened in April 2018 to provide rehearsal, performance and studio space for artists across disciplines, and closed in November 2022 when its lease ran out and its sole operator could not sustain the financial burden alone. The network of independent pubs that provided most of the town's informal cultural infrastructure has contracted substantially over the same period.

Production infrastructure has also gone: Hat Factory's soundproofed rehearsal rooms were removed, and a significant recording studio has closed.

These venues collectively supported different parts of the ecosystem: large-scale commercial nightlife that generated consistent footfall and late-night economic activity; mid-scale and alternative venues that served specific musical and cultural communities; informal and community-led spaces that sustained grassroots social life; and dedicated cultural and production infrastructure that enabled artist development, rehearsal, recording and performance.

The cumulative effect is not a single closure but the removal of an interconnected system of spaces that sustained regular night-time activity, artist development, audience formation and social habits. This is directly reflected in the consultation data: 65% of practitioners linked the absence of viable night-time venues directly to the loss of scene and audience, and 8 of 26 practitioners are now developing their work outside Luton entirely.

The Creative Economy: Emerging or Contracting?

The council's economic growth strategy identifies nine core sectors for inward investment: Aviation, Creative, Digital, Logistics, Construction, Manufacturing, Sports and Health, Professional Services. Creative industries are positioned within this framework as an emerging sector.

The evidence gathered for this study presents a more complex picture. Nesta's research from 2015 to 2016 identified Luton as having 5,058 creative businesses, ranking third in the UK for new creative business growth at that time, behind only London and Manchester. Luton's creative sector was not emerging in 2016. It was one of the fastest growing in the country. What the evidence gathered for this study documents is what happened next: ten or more venues and cultural spaces lost, soundproofing removed from the town's primary cultural venue, a dedicated arts centre closing due to unsustainable sole-operator burden, grassroots practitioners leaving, and 8 of 26 practitioners consulted for this study now working outside the town. The Nesta data, the venue closure record, the DCMS 9.4% national contraction in creative businesses between 2019 and 2025, and the practitioner testimony gathered here converge on the same interpretation: this is not a nascent sector. It is a contracting one.

Framing the creative sector as emerging when the evidence indicates contraction from a previously stronger position shapes the scale and urgency of investment response. If it is seen as a sector that had genuine economic weight, has contracted due to identifiable and addressable causes, and retains significant latent capacity, the appropriate response is more immediate, more substantial, and more focused on removing specific barriers rather than building from nothing. The evidence in this study supports the latter interpretation.

National Context: UK Night-Time Economy Contraction

Luton's contraction did not occur in isolation. The Night Time Industries Association and NielsenIQ's Night Time Economy Market Monitor reported in February 2026 that late-night venue numbers were 28.2%

smaller than in March 2020, with independently run late-night sites down 30.6% over the same period. The NTIA estimates the UK night-time economy has lost approximately £95 billion in revenue since 2019. DCMS reported in 2025 that the number of creative industries businesses decreased 9.4% between March 2019 and March 2025. The NTIA has documented that more than a quarter of UK towns and cities that had a nightclub in 2020 now have none.

Mid-sized towns with thinner demand and fewer operators are especially exposed to ecosystem thinning: fewer venues open late means fewer reasons for audiences to stay out, which reduces footfall for remaining venues, accelerating further closures. These conditions bear directly on the viability assumptions for The Stage and the wider night-time economy strategy.

Three Perspectives on Culture and Economy

The consultation data reflects three distinct ways of understanding the relationship between culture and economic development in Luton. Each is represented in what practitioners and facilitators told us. Understanding these perspectives matters because they lead to different conclusions about what investment is needed and who it should serve.

The Creative Economy Perspective: Dominant in council strategy documents and the Luton 2040 vision, this view positions culture as a driver of economic growth and inward investment. The Stage, Power Court, Universal Studios and airport expansion are framed within this logic. The evidence gathered for this study indicates that large-scale capital investment has to date been less accessible to grassroots practitioners and community-led organisations than to anchor institutions and commercial operators.

Culture as Public Good: This perspective treats culture as something that belongs to everyone, a commons rather than a market. It underpins arguments for subsidised rehearsal space and community access to venues. Several participants described culture as a right. This view is most clearly present in Revoluton Arts' delivery model, which commissions local artists, embeds in communities, and measures success by participation rather than footfall.

The Social and Solidarity Economy: This view, most powerfully expressed by practitioners from Luton's diaspora communities and grassroots music organisers, emphasises collective ownership and systemic change. It is oriented toward building cultural infrastructure that communities own and control. One practitioner described the need as creative collectivity rather than support for individual artists. Without a thriving grassroots culture, they argued, only those from certain backgrounds can become artists, which impoverishes the culture itself.

What the evidence gathered for this study makes clear is the structural divide between these perspectives in practice. Institutionally funded cultural organisations, those with ACE NPO status, Luton Rising support, or major anchor funding, operate with a degree of financial security that allows for planning, staffing, and programme development. Grassroots practitioners and community-led organisations operate in permanent survival mode: self-funded, grant-dependent, often burned out, and without the resilience structures the funded sector takes for granted. This divide is not merely financial. It shapes who gets access to space, who gets commissioned, and whose cultural knowledge gets incorporated into decision-making about the town's creative future.

"Good institutionalised culture can only happen when there's a thriving grassroots culture underneath it."

Consultation participant, Luton

Section 106, Inward Investment and the Skills Gap

The council's economic growth strategy identifies nine priority sectors for inward investment, of which creative industries is one. The other eight, aviation, digital, logistics, construction, manufacturing, sports and healthcare, and professional services, all generate significant development activity in the town. Construction alone, through the £1.7 billion investment programme, is reshaping the town centre. Section 106 planning obligations and social value frameworks attached to this development may offer a potential longer-term mechanism for considering cultural infrastructure alongside wider investment.

Comparable examples provide useful background on how these mechanisms have been used elsewhere. In Plymouth, Nudge Community Builders used Section 106 and place-based investment to bring 25% of empty buildings on Union Street back into use and support over 21 independent small businesses. In Oxford, Make Space Oxford used meanwhile lease agreements, supported by a £1.88 million Local Enterprise Partnership grant, to activate 27 vacant units and create at least 150 jobs. For Luton, these examples are illustrative rather than an expectation: the relevance of Section 106 obligations, the Community Wealth Building framework and the council's asset processes will depend on timing, existing commitments and the circumstances of future development.

Following discussion with partners during the 19 June workshop, Section 106 is presented here as one potential long-term mechanism rather than an immediate delivery recommendation. Partners noted that, given existing commitments and prioritisation, Section 106 is unlikely to generate significant additional resource for arts and culture in the short term, and that opportunities linked to major developments, including the airport, are longer-term in nature.

The consultation data and the Community Wealth Building interview conducted for this study identify a specific structural gap: the council's cultural team does not currently have the commercial and investment activation skills needed to leverage the development activity happening around it. Creativity is treated as isolated from the inward investment agenda, overlooked in procurement decisions, and addressed as an afterthought rather than as a contributor to the conditions that make major development viable. The forward pipeline of council commissions, the derelict building register, the community asset transfer register, and the spatial occupancy monitoring tool that would allow the council to identify empty privately owned buildings. None of these currently exist. These are gaps the council has the power to close, and closing them is a prerequisite to making cultural investment systematic rather than occasional.

Chapter 1: Scope and Method

1.1 What This Study Set Out to Assess

This feasibility study addresses three questions: Is there sufficient unmet need for cultural space in Luton to justify investment? Are there viable assets and delivery routes? And under what conditions would investment be most effective?

The study does not assess individual venue development proposals and does not constitute a business plan for any specific site. It provides the evidence base from which more detailed feasibility work on specific interventions can proceed.

1.2 Evidence Sources

Direct consultation: 26 creative practitioners and 13 cultural facilitators across 18 disciplines. Evidence was gathered through direct outreach, individual interviews and facilitated conversations, and an online survey. The team attended one Hat District networking session as an additional invitation route; this did not produce direct evidence for the study. No discipline-focused or practitioner-forum group sessions took place. Direct engagement drew on contacts across existing community infrastructure including TOKKO, Jamrock Studios, Luton Irish Forum, Luton BID, Barnfield College, Chiltern Academy, Luton Sixth Form College, and faith and neighbourhood networks across Biscot, Bury Park, Marsh Farm, Lewsey and Leagrave.

Spatial mapping: 57 cultural venues and potential sites across LU1 to LU4, including existing facilities, vacant council-owned sites, and development opportunity sites.

Strategic review: The Town Centre Delivery Plan 2025-2030, the Economic Growth Strategy 2025-2032, the Luton 2040 vision, the Culture Trust Business Plan 2024-2028, The Stage Levelling Up Fund bid, the Town Centre Masterplan, the Revoluton Arts Creative People and Places Phase One documentation, the University of Bedfordshire Community Engagement Strategy 2026-2030, the Tangled Feet organisational documentation, the Luton Arts Needs Analysis (Variable Matter, April 2025), the Scrutiny Night-Time Economy Task and Finish Group minutes and consultation data (December 2024 to August 2025), and the Arts and Culture Ecology Needs Report 2023.

What the Key Strategic Documents Tell Us

Three of these documents are directly relevant to the findings of this study and their relationship to each other defines the gap this report addresses.

The University of Bedfordshire Community Engagement Strategy (2026-2030) positions the university as a civic anchor institution working through partnership and co-design, with a focus on inclusive growth, skills, employment and health. Its delivery model centres on student placements, applied research and institutional partnerships. The strategy is built around working with communities rather than on their behalf. Critically, it does not position the university as a provider of physical cultural infrastructure. Community access to university facilities remains constrained to specific partnership arrangements. The document represents a genuine institutional commitment to place-based impact but does not close the gap in affordable, accessible creative space.

The Revoluton Arts Creative People and Places Phase One documentation records 109,066 engagements, 45% non-white participation, hyper-local residencies across Bury Park and Marsh Farm, and 38 commissions of Luton artists. It is the strongest evidence base in the town for what effective

community cultural provision looks like when it is properly resourced and community-led. Its limitation, which the programme itself acknowledges, is that it is event-based and temporary. It generates engagement and demonstrates demand, but it is not tied to permanent infrastructure. It cannot substitute for the sustained spaces and venues that grassroots practitioners need year-round.

The Culture Trust Business Plan (2024-2028) sets out a strategy for financial sustainability and income diversification across Hat Factory Arts Centre, Hat District creative workspaces, Wardown Museum and Stockwood Discovery Centre, serving 250,000+ annual visits. Its strategic priorities include audience growth, repeat engagement, and development of the Hat District creative industry cluster. The plan is frank about the tension between increasing commercial pressure and public access. It is not, and does not claim to be, a plan for replacing the grassroots and night-time ecology that has been lost. Its infrastructure is concentrated in a small number of town-centre sites. The community it serves most reliably is not the same community whose needs are documented in this study.

These three documents, taken together, tell a coherent story: the university commits to place-based civic partnership but not cultural infrastructure; Revoluton Arts demonstrates that demand and engagement exist but without permanent space to anchor them; and Culture Trust holds the town's primary funded cultural assets under increasing commercial pressure. The gap between these three positions and the grassroots practitioner evidence in this study is not a failure of any individual organisation. It is a structural gap in how Luton's cultural ecosystem has been resourced and governed.

1.3 Limitations

The consultation evidence is qualitative and mixed-method. Participant affiliations were not comprehensively recorded. Nine participants came via Luton Arts. The findings should therefore be read as evidence from the practitioners consulted rather than as representative of the membership of any wider network.

18 of the 26 practitioners consulted were not connected to a formal cultural network in the town and were reached through direct, sustained outreach. Many described difficulty finding information about funding, space access and opportunities for collective action. These accounts show that existing information and connection routes were not reaching everyone in this sample; they do not provide a basis for assessing the effectiveness or reach of any individual organisation or network.

Throughout this report, consultation findings are presented as what participants described and reported, not as definitive statements about the sector as a whole. Where the study draws broader conclusions, these are framed as patterns indicated by the evidence rather than settled facts.

1.4 What This Study Can and Cannot Conclude

This study can identify: the nature and scale of unmet need as reported by practitioners; the assets available for activation; the conditions under which investment is most likely to succeed; and the delivery risks that need to be managed.

This study cannot determine: the precise scale of demand across the full practitioner population; the financial viability of specific sites without detailed cost modelling; or the appropriate governance structure for any specific fund or organisation without further stakeholder co-design.

Chapter 2: The Current Cultural Space Landscape

2.1 What Exists

Spatial mapping identified 36 existing cultural facilities across Luton. The full inventory of active spaces is set out below. Cultural provision is disproportionately concentrated in the town centre, LU1 and LU2. Residents in LU3 and LU4 face significant travel barriers to existing provision.

The spatial distribution of mapped venues is presented in Figures 1 and 2 below. Figure 1 shows all mapped cultural venues and potential sites by type and status. Figure 2 presents the same data as a density heat map, illustrating the concentration of provision in the town centre and the relative absence of provision across LU3 and LU4.

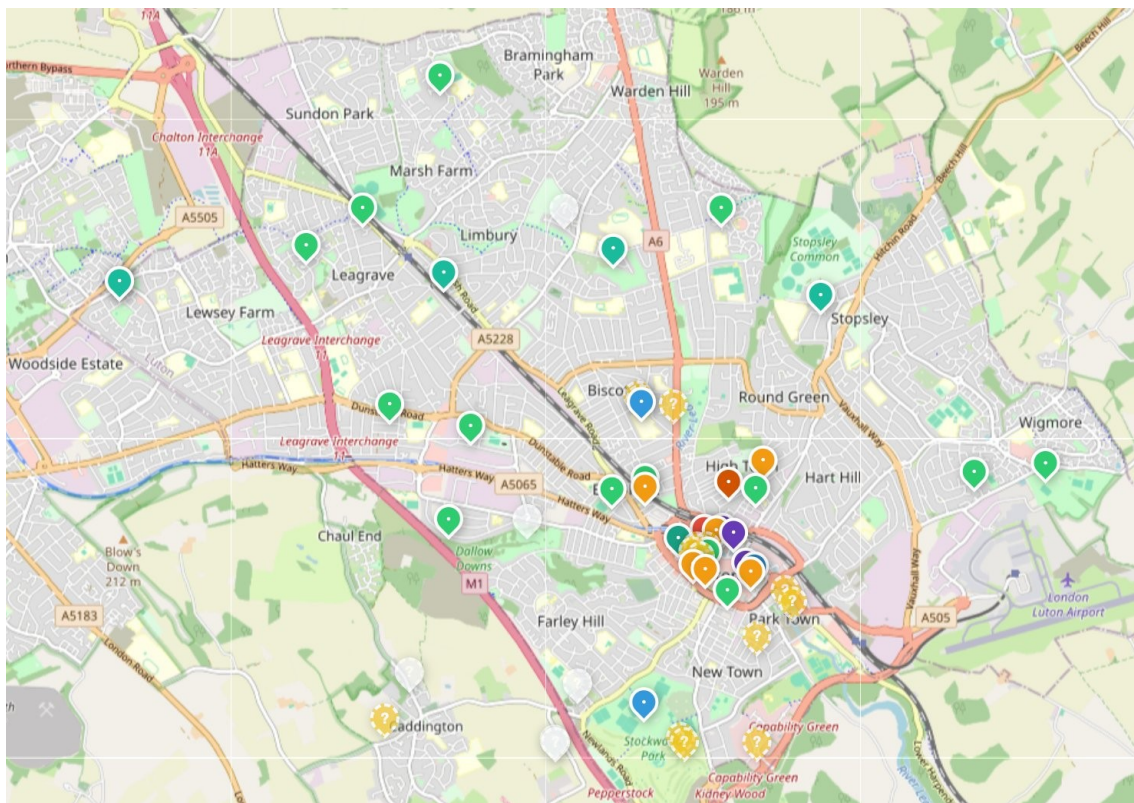


Figure 1: Spatial distribution of mapped cultural venues and potential sites across Luton. Each colour represents a different venue type or status category.

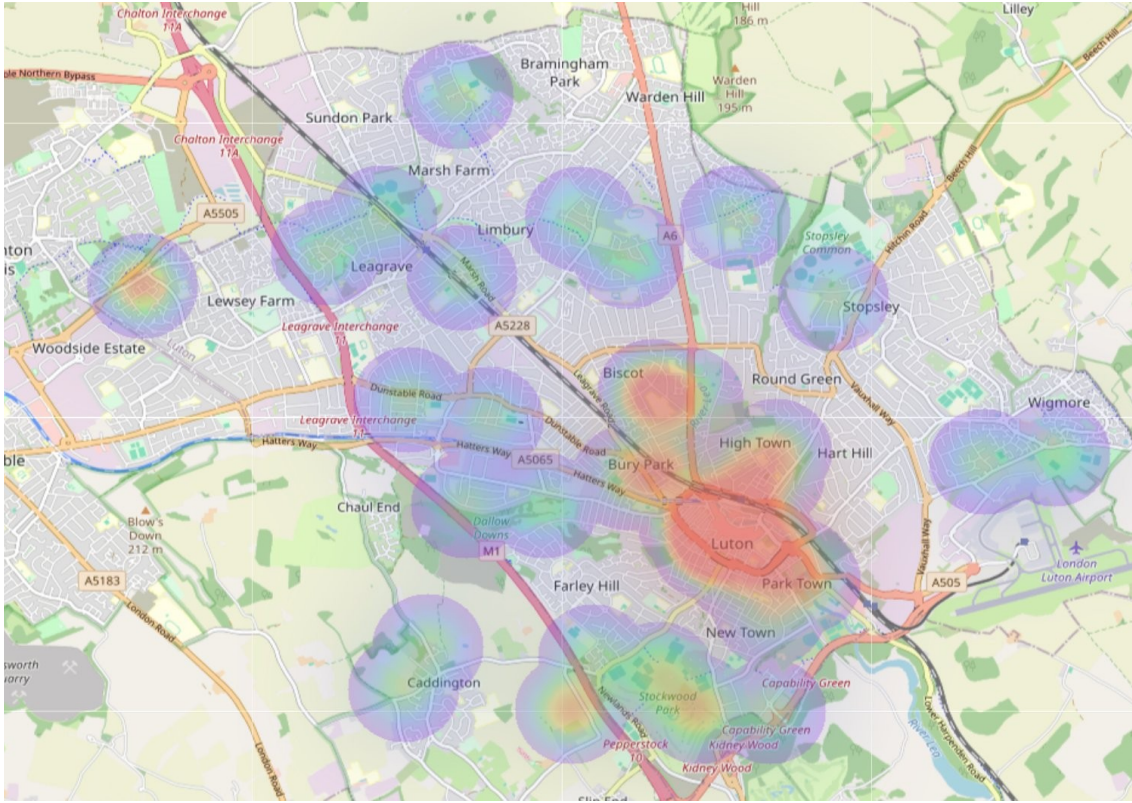


Figure 2: Heat map of cultural provision density across Luton. Red/orange indicates high concentration. The stark contrast between the town-centre cluster and the rest of the borough reflects the access gap documented throughout this study.

The heat map makes visible what the consultation data describes in testimony: cultural provision in Luton is disproportionately concentrated in a small area of the town centre. The communities of Marsh Farm, Leagrave, Lewsey Farm, Stopsley, Wigmore and the western wards have scattered community provision but no mid-scale or specialist cultural infrastructure. For practitioners based in these areas, access requires travel, a barrier that is meaningful for early-career creatives and young people.

Venue	Type / Capacity	Primary Offer
Hat Factory Arts Centre, 65-67 Bute Street	Cultural centre / 200	Theatre, performance, gallery, events, basement rehearsal space (£5/hr, standard hours only)
Hat Studios (Hat Works), 47 Guildford St	Artist studios / 50	Creative workspace, studio hire
Wardown House Museum, Wardown Park	Museum / 100	Heritage exhibitions, historic house
Stockwood Discovery Centre, London Rd	Museum / 80	Historical exhibitions, gardens, education
Luton Library Theatre, St George's Square	Theatre / 238	Theatre, dance, community performance
Luton Central Library, St George's Square	Library / 150	Reading groups, community events, meeting space
University of Bedfordshire, Judith Blake Theatre	Education / 300	Theatre, lectures, primarily student and contracted hirers
Metro Bar & Kitchen (UoB SU), Sandy Salisbury Rd	Music venue / 200	Live music, events, programming shifted to free events as commercial model unviable

Venue	Type / Capacity	Primary Offer
UK Centre for Carnival Arts, 97-99 Wellington St	Cultural centre / 100	Carnival arts, workshops, apprenticeship programme
Marsh Farm Outreach & Revoluton, Bramingham Rd	Community / 80	Youth projects, community programmes, CPP delivery
TOKKO Youth Hub, 12-14 Chapel St	Youth centre / 60	Youth services, training, model shifted toward paid membership
Luton Irish Forum, 102 Hitchin Rd	Community / 100	Cultural activities, community events, GRT community work
The Castle (Castle Tavern), 1 Castle St	Music venue / 100	Live music, rock/metal/alternative, grassroots bands, small festivals
The Bear Club, Mill Yard, 24A Guildford St	Music venue / 120	Jazz, blues, broad programming, currently operating
Off The Wall, 6-8 Park Street	Music venue / 80	Live music, sports events
The Bricklayers Arms, High Town Road	Music venue / 70	Live music, entertainment
The Hightown Club, 25 Oxen Road	Music venue / 200	Dance music, clubbing
Bury Park Community Centre, 161 Dunstable Road	Community / 100	Cultural events, community programmes
High Town Community Sports & Arts Centre	Community / 150	Sports, arts, community events
Wigmore Hall, 66 Eaton Green Road	Community / 120	Community events, hall hire
Inspire All Community Centre, New Bedford Road	Community / 120	Community activities, events
Hockwell Ring Community Centre, Mayne Ave	Community / 70	Community meetings, events
Lewsey Community Centre, Landrace Road	Community / 100	Community events, library services
Farley Community Centre, Delphine Close	Community / 90	Community events, hall hire
Chaul End Community Centre, 515 Dunstable Rd	Community / 80	Community events, health services
Bushmead Community Centre, 19 Hancock Drive	Community / 100	Community programmes, events
Raynham Way Community Centre	Community / 90	Community events, hall hire
Icknield Pavilion (Limbury Community Centre)	Community / 80	Community events, recreation
Bandstand (Parks)	Outdoor / variable	Active live music programme throughout the year
Leagrave Library, 124 Marsh Road	Library / 60	Reading programmes, community events
Stopsley Library, 592 Hitchin Road	Library / 65	Reading programmes, community events

Venue	Type / Capacity	Primary Offer
Lea Manor Library, Northwell Drive	Library / 70	Reading programmes, community events
Lewsey Library, Landrace Road	Library / 70	Reading programmes, community events
Active Luton Dance Studio, Upper George Street	Studio / 40	Dance, fitness
Brown Books Community Bookshop, High Town Road	Bookshop / 30	Literary events, book sales

The town's cultural assets are more substantial than many consultation participants recognised. The gap between what exists and what practitioners experience as accessible is a recurring theme across the evidence and is examined in detail in Chapter 3.

2.2 Major Space Types

Publicly accessible subsidised spaces: Culture Trust manages the only publicly accessible, subsidised spaces in Luton. Hat Factory Arts Centre provides performance space, gallery, events and basement rehearsal at £5 per hour. Hat Studios at Hat Works provides creative workspace and studio hire. This rate is only available within standard working hours, which does not match the times at which the majority of grassroots practitioners need access. Culture Trust also manages Wardown House Museum and Stockwood Discovery Centre.

Independent music venues: The Castle and The Bear Club are actively delivering cultural activity without structural support. The Castle has a strong identity in alternative music and a loyal cross-generational audience. The Bear Club covers broad programming across jazz, blues and independent music. Off The Wall and The Bricklayers Arms in High Town and The Hightown Club also provide informal live music infrastructure.

Education and university facilities: The University of Bedfordshire holds the Judith Blake Theatre (300-capacity) and recording studios, primarily serving students and contracted hirers. The SU Metro Bar operates a 200-capacity venue whose programming has shifted toward free events as commercial models have become financially unviable. These facilities are not consistently available for wider community cultural use. Luton Library Theatre at St George's Square is a 238-capacity professionally managed public theatre.

Community centres and parks: The Parks department coordinates community events with public liability insurance and risk assessment support. The Bandstand has an active live music programme. Sports pavilions are vacant Monday to Friday. Luton has an extensive network of community centres across LU1 to LU4, though many are oriented toward service delivery rather than creative practice.

Libraries: Luton's library network represents the most distributed publicly accessible infrastructure in the town. Several already host community cultural activity and are significantly underexplored as anchors for neighbourhood creative provision.

2.3 Current Access Conditions

Consultation responses indicate that the primary barriers to using existing provision are operational rather than structural. Participants consistently described: unclear or unpublished pricing structures; slow or

opaque booking processes; inconsistent communication; opening hours that do not match grassroots practice patterns; and a perception that commercial bookings take consistent priority over cultural activity.

Hat Factory was named in the challenge data of 10 of 26 practitioners. This indicates that the gap between its stated provision and the operational experience of practitioners attempting to use it is a documented pattern that warrants attention. Culture Trust has acknowledged that engagement with grassroots practitioners has been limited and is introducing a CRM system to improve the booking process. Progress on this will need to be publicly reported to rebuild practitioner confidence.

The barriers operate at two levels. The underlying problems, unpublished pricing, slow or opaque booking, restricted hours and inconsistent communication, are system-wide, recurring across venues rather than sitting with any single operator. Where one venue recurs in the evidence, most notably Hat Factory, named in the challenges of 10 of 26 practitioners, that reflects the concentration of demand on the town's principal accessible venue as much as any fault specific to it. Fixing operating systems across the board will therefore achieve more than focusing on a single site.

2.4 What Is Missing

The gap between what exists and what practitioners need is not primarily a question of buildings. It is a question of the right kind of space, in the right places, at the right price, with the right hours and the right operating quality. The consultation data identifies the following as the most significant and consistently documented absences:

Flexible multi-disciplinary production and making space: No venue in Luton can accommodate carnival fabrication, large-scale build, scenery construction, materials research and messy making at scale. This is not a failure of one venue, it is an absence from the entire provision map. Every practitioner who works at scale, across disciplines including carnival arts, visual art, theatre production and community fabrication, currently has to travel outside Luton or not do the work at all. The Housing Depot at Birdsfoot Lane and Portland Industrial Units have been identified through spatial mapping as the most viable sites for this type of provision, but these have not been validated with council asset teams. That validation is the immediate next step, and the absence of a live conversation between the cultural sector and council asset management is itself a finding.

Soundproofed multi-room rehearsal provision: Hat Factory has become a central node in Luton's music ecology through necessity rather than design. Its importance is acknowledged across the consultation data. However, its soundproofing cannot accommodate multiple simultaneous room uses, a single session in one part of the building prevents others from using adjacent spaces. Effective capacity is therefore a fraction of what the building nominally contains. For Luton to develop a functioning music pipeline, from rehearsal to performance to recording, it needs provision that does not require practitioners to coordinate around each other's sessions. The Culture Trust Business Plan 2024-2028 acknowledges financial pressures on the Hat District estate but does not contain a plan for addressing this infrastructure gap.

Photography, digital studio, gaming and streaming infrastructure: Practitioners currently travel to Bedford to access photography studio facilities. Gaming and streaming infrastructure is entirely absent from Luton's cultural provision. This represents a growing and under-served community of digital creatives whose practice is invisible in standard cultural mapping and unserved by any current venue or programme.

Youth creative infrastructure: No existing youth-facing space was described by participants as fully meeting the identified need. TOKKO was described as having shifted away from youth cultural activity toward NHS and DWP service delivery. Participants described Marsh House as not currently suited to sustained creative practice. The most requested provision was outdoor green

space with shelter and toilets: simple infrastructure that participants said is currently absent. Revoluton Arts' Phase One documentation demonstrates that young people engage strongly with well-designed community cultural programming; the gap is in the permanent infrastructure that would sustain that engagement between events.

Neighbourhood provision in LU3 and LU4: The concentration of cultural provision in the town centre means that participation requires travel, a meaningful barrier for early-career practitioners, young people and those without regular transport access. Community centres in LU3 and LU4 exist but are not resourced as cultural infrastructure. Libraries are the most distributed publicly accessible infrastructure in the borough and are significantly underexplored as anchors for neighbourhood creative provision. The University of Bedfordshire's Community Engagement Strategy 2026-2030 identifies skills and social mobility as core priorities, but its delivery model does not extend to providing or funding neighbourhood cultural spaces.

A functioning stepping-stone live music venue: There is no mid-scale venue between grassroots pub performance and Hat Factory's main space. This missing step breaks the talent pipeline. Artists have nowhere to develop their live practice and build audiences before they are ready for or can access a 200-capacity venue. The closure of Edge, Exchange and The Heights removed the venues that served this function. Nothing has replaced them.

Chapter 3: What We Heard from Practitioners and Facilitators

This chapter presents the evidence gathered through consultation, organised by theme. All findings are reported as participant testimony unless otherwise stated. Quantification is provided where available.

3.1 Access and Affordability

20 of 26 practitioners cited cost, unclear pricing or inaccessible rates as a challenge. The tension described is not simply that spaces are expensive, but that the financial model of existing provision does not match the earning capacity of grassroots practitioners. Of those practitioners who specified their income from creative work in Luton, the majority reported annual earnings of between £0 and £5,000, below minimum wage for creative practice in the town.

Participants described a structural mismatch: community rates exist in several venues but are either not published, not consistently applied, or subject to conditions that make them effectively inaccessible. Practitioners with funded project budgets described being unable to access venues on the terms required to deliver their projects, not because funding was unavailable, but because the venues could not respond in time or could not accommodate the specific requirements. The economic consequence of this pattern is documented in Finding 9 and the Economic Cost projection section.

A recurring theme was practitioners discovering rates only after extended negotiation, or finding that published community rates applied only at times incompatible with their work. Several described giving up on Luton venues entirely and taking funded projects to towns with more accessible infrastructure.

A real tension runs through this. Publicly supported venues carry income targets, and affordable community access competes directly with more lucrative commercial hire. Any pricing or access framework has to hold both at once, protecting cultural use while recognising the operating reality venues face. Naming that tension openly is more useful than treating affordability and viability as if they did not pull against each other.

“Plans are being made for the people of Luton without the people of Luton being consulted.”
Consultation participant, Luton

3.2 Booking and Communication

11 of 26 practitioners documented specific experiences of response delays, undisclosed contacts, and unexplained cancellations. Response times of six months or more were described by multiple participants. The consistent pattern across multiple venues and multiple practitioners indicates a systemic issue with booking infrastructure rather than isolated incidents.

Practitioners described arriving at spaces to find their session cancelled without notice. Others described being told a contact person would respond, then waiting weeks before following up to find the contact had changed. Several described the experience of navigating the booking system as more time-consuming than the actual creative work it was meant to support.

The consultation evidence indicates that improving booking infrastructure and communication systems across existing venues is a high-return, low-cost intervention. Practitioners are not asking for new buildings. They are asking for venues to respond to their emails.

Illustrative cases (anonymised). These short cases come from the consultation evidence, with individuals and, where sensitive, venues left unidentified.

A funded event relocated. A practitioner with a funded event encountered operational failure at a Luton venue, moved the event to a non-traditional venue, and grew attendance from 180 to 400. The work

succeeded, but not in the venue or on the terms intended, and the practitioner did not return to the original venue.

Six months for a reply. A music practitioner with extensive experience of the town's venues described booking response times of six months or more, with some enquiries going unanswered. Funded project time was absorbed in chasing responses rather than in delivery.

A session blocked on arrival. A dance practitioner arrived to teach a booked session to find young people unable to access the studio, having previously worked around six-week term-time booking windows and inconsistent practice across venues.

3.3 Youth Provision

No existing youth creative space was described by participants as fully meeting the identified need. TOKKO was described as having shifted its model toward a paid membership structure and prioritising NHS and DWP bookings over youth creative activity. Fees were described as unclear and the communication process as fragmented. Participants described Marsh House as cold, not currently suited to sustained creative practice, and containing a bar they considered inappropriate for youth use.

The most consistently requested missing provision for young people was outdoor green space with shelter and toilets, not a building, not a programme, but a place where young people can be present without being managed. Practitioners working with young people described a pattern in which spaces designed for youth use had shifted toward commercially oriented models that excluded the communities they were originally designed to serve.

Asked what they wanted, young people and youth practitioners were specific. On space, they described somewhere safe to gather, safeguarded but not heavily supervised, with no bar on the premises and no adult programming taking priority. On facilities, they wanted music, dance and digital provision, alongside the most requested item of all, outdoor green space with shelter and toilets. On access, what mattered was no membership fee, hours that suit young people, and locations reachable without a car.

The consultation evidence is clear that effective youth provision requires co-design with young people from the outset, not retrofit of existing spaces or adaptation of adult-oriented provision.

3.4 Rehearsal, Making and Recording Gaps

Flexible multi-disciplinary creative space of the kind typically found in warehouse or industrial buildings was the single most consistently identified gap, named independently across all disciplines. This includes space for carnival fabrication, large-scale build, scenery construction, materials research and messy making. It does not exist in Luton's current cultural provision. Carnival artists described having to transport fabrication work out of Luton to spaces in other towns. Theatre companies described building sets in domestic spaces and transporting them to venues. The absence of this infrastructure is not a minor inconvenience. It is a constraint on what can be made and who can make it.

Soundproofed rehearsal space accessible outside standard working hours was the second most frequently identified gap. Several practitioners described travelling to Bedford, Milton Keynes or London to access studios that do not exist locally. This represents both a direct cost and a loss of time and economic activity from Luton. The musicians paying to rehearse in Bedford are spending money in Bedford, building relationships in Bedford, and over time, developing their practice in Bedford.

3.5 Geography and Neighbourhood Access

Existing provision is concentrated in LU1 and LU2. Participants from LU3 and LU4 described significant travel barriers, not just in cost or time, but in the experience of travelling to a town centre that does not feel welcoming or relevant to their creative practice. Several described the town centre as somewhere they visit for specific reasons, not somewhere they habitually spend time.

Neighbourhood-level provision was identified as a priority, particularly for early-career practitioners and young people for whom travel to the town centre represents a meaningful barrier. Libraries were identified by multiple participants as underused anchors for neighbourhood creative provision, trusted, distributed, and already present in communities.

3.6 Trust and Engagement

35% of practitioners named over-consultation as a specific challenge. Multiple participants referenced consultations dating back to 2012 in which their input did not produce visible change. Several described having made a deliberate decision not to invest further time in consultation processes. This is not apathy. It is a rational response to a system that has repeatedly taken evidence and done nothing with it.

18 of 26 practitioners were not connected to a formal cultural network in the town. Many described difficulty finding funding opportunities, accessing spaces and knowing what other practitioners were doing. This indicates a need to make information and connection routes easier to navigate for the practitioners reached by the study, without drawing conclusions about the effectiveness or representativeness of any individual network.

Consultation fatigue needs defining precisely, because the term can otherwise be read too loosely. It describes something specific and evidenced: practitioners have been consulted repeatedly, in some cases since 2012, have seen little change follow, and have made a considered decision to withhold further time. It is not disengagement from their practice, nor generalised cynicism. It is an understandable response to consultation without visible follow-through, and it matters because it is reversible: it answers to visible delivery, not to more consultation.

This is a delivery risk for any new investment intervention. The consultation evidence indicates that community engagement alone will not generate participation unless it is preceded by visible action on existing evidence.

"It feels like Groundhog Day, repeated consultation without sustained structural change."
Cultural facilitator, Luton

Chapter 4: Strategic Analysis

4.1 Where Current Provision Is Misaligned with Need

The evidence gathered in this study identifies a consistent gap between what provision exists and what practitioners experience as accessible. This gap is primarily operational. The infrastructure exists to a greater degree than many practitioners recognise, but operating systems, pricing structures, communication and opening hours create effective barriers.

This has a practical implication for investment sequencing: improving the operational quality and accessibility of existing provision may produce faster and more cost-effective outcomes than creating new space. New space developed on the same operating model as existing provision is likely to reproduce existing barriers.

The priorities are deliberately ordered. The immediate emphasis falls on access and coordination, improving how existing provision works and how the system is navigated, because these are lower-cost and quicker to deliver. That does not displace the evidenced conclusion that flexible making space is the primary infrastructure gap; it sequences it. Access and coordination come first in time, but new flexible making space remains the principal longer-term infrastructure need.

4.2 Where Policy and Investment Connect and Do Not Connect

Luton's strategic documents reflect genuine and substantial investment ambition. The Town Centre Delivery Plan, the Economic Growth Strategy 2025-2032, and the Luton 2040 vision together constitute a coherent direction for the town's future, with the creative industries formally named as one of nine priority growth sectors.

The gap this study identifies is not in the ambition of those strategies but in the evidence base and operational planning that would allow grassroots cultural infrastructure to connect to them. The Economic Growth Strategy's creative industries action area notes that relevant funding is yet to be identified. The Town Centre Delivery Plan's own entry for The Stage development notes that the performance and food and beverage elements still need to be scoped. This study's evidence base is the baseline that these strategies currently lack.

The Luton 2040 vision does not name culture as a standalone strategic priority. Culture appears instrumentally, as a contributor to inclusion, wellbeing and economic growth. The consequence is that grassroots cultural infrastructure has no dedicated policy home in the current framework: it sits across multiple strategies, is fully funded by none of them, and has no named accountability mechanism for monitoring the sector's health.

The nine-sector inward investment framework creates a structural risk specific to the creative industries. Aviation, construction, logistics and professional services all generate visible, measurable economic activity, planning consents, employment figures, commercial rateable values. The creative sector, particularly at grassroots level, is largely invisible in standard economic data. Freelancers, community cultural organisers and micro-enterprises do not appear in business rate data or company registrations. The result is a sector that is formally named as a growth priority but whose trajectory, capacity and needs are not systematically tracked.

More specifically, the construction and development activity underway in Luton through the £1.7 billion investment programme creates an opportunity to consider how cultural infrastructure might connect with wider investment over time. Section 106 obligations and social value frameworks attached to major developments are potential longer-term levers, subject to existing commitments, statutory requirements

and realistic timescales. The Community Wealth Building interview conducted for this study identified practical areas for development: improving smaller cultural organisations' visibility of the forward pipeline of council commissions, exploring a community asset transfer register, and strengthening the capacity needed to connect development investment with cultural infrastructure.

4.3 Three Parallel Processes, No Shared Framework

Between December 2024 and April 2025, three substantial bodies of commissioned work examining Luton's cultural and night-time infrastructure were in progress simultaneously. The Scrutiny Night-Time Economy Task and Finish Group was gathering evidence for a review directly requested by the Executive Lead for Inclusive Economy, with Corey Albone as Interim Head of Culture and Creativity as the lead officer. The Luton Arts Needs Analysis, commissioned under the ACE-funded Place Partnerships Programme and conducted by Variable Matter, was completing stakeholder interviews, a survey of 71 local artists and creatives, and two consultation workshops. This feasibility study was undertaking consultation with 26 practitioners and 13 facilitators across 18 disciplines. All three processes are drawn on in this report. None of the three were formally connected to each other during their concurrent operation. None shared data, evidence or emerging findings. None produced a mechanism linking its conclusions to the investment levers available to the council.

This section draws directly on the minutes and consultation data from the NTE Task and Finish Group and on the published findings of the Luton Arts Needs Analysis to establish what the evidence base, taken together, now shows.

What the Night-Time Economy Process Found

The NTE Task and Finish Group's August 2025 consultation produced 1,004 responses, the highest number from any online survey the council had conducted. The headline findings are not ambiguous.

Residents said (August 2025)		
86.4% rated the NTE as poor or very poor	53% never visit the town centre after 6pm	78.6% feel unsafe after 6pm
Limited entertainment options: top barrier (34%)	Live music most requested improvement (746 responses)	Only 8.1% want nightclubs, not the gap that needs filling

The Nighttime Industries Association representative who addressed the group in July 2025 identified three levers that move the needle in comparable towns: a Nighttime Commission model (a collective governance body of businesses, councillors, police and BIDs rather than a single council officer); business rates relief targeted at cultural venues; and rigorous data tracking of footfall, spend, business growth, transport use and student numbers. The Leeds visit in the same month documented a council that had committed £12 million to underground event infrastructure, employed a dedicated events team of eight staff, pedestrianised the cultural quarter, and built its visitor economy explicitly around a curated live music and food offer. None of these structural interventions, the governance model, the capital commitment, the dedicated resourcing, appear in the NTE Task and Finish Group's documented responses or emerging recommendations. The documented response from the council's cultural lead throughout focused on marketing coordination, digital content, the Step Forward Luton app, and the events programme. These are not wrong responses. They are insufficient responses to findings of this scale.

What the Luton Arts Needs Analysis Found

The Variable Matter Needs Analysis, published April 2025 and funded through the ACE Place Partnerships Programme, provides a data layer this study does not replicate. Its key figures:

Indicator	Luton	Comparator
Luton creative/cultural sector employment	1.54% of employees	5.05% (England average)
Luton creative/cultural businesses	5.84% of total businesses	9.3% (England average)
Arts attendance in person	82.88%	90.42% (England average)
ACE funding per head (2023/24)	£8.63	Below England average
Total creative/cultural businesses in Luton	525 out of 9,030	,

The Needs Analysis stakeholder interviews identified the following, directly corroborating the findings of this study: a disconnect between the leadership of larger cultural organisations and freelancers and grassroots groups; culture not connected to regeneration and no tourism strategy; a disconnect between those describing lack of space and those seeking to maximise use of existing and forthcoming space; a succession of stop-start initiatives with no long-term thinking; over-consultation and recycling of conversations over a long period; and a Local Cultural Education Partnership that is not operating. Its survey found that 40% of respondents identified access to space as their top resource need, and the average grant request was £14,000. Recommendation 2 of the Needs Analysis states explicitly that access to space is a repeated concern and that someone should be employed to practically coordinate a space audit, a database of availability, and coordination of partner offers. That recommendation has not yet been implemented.

What the Delivery Plan Shows

The Town Centre Delivery Plan 2026-2030+ sets out the timeline and ten actions for the Station and Hat District area. Both are reproduced below from the published plan.

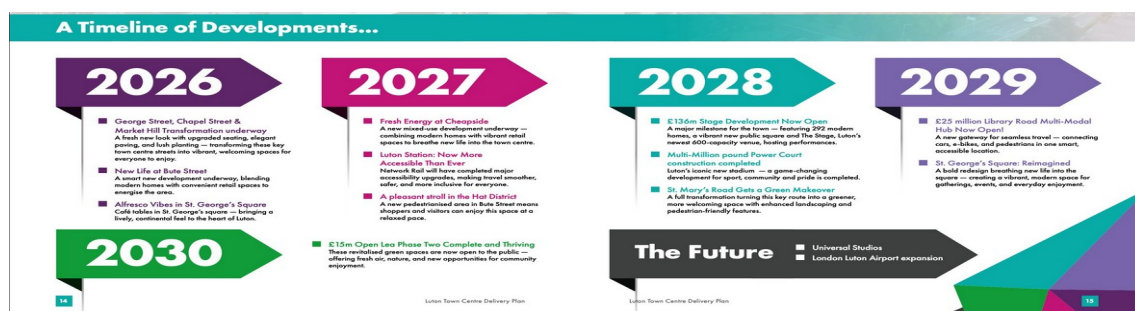


Figure 3: Town Centre Delivery Plan 2026-2030+. The Stage opens 2028. Power Court completes 2028. No grassroots cultural infrastructure appears in the timeline.

ACTIONS Station and Hat District LUTON 2040					
Action	Theme	Progress/Phase	Lead and Partners	When	Dependencies & Next Steps
1		Scheduled for delivery	Network Rail	FY 25/26	
2		Underway	Luton Point	FY 25/26	
3		Concept - Luton Council working on OBC	Luton Council, Environment Agency	1-5 years	Funding bid being submitted to the Environment Agency.
4		(a) Scheduled for delivery (b) Concept phase, (being informed by feasibility studies)	Culture Trust	FY 25/26 (a) & 1-5 years (b)	This will require building availability and affordability. The first building feasibility study is already underway. Funding has been secured for this via the Architectural Heritage Fund.
5		Concept phase	Luton Council, Culture Trust, BID and University of Bedfordshire	FY 25 / 26 (partnership formation and quick wins) & 1-5 years (delivery)	A strong partnership and funding will be needed to work with landowners and landlords.
6		Concept phase	Network Rail Luton Rising (contributing partner)	1-5 years	Network Rail funding is required for this. Luton Council has launched a public petition asking for a complete station redevelopment.
7		Scheduled for delivery	Luton Council	1-5 years	Work needs to be done to prepare for an inward investment campaign to attract a HQ or government department to base here. Work will also be done to scope out the performance and food & beverage elements that could provide opportunities for investment.
8		Concept phase	Luton Council	1-5 years	The Local Plan is currently being worked on, and will be available in 2028.
9		Concept phase	Luton Council	1-5 years	This does not
10		Designed	Foxhall Homes	1-5 years	Plan

Figure 4: Station and Hat District actions from the Town Centre Delivery Plan. Actions 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 are in concept phase. No creative sector businesses, grassroots organisations or community practitioners appear in the Lead and Partners column.

Six of the ten actions are in concept phase. No creative sector businesses, grassroots organisations, community cultural practitioners or diaspora community groups appear in the Lead and Partners column across any of the ten actions. Action 7, The Stage, notes that work still needs to be done to scope out the performance and food and beverage elements. Action 4, Hat District Plus, is in concept phase and being informed by feasibility studies, meaning this study and the Luton Arts Needs Analysis are active inputs into a planning process that has not yet engaged the sector whose needs they document.

The absence of grassroots creative partners from a plan that names culture as a priority growth sector is not incidental. It reflects the structural gap this study documents: the mechanisms that govern investment and delivery in Luton's town centre have not been designed to include the community and practitioners most affected by them. The concept phase status of six of ten actions represents a window. Those actions can still be designed with community involvement built in. That window closes as each action moves from concept to delivery.

The Convergence the Evidence Demands

Three processes, funded and commissioned separately, reaching the same conclusions at the same time, with no shared mechanism for acting on them, is itself the structural finding this section names. The night-time economy consultation shows that residents already know the problem. The Needs Analysis shows that practitioners already know the problem. This study shows that practitioners know it in specific, evidenced, quantifiable detail. The gap is not in the evidence base. It is in the institutional architecture for converting evidence into investment decisions.

The NTE Task and Finish Group's final report is due before the Executive in 2025. The Luton Arts Needs Analysis's 28 recommendations are awaiting an implementation plan. This feasibility study's findings sit alongside both. The case for a coordinating function, not another consultation, not another strategy document, but a named role or body responsible for connecting the evidence that now exists to the investment mechanisms that also now exist, is supported by all three processes simultaneously. The Nighttime Commission model proposed by the NTIA, the community governance structures recommended in this study, and the Arts and Culture Strategy Group reform recommended in the Needs Analysis are three versions of the same answer. They should be treated as one.

4.4 The Stage and the Wider Regeneration Programme

The Stage is a 600-capacity commercial performance venue at Bute Street, funded through the Levelling Up Fund, expected to open in 2027. It receives no ongoing subsidy from the council and is a commercial asset. On current public information, it is not designed to meet the grassroots infrastructure needs identified in this study. The grassroots infrastructure documented as missing, multi-use making space, adequate soundproofed rehearsal, a functioning live music pipeline, neighbourhood provision, will not be addressed by The Stage alone.

The relationship between The Stage and grassroots cultural infrastructure is better understood as complementary and sequential rather than competing. The evidence from comparable programmes consistently indicates that mid-scale cultural venues generate sustained footfall and programme quality when they sit within a functioning ecosystem of smaller venues, active practitioners, habitual audiences, and accessible spaces. The conditions required for The Stage to succeed as a cultural destination are largely the same conditions this study recommends investing in. This alignment between the commercial investment programme and the grassroots infrastructure case is a significant opportunity.

4.5 Delivery Risks

Risk 1: Consultation fatigue may suppress participation in new schemes. Consultation responses indicate that many practitioners have withdrawn from engagement with formal cultural institutions following repeated consultations that produced no visible change. Any new intervention that relies on community engagement will be more credible and more likely to secure participation if it first demonstrates action on existing evidence.

Risk 2: New provision reproduces existing barriers. If new cultural spaces are developed with the same operating model as existing provision, unclear pricing structures, restricted hours, opaque booking, they will reproduce the access barriers that currently make existing provision ineffective for grassroots practitioners.

Risk 3: Regeneration investment does not connect to grassroots use. The £1.7 billion town centre investment programme creates significant potential for cultural infrastructure development. Without an explicit mechanism, through Section 106, social value frameworks, community wealth building tools, or direct commissioning, the benefit is likely to accrue primarily to commercial operators and anchor institutions.

Risk 4: Continued talent leakage. 8 of 26 practitioners consulted are currently developing their practice or achieving their goals outside Luton. Without the infrastructure conditions that would allow them to work locally, this pattern is likely to continue. The economic and cultural cost of talent leakage is not currently captured in any Luton dataset.

Risk 5: Poor operating systems undermine existing assets. Inadequate booking systems have resulted in documented, quantifiable project investment loss, see Finding 9 for the full projection.

4.6 National Funding Context

Cultural funding in England flows primarily through Arts Council England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, local authority budgets and private philanthropy. Culture Trust Luton holds National Portfolio Organisation status with Arts Council England for 2023 to 2026. Luton Rising provides annual funding to Culture Trust as its principal funder.

The Levelling Up Fund, through which The Stage secured £20 million, has now closed to new bids. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund has partially replaced some EU structural funds. The European Institute of Innovation and Technology has recently established a new Knowledge and Innovation Community for the cultural and creative sector, with 150 million euros over six years. Social value frameworks offer a practical route for considering local cultural benefit, while Section 106 should be treated only as a longer-term possibility where the statutory tests, existing commitments and development context allow.

Community wealth building offers a practical architecture for the council's role in cultural infrastructure. Relevant levers include: land and asset use, investment and procurement policy, workforce strategy, and support for shared ownership models. None of the following currently exist in usable form in Luton: a community asset transfer register, a derelict building register, a forward pipeline of council commissions accessible to smaller organisations, or spatial occupancy monitoring of privately owned empty buildings. These are gaps the council has the power to close without external funding.

4.7 The Cultural Ecosystem: Facilitators and Their Assets

The following table maps the principal organisations in Luton's cultural ecosystem against their current roles, their assets and their relevance to the questions this study addresses.

Organisation	Current Role	Key Assets	Relevance to This Study
Luton Borough Council	Principal commissioner, landlord and strategic authority. Holds most of the town's publicly owned cultural property.	57+ mapped assets including vacant sites. Section 106 and social value levers. Economic growth strategy across 9 core sectors including creative.	The single most powerful actor in unlocking or shaping cultural space. Community wealth building tools, if deployed, could redirect procurement and commissioning toward local cultural operators.
Culture Trust Luton	National Portfolio Organisation. Manages Hat Factory, Hat House, Hat Works, Wardown House Museum and Stockwood Discovery Centre. 250,000+ visits per year.	Five sites including freehold properties. Heritage Development Trust status. ACE and Luton Rising core funding. Basement rehearsal at £5/hr.	Most-named institution in consultation data in relation to access barriers. Also has the most assets. Has acknowledged limited grassroots engagement and is introducing a CRM system. Progress needs public reporting.
Revoluton Arts	Creative People and Places programme. Community-rooted cultural engagement across Luton. Phase One: 109,066 engagements, 45% non-white participation.	Community networks. Proven model for reaching low-engagement groups. 12 local associates commissioned. Deep relationships in Bury Park and Marsh Farm.	Strongest evidence base in the town for what effective grassroots cultural provision looks like. Should inform the design of any new provision.
University of Bedfordshire	Higher education with campuses in Luton and Bedford. Community Engagement Strategy 2026-2030 in development.	Judith Blake Theatre (300-cap), recording studios, SU Metro Bar (200-cap). Most mobility-accessible spaces in Luton.	Primarily a commercial and educational entity. SU programming has shifted to free events as commercial models have become unviable. Not a reliable source of community cultural capacity without specific partnership agreements.
UK Centre for Carnival Arts	National centre for carnival arts based in Luton.	Dedicated facility including workshop and production space. Apprenticeship programme.	Named in consultation in relation to access and operational challenges. Financial risk is disproportionately carried by the organisation. Section 106 and redevelopment funding not consistently reaching grassroots drivers.
Active Luton / Parks	Sport and leisure provider. Parks department manages 8+ sports pavilions.	Pavilions vacant Mon-Fri. Wardown Bowls Pavilion used for corporate bookings. Bandstand with active live music programme.	Pavilions require adaptation for creative use. Five-step partnership pathway exists. Lewsey TARA has operated a pavilion for 10-15 years as a proven model.
Luton Libraries	Council-run library network across the borough.	Distributed neighbourhood buildings across LU1 to LU4. Community trust and existing footfall.	Most distributed publicly accessible infrastructure in the town. Several already host cultural activity. Significantly underexplored as anchors for neighbourhood creative provision.
Grassroots and independent operators	Network of promoters, music organisers, community event producers and independent venues including The Castle, The Bear Club, Off The Wall and The Bricklayers Arms.	Existing audiences, night-time economy presence, live music programming, deep community trust.	Community whose engagement will most directly determine whether any new provision succeeds. Local expertise is underutilised. Community co-design from the outset is essential.

The town's cultural assets are substantially more than its practitioners experience them to be. The gap is not primarily one of buildings or funding. It is one of access, trust, operational quality and coordination. Organisations with the most assets are described as least accessible; organisations doing the most effective community-rooted work operate with the least secure funding.

Key Findings

Nine findings drawn directly from consultation and spatial mapping. Each finding is presented with supporting evidence and an implication for investment and delivery.

Finding 1 Existing provision is experienced as inaccessible by the majority of respondents, despite a substantial mapped asset base.

36 existing cultural facilities are mapped across the town. The majority of practitioners describe these spaces as effectively inaccessible through cost, operational barriers and, in some cases, gatekeeping. Hat Factory was named in the challenges of 10 of 26 practitioners.

Implication: Improving access and operating systems may be as important as creating new space, and is lower cost.

Finding 2 Consultation responses indicate structural inequality in access to provision, with racial and class-based barriers documented by 38% of participants.

38% of practitioners named racial or class-based gatekeeping as a specific barrier. Specific examples included events for diaspora communities not receiving equivalent facilitation or resources, and a community event being declined on the grounds that it did not qualify as a cultural activity.

Implication: This creates a governance and representation risk for any new provision that does not embed diversity in its decision-making from the outset.

Finding 3 Talent leakage from Luton is documented in the consultation data, with 8 of 26 practitioners developing their practice or achieving their goals outside the town.

8 of 26 practitioners are developing their practice or achieving their goals outside Luton. One practitioner with over 20 years of active involvement in Luton's music scene now works outside the town due to the absence of viable work locally. A second moved their event outside Luton after an operational failure at a funded venue and has not returned.

The leakage concentrates in identifiable disciplines. It is clearest in music, where a practitioner with over 20 years in the local scene now works outside the town and others travel to Bedford, Milton Keynes or London to rehearse and record; in carnival and large-scale making, where fabrication is taken out of Luton for want of space; and in photography, digital, gaming and streaming, where practitioners travel to Bedford for studio access or gather in other cities altogether.

Two causes lie behind this. The first is the absence of appropriate space: no flexible making space, inadequate soundproofed rehearsal, and no photography, gaming or streaming provision. The second is operational frustration: booking failures, unanswered enquiries, and access that does not match when practitioners work. The long-standing music practitioner's departure reflects the first; the relocated funded event reflects the second. This is what unviable meant in practice: space, booking and access combined so that projects could not be delivered to funder timescales, and the administrative cost of working around the infrastructure outweighed what the work could bear.

Implication: Continued infrastructure contraction will accelerate talent loss not currently captured in any Luton economic dataset.

Finding 4 No existing youth-facing creative space was described by participants as fit for purpose.

Participants described TOKKO as having shifted toward a paid membership model and prioritising NHS and DWP bookings. They described Marsh House as not currently suited to sustained youth creative practice and noted that it contains a bar they considered inappropriate for youth use. The most requested missing provision was outdoor green space with shelter and toilets.

Implication: Youth provision requires co-design with young people from the outset, not retrofit of existing spaces.

Finding 5 Flexible multi-use, multi-disciplinary creative space is the single most consistently identified infrastructure gap, named independently across all disciplines.

Space suitable for carnival fabrication, large-scale build, rehearsal, storage and materials research does not exist in Luton's cultural provision. Named independently and consistently across disciplines.

Implication: Clear first-priority infrastructure investment with multiple potential uses and revenue streams.

Finding 6 Repeated consultation without visible follow-through has significantly reduced practitioner confidence in engaging with new initiatives.

Multiple participants referenced consultations dating back to 2012. 35% named over-consultation explicitly as a challenge. Several described having made a deliberate decision not to invest further time in consultation processes.

Implication: Any new intervention should be preceded by visible action on existing evidence rather than relying on further consultation to generate engagement.

Finding 7 None of the strategic documents reviewed for this study yet contains a specific plan for connecting the £1.7 billion investment programme to the grassroots infrastructure needs identified here.

The Stage is, on current public information, a commercial mid-scale venue not designed to address existing grassroots gaps. None of the strategic documents reviewed yet contains a specific operational plan for how this investment will benefit the practitioners and communities documented here.

Implication: Risk that the investment programme delivers commercial and anchor infrastructure without the grassroots ecosystem conditions required to sustain it.

Finding 8 Fragmentation across cultural organisations is described by participants as a significant barrier, with no shared infrastructure for data, booking, pricing structures or practitioner support.

Consultation responses indicate gaps in coordination across cultural organisations and practitioner networks, including the absence of shared infrastructure for data, booking or practitioner support. The study team was aware of the music, heritage and creative forums, but no group sessions were held through those forums during the research period; evidence was gathered through direct outreach instead. This reflects the evidence routes available to the study and should not be interpreted as an assessment of the effectiveness or representativeness of any forum or network. Facilitator evidence also suggested that participation across sector groups is not uniform, with 40 to 60% of creatives attending Culture Trust networking sessions reported as not currently engaging with other existing groups.

Implication: Addressable without significant capital investment through a coordination function and shared digital infrastructure.

Finding 9 Inadequate venue booking systems have resulted in documented, quantifiable project investment loss.

6 of 26 practitioners (23%) documented specific instances where project-funded creative activity could not be delivered in Luton due to inadequate booking systems, response failures or operational breakdown.

Implication: The economic cost of inadequate cultural infrastructure is measurable, local, and not currently captured in the economic datasets used to inform investment decisions.

The Economic Cost of Booking Failure: Direct Sample Evidence

Risk 5: Poor operating systems undermine existing assets. Documented venue access failures have resulted in project-funded creative activity that could not be delivered in Luton. The quantified scale of this is detailed in Finding 9. Addressing operating systems is low-cost relative to capital investment and would have immediate economic return.

Six of the 26 practitioners consulted reported blocked projects with a combined value of £60,000 because of operational barriers. This represents 23% of the study sample. It is direct evidence of a measurable local economic effect, but the sample is small and self-selecting and the figure should not be extrapolated to the wider creative population without representative research.

Base evidence	Rate in sample	Scope	Interpretation
£60,000 combined blocked projects reported by 6 of 26 practitioners (facilitation evidence)	23% of sample (1 in 4) experiencing blocked projects due to operational barriers	Evidence from the 26-person study sample	No wider population estimate is made

What Is Working

A complete picture of Luton's cultural landscape requires an account of what is functioning effectively as well as where gaps exist. This chapter draws directly from the data.

Community-Rooted Organisations

Revoluton Arts was named positively and consistently across the consultation, more than any other single organisation. Its Phase One delivery, 109,066 engagements, 45% non-white participation, hyper-local residencies across Bury Park and Marsh Farm, and 38 commissions of Luton artists, represents the strongest evidence base in the town for what effective cultural provision looks like. The caveat raised by one practitioner, that Revoluton is still not cutting it at the scale the town needs, points to an issue of resource and reach rather than model or intent.

Luton Irish Forum was described as genuinely working within its own community, having grown from 3 to 10 active members with strong youth outreach and filling gaps in provision for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community where no other organisation was active.

The Parks department coordinates community events free of charge with public liability insurance and risk assessments provided. The Bandstand has an active live music programme throughout the year. The Parks team was identified as the first local organisation to offer risk assessment support for small community events under 500 people.

Independent Venues

The Castle was named positively by multiple practitioners. It has a clear genre identity in rock, metal and alternative music, a loyal cross-generational community, and an independent character that practitioners described as authentic. It is operating without structural support.

The Bear Club covers broad programming across jazz, blues and independent music, helping to fill gaps in the town's cultural offer. One practitioner who encountered difficulties at a funded venue moved their music event to Mecca Bingo and grew attendance from 180 to 400 people. The adaptability of non-traditional venues is itself a finding: when formal cultural infrastructure fails practitioners, they find alternatives.

Outdoor Activations and Festivals

Luton Rising delivers over 150 events annually including Baku Festival, Pride, Inspire Eid, One Eid and Desi Fest, with strong reach through identity-based programming that goes to communities rather than expecting communities to travel to venues. This model is effective for reach. Its limitation, identified by facilitators themselves, is that it does not build sustained year-round infrastructure.

Culture Trust: Provision and Its Limits

Culture Trust manages the only publicly accessible, subsidised spaces in Luton. Its basement rehearsal space at £5 per hour was the most affordable option identified in the study. Culture Trust has acknowledged that engagement with grassroots practitioners has been limited and is now open to conversation, and is introducing a CRM system.

The £5 rehearsal space is not available outside standard working hours, which is when the majority of grassroots practitioners need it. The rate exists; the access window does not match demand.

The Underlying Capacity

The strongest positive in the data is the creative capacity of the town itself. Practitioners are active, skilled, motivated and in many cases earning from their work. One practitioner described the town as awash with creative people. Another noted that creative people are moving into the wider Luton area from London, drawn by lower costs and proximity to the capital. The infrastructure has not kept pace with the people it is supposed to serve.

"Creativity usually thrives in difficult situations. That's what shaped Luton culture."

Consultation participant, Luton

Voices from the Consultation

This chapter presents direct testimony from consultation participants. No participants are named.

On Space and Access

"The people who are doing positive work don't have the space. The people who have the space don't engage in the provisions."

Community development practitioner, Luton

A community development practitioner described spaces prioritising commercial bookings over grassroots activity, creating a dynamic where the most engaged and active cultural operators are also the most likely to be displaced. A dance and movement practitioner described arriving to teach a session only to find young people barred from accessing a studio. The practitioner had experienced six-week term-time booking windows and inconsistent practices throughout their time working in Luton venues.

"Am I going to be moved because something with more money came in? I don't feel we are treated the same."

Freelance arts practitioner, Luton

A music practitioner with extensive experience of Luton's venues described response times of six months or more. A visual arts practitioner described wanting a space for pure creative work, publicly owned, strictly for creating, and finding instead that the most accessible spaces are also the most administratively complex to navigate.

On Race and Class

"If you're Black, brown or working class, you jump through funding hoops. If you're in the know and inside the politics, it's easier. This keeps working class communities out in plain sight."

Consultation participant, Luton

A music practitioner from the Black community described the absence of venues celebrating music of Black origin outside of Black History Month. Another described attending an open mic night where police showed up asking about a specific genre, citing allegations of differential policing of diverse music events in Luton.

A practitioner working across youth, community and heritage described differential treatment in access to venues, programming support and institutional backing. A community event was declined on the grounds that it did not qualify as a cultural activity. These experiences were corroborated across multiple respondents.

On the Night-Time Economy

"In other towns Wetherspoons is a cheap stop gap while you figure out your next move. For Luton, it's our busiest late night venue."

Creative practitioner, Marsh Farm

A digital creative from Marsh Farm described the gaming and streaming community meeting in every city other than Luton because there is simply nowhere to go. A manufacturing heritage practitioner described a venue from the 1970s-1990s as a model worth understanding: all communities together, sharing food and drink. You cannot manufacture that. But you can create the conditions for it.

On Youth

"There are NO youth spaces at all. Youth Scape, Tokko, existing spaces are NOT serving young people."

Youth practitioner, Luton

TOKKO changed its model and required young people to become paying members, creating a barrier for those who could not afford it. The dance provision disappeared. A practitioner working with youth dance described a model shift from community and cultural to commercial that did not engage with what was possible within the community, leaving spaces empty and good practice sidelined.

On What Is Actually Needed

Across 26 practitioners and 13 facilitators, the following demands were stated most consistently:

- Flexible multi-disciplinary creative space of the kind found in warehouse or industrial buildings, for messy making, carnival fabrication, large-scale build and storage
- Affordable, properly soundproofed rehearsal space accessible outside standard working hours
- Dedicated music infrastructure including recording facilities, practice rooms and stepping-stone live music venues
- Photography and digital studio infrastructure, including gaming and streaming facilities currently entirely absent
- Visual arts exhibition space beyond the Long Gallery
- Youth creative facilities without bars or pass-through access, co-designed with young people
- Neighbourhood-level provision in LU3 and LU4, removing the need to travel to the town centre
- Wraparound operational support alongside space, including risk assessments, insurance and compliance guidance
- A coordination function that makes the existing ecology navigable
- Spaces under community ownership, not controlled by institutions whose track record has reduced community confidence

"This isn't solved with one venue or investing in one thing. This is a long-term problem that requires long-term thinking."

Consultation participant, Luton

The Competitive Context: Building Sustainable Cultural Participation

Cultural spaces compete for habit, spend and attention. Understanding the competitive context in which Luton operates is essential to understanding what any new investment needs to achieve.

Creating the Conditions for Cultural Investment to Succeed

Luton's town centre investment programme is creating new spaces intended to attract people and activity. The evidence in this study suggests that cultural spaces deliver most when physical investment is supported by a wider ecosystem of programming, creative practice, audience development and trust. That ecosystem grows when people have multiple reinforcing reasons to spend time in a place and when participation becomes a normal, habitual choice. Strengthening these conditions in the town centre would help maximise the value of current and future investment.

One practitioner with over 20 years of active involvement in Luton's music scene described how changes in the night-time economy affected both venues and the communities that used them. As regular activity reduced, some audiences formed habits elsewhere. Their account underlines the value of sustained programming and audience development alongside investment in buildings.

The Night-Time Economy: Participation, Habits and Economic Value

Multiple practitioners described spending Tuesday through Sunday going out in Luton before the ecology contracted. They said the closure of Edge, the removal of sound systems from Carnival, the policing of diverse music events, and the gap left where venues and activity were not replaced had contributed to communities going elsewhere. Participants reported that those audiences have not yet returned.

The economic case for a functioning night-time economy is significant. A single mid-sized music venue operating at 500-capacity three nights per week at average £10 spend per head generates approximately £780,000 in direct spend per year, plus supply chain and multiplier effects. Luton's Radio 1 Big Weekend 2024, a three-day event with 50,000 visitors, generated £6.7 million of economic impact including £1.5 million directly for hospitality. This demonstrates audience potential; consistent, year-round infrastructure and programming could help more of that participation and value remain local.

The Stage within the Wider Cultural Ecosystem

The Stage is modelled on Lafayette in Kings Cross, a 600-capacity live music venue with award-winning acoustics, a 4am licence on Fridays and Saturdays, and a programme that includes nationally recognised artists. Lafayette works because it sits within a 67-acre development that includes Central Saint Martins, Google's UK headquarters, 50 restaurants, bars and shops, a digital radio station with 350 regular contributors, canal-side public realm, and year-round cultural programming. That ecosystem took over 20 years and billions of pounds of public and private investment to build.

The Stage will be a significant addition to Luton's cultural infrastructure. The question this report addresses is what wider ecosystem The Stage will sit within, and what investment is needed to build the conditions in which it can succeed. A flagship venue delivers most when the surrounding ecosystem is ready to sustain it; parallel investment in grassroots activity can therefore strengthen The Stage and the wider masterplan.

Bedford and the Night-Time Economy Model

Bedford is 21 miles from Luton and shares the University of Bedfordshire. It ranked in the top five UK towns for student nightlife, with approximately 37 events per thousand students. Its cultural ecology, built through deliberate collaboration between promoters, venues and the university, includes Bedford

Esquires, the Corn Exchange and The Ent Shed. Luton has the same university and does not have the same outcome. The difference is a decade of consistent, relationship-based, promoter-led investment in building a scene from the ground up.

Hitchin, St Albans and the Leisure Spend Migration

Hitchin and St Albans are within 30 minutes of Luton. Both have built significant independent cultural and leisure offers. St Albans has over 100 independent shops and restaurants and an independent cinema. Hitchin hosts an annual festival and farmers markets drawing people from across the region. Neither town has Luton's population, diversity or creative energy. Both have a larger share of Luton's leisure spend.

The comparison with these towns is deliberate. Bedford shares the University of Bedfordshire with Luton and sits in the same sub-region; Hitchin and St Albans are within thirty minutes and draw on an overlapping catchment. Their stronger cultural and leisure economies reflect policy, investment and coordination choices rather than any structural advantage Luton lacks, which is what makes the comparison instructive.

What a Functioning Pipeline Requires

The evidence from comparable UK towns consistently identifies the conditions required for a functioning creative talent pipeline: grassroots open mic and performance opportunities, properly equipped rehearsal and recording facilities, a stepping-stone live venue with a community mission, and a mid-scale venue that provides career progression. Each step needs to exist for the next to be viable.

The consultation data and the venue closure record indicate that the infrastructure conditions for a functioning talent pipeline are not currently present in Luton. No properly soundproofed rehearsal provision accessible outside working hours. No dedicated recording infrastructure. No stepping-stone live venue. Investment needs to address the missing steps, not only the destination.

What Comparable Programmes Have Achieved

Make Space Oxford: Established in 2015, using meanwhile leases to activate empty properties. Phase One (£1.88m LEP grant): 27 vacant units, 50+ organisations, 150 jobs. Phase Two: 100 organisations, 200+ jobs. Six vacant council-owned sites are available for immediate activation in Luton with no lease negotiation required.

Hastings Commons: Since 2014, brought 8,500 square metres of derelict buildings into community ownership. Created 11 rent-capped homes, 50+ workspaces, youth clubs and creative technology hubs. 541 Community Land Trust shareholders. Won World Habitat Gold Award 2025. The central lesson: permanence requires removing assets from the market before commercial pressure builds.

DOEN Participaties: Published April 2025: a feasibility study on impact investing in the cultural sector in the Netherlands. Subsequently committed to developing the first dedicated cultural impact investment vehicle in Europe. A well-evidenced feasibility study is a proven trigger for capital mobilisation.

The Great Place Programme: Funded by ACE and NLHF from 2016. Evaluation found cultural investment produces stronger outcomes when integrated with housing, employment and community infrastructure strategies. Luton's £1.7 billion investment pipeline creates precisely the conditions for this kind of integration.

The Asset Landscape

Existing Facilities

Spatial mapping identified 36 existing cultural facilities across Luton. The full inventory is set out in Chapter 2. Cultural provision is disproportionately concentrated in the town centre, LU1 and LU2. Residents in LU3 and LU4 face significant travel barriers.

The Asset Register Gap

The spatial mapping conducted for this study identified vacant and underused properties with potential for cultural activation. However, it is important to be clear about what this mapping can and cannot conclude. These sites were identified through desk-based research and spatial analysis. They have not been validated with council asset teams. The absence of that engagement is itself a finding: asset management and the cultural sector are not in conversation, and bridging that gap is a prerequisite to activating any of these opportunities.

Six council-owned sites are currently identified as potentially available, including former retail units and a former care home. The specific sites are noted in Appendix A. However, the more important point is structural: Luton does not currently have a derelict building register, a community asset transfer register, or spatial occupancy monitoring of privately owned empty buildings. These tools, which the council has the power to establish, are what would make the systematic identification and activation of cultural spaces possible. Without them, opportunities are identified opportunistically rather than strategically.

The Community Wealth Building team represents the most direct route to establishing these mechanisms. The interview conducted for this study identified a clear appetite to develop: a forward pipeline of council commissions accessible to smaller organisations; a derelict building register; a community asset transfer register; and spatial occupancy monitoring of privately owned vacant buildings. None of these currently exist. Establishing them is a no-cost, high-impact intervention.

Section 106: A Longer-Term Consideration, Not a Short-Term Route

Partners agreed on 19 June that Section 106 is unlikely to generate significant resource for culture in the short term, given existing commitments, and that expectations should be managed. It is included here only as background on a longer-term mechanism. Section 106 planning obligations can require developers to contribute to infrastructure needed to mitigate the impact of development, where the statutory tests are met. The examples below show how Section 106 has been used for culture elsewhere; they are illustrative, not a standard Luton is expected to meet.

Their relevance to Luton would need to be assessed in relation to individual developments, statutory requirements, existing commitments and longer-term priorities; they are not immediate or guaranteed solutions.

Example	What it delivered	Mechanism	Why it worked for cultural infrastructure
Watermans Arts Centre, Hounslow	New, larger cultural venue funded through redevelopment. A “no net loss” clause ensured the new venue was delivered before the old one closed.	Legal agreement with named use; venue delivered as planning condition, not goodwill.	Protected and improved existing cultural infrastructure. The mechanism prevented displacement by making replacement a legal requirement, not an aspiration.
The Joiners Arms, Tower Hamlets	Return of a named LGBTQ+ venue: space, financial contribution, and long lease all secured.	Named use in the legal agreement. Community operator built into the deal from the outset.	Prevented cultural displacement by specifying not just that a venue would exist, but how it would be operated and for whom.

Example	What it delivered	Mechanism	Why it worked for cultural infrastructure
Streatham Cultural Space, Lambeth	Permanent performance venue embedded within a housing scheme.	Space secured through planning obligation. Culture embedded in the development, not added afterwards.	Demonstrated that performance space can be a planning requirement within residential-led development. Directly applicable to the residential element of The Stage development.
Affordable Creative Workspace, Brent	Long-term subsidised artist studios with rent capped below market rate.	Rent cap written into the legal agreement, not left to operator discretion.	Addressed the affordability problem structurally. Without a legal cap, "affordable" workspace becomes market-rate workspace within five years.
Shoreditch/Hoxton Art Fund, Hackney	Pooled developer contributions funding ongoing community-led arts activity.	Multiple developer contributions aggregated into a single fund, disbursed for cultural programming rather than capital.	Funded participation and activity, not just buildings. Relevant to Luton where cultural programming infrastructure is as much a gap as physical space.
Old Vinyl Factory, Hayes	Managed cultural venue and workspace secured within regeneration scheme, with long-term use and management conditions.	Legal agreement specifying not just existence of the space but how it is operated and managed over time.	Controlled the cultural use of the space in perpetuity, not just at handover. The distinction matters: a cultural space with no use conditions becomes an office within a decade.

The Stage and the Grassroots Ecosystem

The Stage is being delivered to shell and core, with the fit-out of the performance venue and food court led by the operator and supported by some capital contribution. At the time of this study, no public programme specification or community cultural-use requirement had been published, and the venue is expected to operate without ongoing council subsidy. This positions The Stage as a commercially operated cultural asset whose success can be strengthened by a healthy local creative ecosystem.

Shell and core delivery is an established approach for commercial venues. In Luton, the opportunity is to ensure that the surrounding grassroots ecosystem is strong enough to complement and support the new mid-scale venue. The study documents a creative ecology that has contracted over fifteen years and no published requirement for local-artist or community programming at the time of research. Strengthening local talent pathways, rehearsal and making space, neighbourhood activity and audience development would help The Stage thrive while extending the benefits of the investment across the town's cultural ecology.

The Joiners Arms and Streatham examples above demonstrate that S106 can specify not just that a cultural space will exist, but who will operate it, on what terms, and for whom. The Old Vinyl Factory example demonstrates that management conditions can be written into the legal agreement to govern how the space operates over time. These mechanisms were not applied to The Stage. They could still be applied to the residential element of the development, which is not yet complete, and to future phases of the wider masterplan. The window is not closed.

The specific ask for Luton's planning and cultural teams is not to reopen The Stage development agreement, but to use the remaining development activity in the masterplan, 292 residential units, the food court fit-out, associated commercial development, to secure the cultural infrastructure conditions that the building alone cannot deliver: a community programming obligation, affordable workspace within the Hat District, a contribution to the grassroots rehearsal and making space infrastructure documented as missing in this study, and a named cultural use covenant that survives any future change of ownership or operator.

Meanwhile Use and Phased Activation

The Housing Depot at Birdsfoot Lane and Portland Industrial Units are identified through spatial mapping as potentially suited to flexible multi-disciplinary creative use, including carnival fabrication, rehearsal, large-scale build and storage. These have not been validated with council asset teams, and that engagement is the immediate next step. Sports pavilions managed by the Parks department are vacant Monday to Friday, with Lewsey TARA having operated a pavilion successfully for 10 to 15 years as a proven replicable model. Wardown Park offers additional meanwhile opportunities including the Upper Cricket Pavilion, Boat House and Catering Kiosk. Meanwhile use agreements modelled on Make Space Oxford, short-term licences that allow cultural activation without requiring full commercial negotiation, with the potential to transition to longer-term community ownership, are the most immediate activation route available.

4.8 Comparator Research: What Luton Can Adapt

The comparator research tests whether Luton's challenges are unique and, more importantly, which delivery mechanisms have worked in places with credible parallels. The strongest examples are not London-scale regeneration schemes. They are towns and mid-sized cities that used underused assets, capable operators, protected affordability and practical governance to build cultural value over time.

THE PROPOSITION The most transferable comparator models combined control of underused assets, capable operators, protected affordability and sustained participation. For Luton, the transferable lesson is the mechanism: a pipeline from empty space to community stewardship that can complement wider cultural investment.

Why these places are credible comparators

The test. A town or mid-sized city; constrained resources; a clever mechanism rather than a megabudget; underused buildings brought into creative use; and a direct match to Luton's gaps in making space, music, digital production, diverse participation, asset visibility or trust.

Cost comparison. A consistent town-to-town comparison of venue hire rates was not obtainable from the available published material: operators use different inclusions, access periods, subsidies and commercial terms. The report therefore uses published figures only where they are directly evidenced and does not present unlike-for-like prices as a reliable benchmark.

Luton's starting point. Luton already has cultural ambition, community-wealth and social-value policy, anchor institutions and planning levers. The missing bridge is a prioritised asset-and-operator pipeline with affordable occupation and whole-life viability built in.

What comparable places did—and the transferable lesson

Place / why it matters	Method used	What Luton can adapt
Folkestone Strongest overall	Patient capital acquired and repaired a portfolio of run-down buildings, then placed them with a mission-led charity on 125-year peppercorn leases for affordable creative occupation.	Treat stewardship as infrastructure: assemble an asset portfolio, protect affordability through lease terms and appoint a mission-led operator.
Bedford 21 miles; same university	Independent Esquires sustained a grassroots music pipeline through promoters, relationships and multiple performance rooms rather than a major capital programme.	Back an operator-led music ecosystem connecting rehearsal, promotion, accessible performance, talent progression and secure tenure.
Stoke-on-Trent Post-industrial making town	The former Spode factory was converted into affordable studios, exhibition space and development programmes through council, ACAVA and Arts Council support.	Pilot a heritage or vacant site as affordable making and digital space; agree rent, access, operator and progression before capital works.
Middlesbrough Council-led cluster	The Boho Zone clustered flexible workspace, incubation, live/work space and digital businesses near transport, the university and a cultural anchor.	Sequence a small cluster around existing anchors and combine workspace with business support rather than scattering unsupported rooms.

Place / why it matters	Method used	What Luton can adapt
Bradford Young, diverse twin	City of Culture used grassroots commissions, co-production, free activity and neighbourhood participation to reach communities beyond established institutions.	Devolve programme funds and decisions to local groups, while recognising that City of Culture funding is exceptional.

Recommended Luton method: assets → operators → investment → trust

1. Build the asset register Identify vacant council, anchor and private buildings; score condition, planning fit, ownership route, neighbourhood need and potential operator.	2. Run three demonstrators Test an affordable making/digital hub, a grassroots music pathway and a neighbourhood cultural programme to build evidence for future capital decisions.
3. Secure the operating model Select operators early; lock in affordable rent, fit-out, access, management, maintenance, revenue and exit arrangements.	4. Blend the capital stack Combine assets, grants, philanthropy, social investment, community shares and earned income. Use Section 106 only where the statutory tests are met.
5. Put policy behind the pipeline Define cultural/community infrastructure in relevant planning and delivery documents; publish standard asks, triggers and monitoring.	6. Govern for resilience Use transparent decisions and staged funding. Coventry warns against concentrating delivery and risk in one fragile vehicle.
DECISION GATE Advance only projects with a named asset, credible operator, protected affordability, a balanced capital-and-revenue plan, a lawful funding route and measurable community benefit.	

The fuller comparator bank, including the cautionary and gap-specific cases, is set out in Appendix H.

Chapter 5: Options and Focus Areas

5.1 Operational Fixes: The Immediate Opportunity

Before new space is built or activated, the operating quality of existing provision requires attention. This is the highest-return, lowest-cost intervention available.

The changes fall into two kinds. Operational quick wins, a published pricing framework, faster and more transparent booking, named contacts and extended access hours, can be delivered within existing resources and need coordination rather than capital. Structural change, a standing coordination function, asset and community-transfer registers, community governance and a blended investment vehicle, takes longer and needs design and agreement across partners. Both are necessary, but the quick wins should not wait on the structural work.

- A single published, transparent pricing framework for all publicly supported cultural spaces, covering community, practitioner and commercial rates, available online and consistently applied.
- A shared booking coordination function that makes the existing ecology navigable. This does not require a new organisation, it requires a named coordination role and a shared digital system.
- Extended access hours for the Hat Factory basement rehearsal space, initially as a pilot. The £5/hr rate exists; the access window does not currently match demand.

5.2 Immediate Site Activation

Rather than identifying specific sites as primary opportunities, without asset team validation, any such identification is speculative, the immediate priority is to establish the infrastructure that makes systematic activation possible:

- Work with the Community Wealth team to establish a derelict building register and vacant commercial properties register.
- Establish a community asset transfer register to create a formal pathway for council-owned properties to move into cultural use.
- Create a forward pipeline of council commissions accessible to smaller cultural organisations, including a two-year visibility window for SMEs and VSEs.
- Engage asset teams in a structured conversation with the cultural sector, the absence of this engagement is currently a barrier to activation.

The Make Space Oxford model, meanwhile leases as catalysts for longer-term community occupation, is a directly applicable precedent: Phase One secured 27 vacant units, housed more than 50 organisations and created at least 150 jobs.

5.3 Warehouse-Scale and Multi-Disciplinary Making Space

Flexible multi-use creative space is the single most consistently identified gap across all 26 practitioners. The Housing Depot at Birdsfoot Lane and Portland Industrial Units have been identified through spatial mapping as potentially suited to this use. However, these identifications are preliminary, they have not been validated with asset teams, and the lack of engagement between asset management and the cultural sector is itself a finding that needs to be addressed before specific sites can be confirmed as opportunities.

A site-specific feasibility assessment is the appropriate next step, covering: fit-out cost range; revenue model options; operator model; community governance options; and funding routes including Section 106 contributions from adjacent developments.

5.4 Music Infrastructure

Luton has no properly soundproofed rehearsal provision accessible to grassroots practitioners outside working hours, and no functioning stepping-stone live music venue. Investment in dedicated music infrastructure, rehearsal rooms and a small-capacity live music space of 100 to 300, would directly address the talent pipeline gap and begin to rebuild the local live music circuit.

5.5 Youth Creative Infrastructure

Effective youth provision requires co-design with young people from the outset. The consultation evidence is clear that retrofit of existing spaces or adaptation of adult-oriented provision has not worked. The most requested element was outdoor green space with shelter and toilet provision, not a building.

Three delivery routes. Youth provision does not depend on a single new building. Three routes are available, and the evidence points to using them in combination.

- Within existing infrastructure: adapt suitable spaces such as libraries and community centres for youth creative use, with safeguarding in place and without adult programming taking priority.
- Sheltered green space in parks: deliver accessible outdoor green space with shelter and toilets, working with the Parks department, as the most consistently requested and lowest-cost provision.
- A dedicated youth creative facility: co-designed with under-25s from the outset, offering music, dance and digital provision without a bar or pass-through adult use.

On this basis, sheltered green space for young people is recommended as an early, low-cost intervention, delivered with the Parks department in direct response to the most consistently requested youth provision in the consultation.

5.6 Neighbourhood Cultural Hubs

A distributed network of small neighbourhood creative hubs would extend provision to communities excluded by geography, cost and transport. Libraries represent an underexplored anchor for this network, providing existing footfall, community trust, and distributed locations across LU1 to LU4.

Chapter 6: Recommendations and Sequencing

Is a Cultural Space Fund Feasible in Luton?

Yes, with conditions. There is sufficient unmet need, a viable asset base, growing strategic alignment through the Town Centre Delivery Plan, and genuine appetite among the right investors to support community-rooted cultural infrastructure.

Feasibility here is not primarily a financial question. It is a relational and political question. The evidence indicates that community confidence in institutional delivery of cultural provision is currently low. Investment structures that incorporate community governance have, on the evidence of comparable programmes, generated stronger engagement and more durable outcomes.

Potential Fund Models

A Community Real Estate Fund: Acquiring cultural properties and placing them under collective ownership. Revenue from affordable rental income. Inspired by community land trust principles. Most directly addresses the security and longevity of cultural space.

A Place-Based Creative Enterprise Fund: Equity and loan investment in creative ventures rooted in Luton's diverse communities. Modelled on the Boston Ujima participatory investment approach, with community members involved in investment decisions.

A Production and Pre-Finance Fund: Bridge loans and revenue-based finance for cultural productions that require upfront investment before income is generated. Modelled on Cultuur en Ondernemen's Cultural Loan Facility and Nesta's Arts Impact Fund.

A Blended Fund: Given the breadth of unmet need, a blended approach combining real estate investment, creative enterprise equity and production pre-financing, with clear community governance, is the most appropriate model for Luton's specific context.

Comparable models exist for each type. For making space, the conversion of the derelict Spode works in Stoke-on-Trent created affordable studios with the council and Arts Council England, and Make Space Oxford activated vacant units on meanwhile leases. For music and rehearsal, Bedford's Esquires was revived by local promoters and taken into community ownership through the Music Venue Trust. For youth and community provision, Hastings Commons has brought derelict buildings, including a youth club and workspaces, into community ownership. These come from the accompanying comparator research and are illustrative models, not commitments.

Conditions for Success

1. Community governance from the outset. Key figures from underserved communities must have genuine decision-making power, not advisory roles.
2. Operational quality as a baseline. Before building new spaces, the spaces that exist must be made to work.
3. Operational support as standard. Space without wraparound support replicates the failure of existing provision.
4. Proactive outreach. The fund must go to communities, not wait for communities to find it.
5. Neighbourhood distribution. At least a proportion of investment must reach outside the town centre.

6. Patient capital. Cultural investment in this context requires a long-term horizon and tolerance for non-linear returns.
7. Transparency and accountability. Fund decisions, allocations and outcomes must be publicly reported.
8. Diversity and inclusion embedded structurally, not added as an afterthought.

Community ownership does not mean institutions withdraw. Their involvement remains necessary in defined roles: the council as landowner, planning authority and holder of asset-transfer and Section 106 levers; Culture Trust as operator of the town's principal subsidised venues and holder of its National Portfolio relationship with Arts Council England; and the university and UK Centre for Carnival Arts as holders of specialist facilities. The question is not whether institutions are involved but in what role: enabling and underwriting community-led provision rather than controlling it.

Rebuilding trust depends on visible, structural accountability, not presentation. On the evidence of comparable programmes, that means fund decisions, allocations and outcomes published; a minimum review cycle with shared reporting; community representatives with genuine decision-making power rather than advisory roles; and a named body accountable for the coordination function. Structural community governance of this kind has produced stronger engagement and more durable outcomes than consultation alone.

"Acknowledging past failures is more than hearing. Now is the time for action."
Cultural facilitator, Luton

Prioritising the Recommendations

The recommendations are prioritised, not a flat list. The Top Five Actions above are the immediate priorities, chosen because they are low-cost, high-clarity and demonstrate intent. The short, medium and long-term sequencing that follows orders the fuller set. The table below maps each of the nine findings to the recommendations that answer it, so coverage of the evidence is explicit and no finding is left without a response.

Finding	How the recommendations respond
Finding 1: Existing provision inaccessible in practice	A published pricing framework, standardised booking and response times, extended access hours, and a coordination function to make provision navigable. These are operational quick wins.
Finding 2: Structural inequality in access (38% gatekeeping)	Community governance with reserved decision-making seats for the communities most affected; a transparent access and pricing framework removing discretion at the point of booking; annual published monitoring of who accesses space and funding; and a named route to challenge access refusals.
Finding 3: Talent leakage	Flexible making space and music infrastructure to retain practice locally, and a forward commissioning pipeline accessible to smaller organisations.
Finding 4: No fit-for-purpose youth space	Youth creative provision co-designed with under-25s; sheltered green space with shelter and toilets as an early intervention; and delivery through existing infrastructure where suitable.
Finding 5: Flexible making space is the primary gap	Activate flexible multi-disciplinary making space through meanwhile use and asset transfer, validated with council asset teams.
Finding 6: Consultation fatigue	Visible action on existing evidence rather than further consultation, with public reporting against commitments.
Finding 7: The investment programme lacks a grassroots plan	Cultural conditions on remaining masterplan phases; Section 106 and social value treated as a potential longer-term mechanism following the 19 June discussion; and connecting The Stage to the grassroots ecosystem it depends on.
Finding 8: Ecosystem fragmentation	A coordination function with a shared directory and digital infrastructure, and high-level data sharing between organisations.
Finding 9: Booking failures with a quantified cost	Operational fixes to booking, pricing and communication, and tracking of operational failure at venue and commissioning level.

Finding 2 in particular, structural inequality in access, named by 38% of practitioners, is answered with specific actions rather than a general commitment: reserved decision-making seats for the communities most affected on any new fund or governance body; a transparent, published access and pricing framework that removes discretion at the point of booking; annual published monitoring of who accesses space and funding; and a named route to challenge access refusals.

These recommendations were presented to partners at the working session on 19 June 2026. What follows in Chapter 7 is distinct from the evidence and recommendations set out above: it is the partnership's agreed response, setting out which actions will be taken forward, by whom, and in what sequence.

Chapter 7: Prioritised Action Plan

7.1 Introduction

On 19 June 2026, following the presentation of the study's findings, Luton Borough Council and Culture Trust Luton hosted a working session as the town's largest cultural asset portfolio holders. Rather than revisiting the evidence, the session considered what should now happen in response and began to identify practical actions for delivery.

Partners sorted potential actions into three horizons: what could begin immediately within existing resources, what required partnership development over the medium term, and what required longer-term strategic change. For each action, the group identified not only what should happen but who would own it. That question of ownership is as important as the actions themselves, and it is captured throughout this chapter.

The actions set out below do not replace or reinterpret the findings in Chapters 2 to 6. The findings are the evidence; the recommendations are the study's proposed response; this chapter is the partnership's collectively agreed response, and the beginning of an implementation framework. It closes the loop from evidence, through interpretation and recommendation, to named responsibility for delivery.

The emphasis is deliberately on demonstrable progress within the next nine months, focused on improving access to and coordination of existing provision rather than on new capital. This reflects the central finding, which partners endorsed, that Luton's issue is not an absolute lack of space but a set of persistent barriers to accessing what already exists.

Each priority action is set out with its purpose, the evidence it responds to, the activity it involves, its lead and supporting partners, and how progress could be measured. A summary implementation-framework table accompanies each horizon, listing every action agreed in the session together with its owner, timescale and the evidence it addresses. Where the session did not settle an owner, this is shown as to be confirmed rather than assumed.

7.2 Immediate priorities (0 to 9 months)

Partners agreed a set of immediate priorities that can be progressed within existing resources and that would demonstrate visible change quickly. Four are expanded below; the full set agreed in the session, with owners, is given in Table 9.

1. A shared cultural spaces directory

What the study found

Existing provision is more extensive than practitioners realise, but it is invisible and hard to navigate; information is fragmented and lower-cost options do not reach a broad enough range of creatives. The original report recommended a coordination function and a register of spaces.

What partners agreed on 19 June

Partners agreed to begin with a public-facing directory, produced quickly from existing data and improved over time, and were clear this is distinct from the internal asset work. An initial working session was noted for 29 June.

What now needs to happen

Build a public cultural spaces directory, a list of spaces people can currently hire or use, covering contacts, capacity, cost, opening hours, technical specification, accessibility, insurance requirements and who can hire, with an agreed update process. This should not be confused with three separate instruments that follow it:

- Public cultural spaces directory: the outward-facing list of usable space (the immediate output).
- Internal council cultural asset register: council-owned assets with status, availability, constraints and potential cultural use.
- Vacant and derelict property pipeline: wider intelligence including private and commercial property that may become available.

- Community asset-transfer register: which public assets may be eligible for transfer, and under what process.

Owner and first decision

Proposed lead: Luton Borough Council asset team with Culture Trust, supported by the economics and Community Wealth Building team, Step Forward Luton, the University of Bedfordshire and VCSE partners (ownership to be confirmed). First decision: confirm the lead officer and the minimum data set for version one.

Evidence of progress

A public directory live within nine months covering all mapped venues, an agreed update cycle, and use by practitioners from outside established networks.

2. Visibility of spaces and support offers

What the study found

Support and lower-cost provision are reaching a small, established group; many practitioners do not know what exists or how to access it. The problem is not an absence of communications activity but the architecture between promotion and access.

What partners agreed on 19 June

Partners agreed to make pricing and how-to-hire information transparent and to improve visibility, with Culture Trust leading on pricing and how-to-hire, and the council, Culture Trust and the Arts and Culture Strategy Group jointly responsible for transparency of council support.

What now needs to happen

Publish consistent pricing and access information; use more visual, practical, neighbourhood-facing promotion; route all of it through one source connected to the directory and to practical access guidance; and measure whether communications produce first-time participation rather than page views.

Owner and first decision

Culture Trust (pricing and how-to-hire) with the council, Culture Trust and the Strategy Group on council-support transparency, supported by community organisations and Create Wellbeing. First decision: agree the single structured source of information and who maintains it.

Evidence of progress

Consistent published pricing and access information, and measurable first-time participation from communities outside established town-centre audiences.

3. A Cultural Venue Access Standard

What the study found

The operational barriers are system-wide, unpublished pricing, slow or opaque booking, restricted hours and inconsistent communication, with Hat Factory the most visible concentration of a wider problem rather than the whole of it. Hirers need support; venues need systems.

What partners agreed on 19 June

Partners agreed a simple, shared approach to venue access, developed as a toolkit, with Create Wellbeing leading its development.

What now needs to happen

Adopt a Cultural Venue Access Standard across publicly supported provision. Every such space should publish:

- current hire prices and eligibility for reduced rates; available hours; permitted uses; accessibility information; technical specification; and insurance, safeguarding and licensing requirements;
- a named booking contact, acknowledgement within two working days and a substantive response within ten working days;
- a written reason where a booking is declined, and a clear route to challenge or escalate a refusal.

Owner and first decision

Create Wellbeing (toolkit) with Culture Trust and the council, supported by venue operators and the Strategy Group, with potential Arts Council foundational funding. Culture Trust's CRM can help deliver this, but the standard should apply across provision, not be treated as one organisation's solution. First decision: agree the minimum standard and the first venues to adopt it.

Evidence of progress

The standard adopted across participating venues, published booking requirements, and a measurable fall in response times and unexplained refusals.

4. Small-scale commissioning and micro-access

What the study found

Practitioners consistently described the difficulty of testing new ideas without securing substantial project funding. Early-stage activity often stopped before it started because there was no mechanism to trial work, use space for short periods or programme small events.

What partners agreed on 19 June

Partners agreed that, rather than waiting for larger capital programmes, a small-scale commissioning approach could be introduced within existing resources to encourage experimentation and build confidence. A micro pop-up venue fund and a community and venue support fund were both discussed.

What now needs to happen

Design a small-scale commissioning or micro-access route with clear scale, eligibility and a light-touch, quick process, and connect it to rehearsal and making provision and to progression, so that trial activity leads somewhere rather than beginning again from zero.

Owner and first decision

Proposed: the Arts and Culture Strategy Group with the council and Culture Trust, supported by Arts Council England, Create Wellbeing and Members of Parliament for advocacy and fundraising (ownership to be confirmed). First decision: agree the fund's scale, source, eligibility and a named holder.

Evidence of progress

A micro-fund or access scheme piloted within the period, the number of early-stage activities supported, and how many progressed to a next stage.

Table 9. Immediate priorities agreed by partners (0 to 9 months)

Action and purpose	Ownership	Delivery
Shared cultural spaces directory Visibility, affordability, fragmented information	Lead: LBC asset team, Culture Trust Supporting partners: Economics / Community Wealth, Step Forward Luton, UoB, VCSE	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Findings 1, 8, 9
Financial review of all spaces and costings Transparent, comparable costs	Lead: Luton Borough Council Supporting partners: Culture Trust, venue owners	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Findings 1, 9
Visibility of pricing and how to hire space Access and transparency	Lead: Culture Trust Supporting partners: LBC, ACSG	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Findings 1, 8
Transparency of council support and how to get started Clarity and trust	Lead: LBC, ACSG Supporting partners: Community organisations	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Findings 6, 8
Venue access toolkit (insurance, risk, safeguarding, booking, licensing) Operational barriers, capability gap	Lead: Create Wellbeing Supporting partners: Culture Trust, LBC, venues; Arts Council foundational fund	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Findings 1, 9
Sort booking difficulties and physical accessibility Booking failures	Lead: Culture Trust, venues Supporting partners: Arts Council foundations fund	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Finding 9

Action and purpose	Ownership	Delivery
Improve communication and visibility of support offers Reach beyond the established group	Lead: Culture Trust, ACSG Supporting partners: Community organisations, Create Wellbeing	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Findings 6, 8
Community and venue support fund (encourage activity) Early-stage encouragement	Lead: ACSG (to confirm) Supporting partners: MPs (advocacy), Arts Council	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Findings 3, 6
Small-scale / micro commissioning (micro pop-up venue fund) Trial activity without large funding	Lead: ACSG with LBC / CT (to confirm) Supporting partners: Create Wellbeing, MPs	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Finding 3
Pride in place: creative representation on the board (Luton Central, Marsh Farm) Representation and trust	Lead: Create Wellbeing Supporting partners: ACSG, community organisations	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Finding 2
Clarity of roles (begins) Distributed ownership	Lead: ACSG (to confirm) Supporting partners: All partners	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Finding 8
Pilot sheltered green-space youth provision Respond to the most consistently requested youth provision with an early, low-cost test	Lead: LBC Parks / Youth Services (to confirm) Supporting partners: Young people, ACSG, community youth organisations	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Finding 4
Create a local cultural supplier list and baseline local cultural spend Make procurement routes visible and identify cultural spend currently being missed	Lead: LBC Procurement / Community Wealth Building Supporting partners: Anchor partners, ACSG, suppliers, Create Wellbeing	Timescale: 0 to 9 months Evidence: Finding 8; CWB analysis

7.3 Medium-term priorities (9 to 24 months)

The medium-term priorities move from improving access to building the connective structure the system currently lacks: a pathway between venues, stronger coordination, clearer roles, and shared data. Three are expanded below; the full set agreed in the session is given in Table 10.

1. A cultural pathway across venues

What the study found

There is no shared structure supporting progression from early-stage activity to larger-scale performance. As the venue-loss analysis sets out, the stepping-stone function was lost with Edge, Exchange and The Heights and never replaced, which places unrealistic expectations on The Stage.

What partners agreed on 19 June

Partners agreed to define and communicate a clearer pathway across venues and activity levels, coordinated across venue owners and the Strategy Group.

What now needs to happen

Articulate how existing venues connect and how a creative progresses over time, and address the missing stepping-stone directly through three options rather than assuming a new building:

- Option A: strengthen an existing independent venue into a clearer stepping-stone role, through rate relief, soundproofing or capital upgrades, programming subsidy, promoter partnerships and extended operating permissions.
- Option B: commission a distributed stepping-stone programme across The Castle, The Bear Club, Luton Library Theatre, Hat Factory and temporary spaces, with progression criteria and shared promotion.
- Option C: develop a dedicated new space only where Options A and B cannot provide the capacity, technical specification or audience scale required.

Owner and first decision

The Strategy Group with all venue owners, supported by Culture Trust, the University of Bedfordshire, the UK Centre for Carnival Arts and independent venues. First decision: the night-time economy lead, Culture Trust and independent venue representatives test whether the gap is best met by an existing operator, a distributed programme or a new venue, before any capital assumptions are made.

Evidence of progress

A published pathway partners recognise, a decision on the stepping-stone route, and evidence of creatives progressing between venues.

2. Coordination, roles and shared governance

What the study found

Organisations operate in parallel and there is an expectation that the council leads on everything; the evidence indicates delivery requires distributed ownership.

What partners agreed on 19 June

Partners agreed to clarify roles and responsibilities through the Strategy Group, to provide roles and how-to guides including on procurement, and to hold a structured engagement conversation across the council and all partners.

What now needs to happen

Document agreed roles and responsibilities, stand up a coordination function with a named holder, and establish a standing route through which young people shape cultural planning as part of governance rather than through occasional consultation.

Owner and first decision

The Strategy Group, supported by the council, Culture Trust and all partners. First decision: agree who holds the coordination function and its mandate.

Evidence of progress

Documented roles, a functioning coordination function, and a standing youth participation route.

3. Shared data between partners

What the study found

There is no shared infrastructure for data, and decisions are made without shared insight into audiences, demand and attendance.

What partners agreed on 19 June

Partners agreed to share high-level insight, while recognising that personal data cannot be shared.

What now needs to happen

Agree what high-level information can be shared and use it to coordinate programming, and connect it to a single cultural evidence and delivery register that prevents the duplicated consultation this study documents.

Owner and first decision

The Strategy Group with all partners. First decision: agree the data-sharing scope and a host for the register.

Evidence of progress

A data-sharing approach in place, shared insight informing programming, and a live evidence register in use before any new consultation is commissioned.

Table 10. Medium-term priorities agreed by partners (9 to 24 months)

Action and purpose	Ownership	Delivery
Map the venues and space (fuller mapping) Coordination	Lead: All venue owners Supporting partners: ACSG	Timescale: 9 to 24 months Evidence: Finding 8

Action and purpose	Ownership	Delivery
Create a cultural pathway across venues Progression; manage Stage expectations	Lead: ACSG Supporting partners: Venue owners, CT, UoB, UKCCA	Timescale: 9 to 24 months Evidence: Findings 7, 8
Strengthen coordination; clarify roles and responsibilities Fragmentation; distributed delivery	Lead: ACSG Supporting partners: LBC, CT, all partners	Timescale: 9 to 24 months Evidence: Finding 8
Give roles and how-to guides (procurement, etc.) Capability and navigation	Lead: LBC, ACSG Supporting partners: All partners	Timescale: 9 to 24 months Evidence: Finding 8
Engagement conversation Reconnect unengaged creatives	Lead: LBC and all partners Supporting partners: Community organisations	Timescale: 9 to 24 months Evidence: Findings 2, 6
Look at the social value plan (begin scoping) Direct local spend to the sector	Lead: LBC and anchor partners, procurement, community wealth Supporting partners: Suppliers	Timescale: 9 to 24 months Evidence: Section 106 / CWB analysis
Support the business of creatives Sustain practice	Lead: ACSG, UoB Supporting partners: Culture Trust, Create Wellbeing	Timescale: 9 to 24 months Evidence: Finding 3
Shared data (high-level insight) Coordinated programming	Lead: ACSG and all partners Supporting partners: Venue owners	Timescale: 9 to 24 months Evidence: Finding 8
Transparency of the council and the students' union Clarity	Lead: Luton Borough Council Supporting partners: University of Bedfordshire	Timescale: 9 to 24 months Evidence: Finding 8
Develop the micro pop-up venue fund Early-stage support	Lead: ACSG (to confirm) Supporting partners: LBC, Culture Trust	Timescale: 9 to 24 months Evidence: Finding 3

7.4 Longer-term priorities (2 to 5 years)

The longer-term priorities concern strategic change: capturing and directing social value, applying a cultural lens to Section 106, building the talent pipeline and artist pathway, and the future independence of the Arts and Culture Strategy Group. Partners were clear that capital funding and Section 106 are longer-term and should not distract from the immediate work on access. Three are expanded below; the full set is given in Table 11.

1. Social value and procurement

What the study found

A significant amount of local spend is happening and being missed, social value is not tracked, and the connection between development spend and cultural infrastructure is not made systematically.

What partners agreed on 19 June

Partners agreed that the council and Culture Trust set the standard while community and strategy partners own engagement, and that social value and procurement are a longer-term route that should not delay immediate access work.

What now needs to happen

Phase the work so it is realistic:

- Immediate: improve procurement visibility, establish a local cultural supplier list, include cultural questions in social-value reporting, track local spend, and make forward commissions visible.
- Medium: agree standard cultural social-value asks for major contracts and build the internal commercial skills required to use these levers.
- Long: explore major-development contributions, including airport-related opportunities, when relevant planning and funding windows arise.

Owner and first decision

Luton Borough Council (procurement and Community Wealth Building) with anchor partners, supported by Luton Arts, the Strategy Group and suppliers. First decision: agree a creative-economy and social-value baseline and a named officer to maintain it.

Evidence of progress

A social value framework that captures and directs local spend, monitoring in place, and local cultural spend rising over time.

2. Section 106 through a cultural lens**What the study found**

Section 106 may offer a longer-term route for considering cultural benefit within future development, where the statutory tests are met and existing commitments allow.

What partners agreed on 19 June

Partners agreed Section 106 is a potential longer-term mechanism, not an immediate funding solution, given existing commitments and prioritisation, and that airport-related opportunity is on a horizon of around five years.

What now needs to happen

Apply a cultural lens to future Section 106 negotiations on realistic timescales, and do not allow it to delay the immediate improvements to access and coordination.

Owner and first decision

Luton Borough Council and Luton Arts, supported by the Strategy Group. First decision: agree standard cultural asks for future major developments.

Evidence of progress

A cultural lens applied to future negotiations, with cultural asks recorded in relevant agreements as windows arise.

3. Talent pipeline, artist pathway and trust**What the study found**

Talent is leaving the town and confidence is low; the evidence points to the need to understand a creative's journey from the start of a career and how they move through venues.

What partners agreed on 19 June

Partners agreed that Culture Trust and the Strategy Group would develop a talent pipeline and employment programme, and that the Strategy Group would build trust and a clear artist pathway.

What now needs to happen

Develop a talent pipeline and employment programme focused on core skills, build trust and a clear artist pathway, and connect both to the progression pathway and stepping-stone work above so the pipeline has somewhere to lead.

Owner and first decision

Culture Trust and the Strategy Group (pipeline) and the Strategy Group (trust and pathway), supported by the University of Bedfordshire, the UK Centre for Carnival Arts and community organisations. First decision: agree the pipeline's scope and lead.

Evidence of progress

A talent pipeline and employment programme in place, and evidence of trust rebuilt and careers sustained locally.

Table 11. Longer-term priorities agreed by partners (2 to 5 years)

Action and purpose	Ownership	Delivery
Social value and procurement approach Capture missed local spend	Lead: LBC (procurement, CWB) and anchor partners Supporting partners: Luton Arts, ACSG, suppliers	Timescale: 2 to 5 years Evidence: Section 106 / CWB analysis
Review Section 106 from a cultural lens Direct development gain to culture	Lead: LBC, Luton Arts Supporting partners: ACSG	Timescale: 2 to 5 years Evidence: Finding 7; S106 analysis
Airport Section 106 (around 5 years) Longer-term opportunity; managed expectations	Lead: LBC, Luton Arts Supporting partners: (to confirm)	Timescale: ~5 years Evidence: Finding 7
Talent pipeline and employment programme (core skills) Retain and develop talent	Lead: Culture Trust, ACSG Supporting partners: UoB, UKCCA	Timescale: 2 to 5 years Evidence: Finding 3
Building trust and the artist pathway Reverse leakage; rebuild confidence	Lead: Arts and Culture Strategy Group Supporting partners: Culture Trust, community	Timescale: 2 to 5 years Evidence: Findings 3, 6
ACSG independence and future ownership Distributed leadership; legacy	Lead: Arts and Culture Strategy Group Supporting partners: LBC, Culture Trust	Timescale: 2 to 5 years Evidence: Finding 8
Capital funding where appropriate (incl. micro pop-up venue fund) Not immediate; must not distract from access	Lead: LBC, ACSG Supporting partners: Partners	Timescale: 2 to 5 years Evidence: Chapter 6 fund models
Develop routine social-value reporting for cultural and creative benefit Track commitments, supplier capacity, local spend and follow-through	Lead: LBC Procurement / Community Wealth Building Supporting partners: Anchor partners and major suppliers	Timescale: 2 to 5 years Evidence: 19 June workshop direction
Explore a 'social value pound for Luton' mechanism Test whether a clear local mechanism can retain more regeneration value in Luton	Lead: LBC / Community Wealth Building (to confirm) Supporting partners: Anchor partners, ACSG, local suppliers	Timescale: 2 to 5 years Evidence: 19 June workshop note; requires options appraisal

7.5 Principles agreed by partners

Alongside the actions, partners agreed a set of principles. These are not actions in themselves; they are the shared basis on which the actions should be taken forward.

Access before expansion. Partners agreed the immediate issue is not the overall supply of space but improving access to existing provision.

Delivery before consultation. The evidence base is considered sufficient. The priority should now move to implementation rather than further consultation.

Shared ownership. Delivery should be distributed across partners rather than resting solely with the council.

Manage expectations around capital funding. Section 106 and major developments, including the airport, should not be relied upon for short-term delivery.

Build confidence through visible progress. Quick, achievable actions should demonstrate change while the longer-term work develops.

Together, these actions and principles form the partnership's agreed response to the evidence. They move the study beyond diagnosis: from what the evidence shows, through what the partnership recommends, to who is responsible for what, by when, and why. This is the point at which a feasibility study becomes something partners can pick up and use, and it is the basis for the work that will feed into the Arts and Culture Strategy over the next nine months and beyond.

Appendix Schedule

Supporting materials A–G are listed below but are not included in this volume. Their issue status should be confirmed before final publication.

Appendix A: Full geospatial asset map, 57 venues and potential sites with coordinates, type, status, capacity and notes. [Listed supporting material; not included in this volume.]

Appendix B: Consultation methodology, participant breakdown by discipline and ward, ethics statement. [Listed supporting material; not included in this volume.]

Appendix C: Full gap and challenge dataset, 142 unique gaps, 604 unique challenges. [Listed supporting material; not included in this volume.]

Appendix D: Policy alignment table, focus areas mapped against Luton 2040, Town Centre Masterplan, Town Centre Delivery Plan, Culture Trust Business Plan, and Levelling Up Fund themes. [Listed supporting material; not included in this volume.]

Appendix E: Comparable programme summaries, Make Space Oxford, Hastings Commons, DOEN Participaties, Great Place Programme, Nudge Community Builders, Midsteeple Quarter, SAFE Regeneration, Huntly Development Trust, Bradford People's Property Portfolio, Back on the Map. [Listed supporting material; not included in this volume.]

Appendix F: Community wealth building models and references. [Listed supporting material; not included in this volume.]

Appendix G: Glossary. [Listed supporting material; not included in this volume.]

Appendix H: Comparator bank — towns and delivery models most relevant to Luton.

Appendix I: Supplementary workshop detail — social value, procurement and delivery safeguards.

Appendix H: Comparator Evidence Bank

This appendix retains the full comparator set behind Section 4.8. Each case is presented through the same decision-useful lens: why it is credible, the mechanism used, the Luton finding it addresses and any material caveat.

Closest and most transferable precedents

Place and relevance	Mechanism, Luton application and caveat
Folkestone — Creative Quarter Making space, affordability and community ownership	Mechanism: long-term charitable stewardship, peppercorn leases and controlled rents across a portfolio of repaired buildings. Luton application: treat stewardship and affordability as infrastructure, not an afterthought. Caveat: the philanthropic capital is substantial; the ownership mechanism is more transferable than the funding quantum.
Bradford — UK City of Culture 2025 Structural inequality and trust	Mechanism: grassroots commissioning, co-production, free activity and neighbourhood participation. Luton application: take resources and decision-making to communities. Caveat: exceptional programme funding; use Bradford for the delivery model rather than the funding scale.
Stoke-on-Trent — Spode Works / Silicon Stoke Making, heritage and gaming	Mechanism: affordable studios and 24/7 access in a former industrial asset, supported by council and Arts Council partnership; a separate council-university gaming route. Luton application: test one heritage or vacant site for making and digital use. Indicative rents of approximately £165–£367 per month require current-source verification.
Middlesbrough — Boho Zone Affordable workspace and clustering	Mechanism: managed workspace, incubation and live/work space clustered around transport, university and a cultural anchor. Luton application: create a small connected cluster and combine space with enterprise support.
Bedford — Esquires Music pipeline and secure tenure	Mechanism: promoter-led grassroots venue development with a route toward community ownership. Luton application: build the progression pathway through operators, rehearsal and accessible performance. It is the strongest nearby 'no excuses' comparator.
Leicester — Cultural Quarter / LCB Depot Empty buildings to creative workspace	Mechanism: a former municipal depot converted into managed creative space and grown into a wider cluster. Luton application: connect the asset register to a mission-led operator and affordable workspace rather than simply identifying buildings.

Gap-specific and cautionary cases

Place and relevance	Mechanism, Luton application and caveat
Wakefield — Tileyard North / Rutland Mills Music and making infrastructure	Mechanism: a music-centred creative campus embedded in a wider waterfront masterplan. Luton application: integrate production infrastructure with mainstream regeneration and an anchor venue. Caveat: £40m-plus and mainly private; not an immediate like-for-like scheme.
Blackburn — Festival of Making / Making Rooms Carnival fabrication and making	Mechanism: a permanent community fabrication facility alongside a free multi-venue festival and artist-manufacturer collaboration. Luton application: establish practical community making capacity as a foundation for longer-term capital development.
Milton Keynes — MK Gallery Public realm and cultural anchor	Mechanism: gallery, auditorium, education and community studio functions anchoring an arts and public-realm district. Luton application: connect anchor investment to public realm and community use. Caveat: use the gallery only, not Milton Keynes' wider new-town economy, as the comparison.
Coventry — City of Culture Trust collapse Governance, coordination and legacy	Mechanism and warning: a highly funded programme failed where governance and organisational resilience were weak. Luton application: do not concentrate delivery and financial risk in one fragile vehicle; require transparent oversight, reserves, diversified income and staged commitments.

Luton need → strongest comparator

Luton need	Strongest comparator(s)
Flexible making space and carnival fabrication	Blackburn; Wakefield; Stoke-on-Trent
Soundproofed music and a live-music pipeline	Bedford; Wakefield
Community ownership of cultural assets	Folkestone; Hastings Commons; Bedford
Empty-building register to affordable workspace	Leicester; Middlesbrough; Make Space Oxford
Diversity, structural inequality and trust	Bradford; Leicester
Gaming and streaming	Stoke-on-Trent / Silicon Stoke
Coordination, governance and legacy	Coventry, as a cautionary case
CAUTION Comparator figures are drawn from the supplied research bank. Financial totals, rents, occupancy and current ownership status should be checked against the relevant primary source at the point of external publication.	

Appendix I: Supplementary Workshop Detail

The following detail records workshop points that sit behind the prioritised actions in Chapter 7. These are recorded as matters for development or confirmation where the notes did not identify a complete decision.

Social value and procurement

- Establish a baseline showing how much regeneration and procurement spend currently reaches Luton-based cultural and creative suppliers.
- Develop and maintain a usable local cultural supplier list, accompanied by clear guidance for suppliers on eligibility, evidence and contracting requirements.
- Build a follow-up process so commitments are monitored rather than ending at contract award.
- Review monthly social-value reporting used by major suppliers, including the Wilmot Dixon example raised in the workshop, as a possible reporting model rather than an agreed requirement.
- Explore the proposed 'social value pound for Luton' concept through an options appraisal covering governance, collection, allocation and reporting.
- Confirm the applicable procurement threshold and contract wording before adopting the workshop suggestion concerning contracts over £100,000; the note is not treated here as verified procurement policy.
- Distinguish project funding, core organisational support and capital investment when designing future cultural funding routes.

Ownership and progression

- Council and Culture Trust set the operating standard; community and strategy partners own and lead the engagement route.
- The Arts and Culture Strategy Group should consider how it can move toward greater independence without leaving accountability or delivery responsibilities unclear.
- The cultural pathway should show how a creative enters the system, develops skills, moves between venues and progresses toward employment or larger-scale presentation.
- Creative representation should be embedded in relevant Pride in Place governance, including Luton Central and Marsh Farm, subject to confirmation of the formal appointment route.

Appendix J: References and Source Notes

This list records the principal published and supplied sources used for strategy alignment, funding context and comparator research. Web sources were last checked on 3 September 2026. Figures marked elsewhere in the report as requiring verification should be checked again against the relevant primary source immediately before external publication.

Luton strategy and local evidence

Luton Borough Council, Luton 2040: A Place to Thrive — Vision 2023–2028.

https://www.luton.gov.uk/Council_government_and_democracy/Lists/LutonDocuments/PDF/luton-2040-vision-2023-2028.pdf

Luton Borough Council, Luton Town Centre Masterplan Framework.

<https://www.luton.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-05/luton-town-centre-masterplan-report.pdf>

Luton Borough Council, Town Centre Delivery Plan and regeneration overview.

<https://www.luton.gov.uk/community-environment/regeneration/redeveloping-luton-town-centre>

Luton Borough Council, Harnessing Momentum: arts, culture and creativity.

<https://www.luton.gov.uk/council-elections/strategies-policies-plans/harnessing-momentum-arts-culture-creativity>

Luton Borough Council, strategies, policies and plans directory. <https://www.luton.gov.uk/council-elections/strategies-policies-plans>

Create Wellbeing, Luton Cultural Space Feasibility Study consultation dataset: 26 practitioner interviews and associated thematic coding (supplied research material, 2026).

Luton Arts Needs Analysis: findings and recommendations (supplied research material).

Night-Time Economy Task and Finish Group: consultation and draft/final reporting material cited in the study (supplied research material).

Creative Space Feasibility Study — Findings and Agreed Direction: meeting note from the 19 June partner session (supplied research material, 2026).

Luton comparator research bank and comparator towns one-page summary (supplied research material, 2026).

Comparator and delivery sources

Creative Folkestone, Creative Quarter. <https://www.creativefolkestone.org.uk/folkestone-creative-quarter/>

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