

# WHEREVER YOU ARE, WHOEVER YOU ARE, THE ARTS ARE YOURS

A Strategy for Joy and Belonging

Created for, with and by the  
Outdoor Arts Sector



This strategy has been commissioned by OutdoorArtsUK, 101 Outdoor Arts and Without Walls. It has been developed by Third Version Creative and supported by Arts Council England.

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**OutdoorArtsUK**

OutdoorArtsUK is a national membership organisation supporting and advocating for high-quality creative experiences taking place in public spaces. [www.outdoorartsuk.org](http://www.outdoorartsuk.org)

**101 Outdoor Arts**

101 Outdoor Arts is a national centre for arts in public space, and is part of Corn Exchange (Newbury) Trust. 101 supports the development, creation and presentation of outdoor work through residencies, artist development programmes and industry events. [www.101outdoorarts.com](http://www.101outdoorarts.com)

**Without Walls**

Without Walls is a network of over 35 organisations presenting the best outdoor arts to people in towns and cities across England. Since its formation in 2007, Without Walls has developed and toured over 200 new shows both in the UK and internationally across 22 countries.

[www.withoutwalls.uk.com](http://www.withoutwalls.uk.com)

**Third Version Creative**

Third Version Creative is an international producing and development organisation supporting artists, producers and cultural organisations through research, strategy and creative programmes. [www.thirdversioncreative.com](http://www.thirdversioncreative.com)

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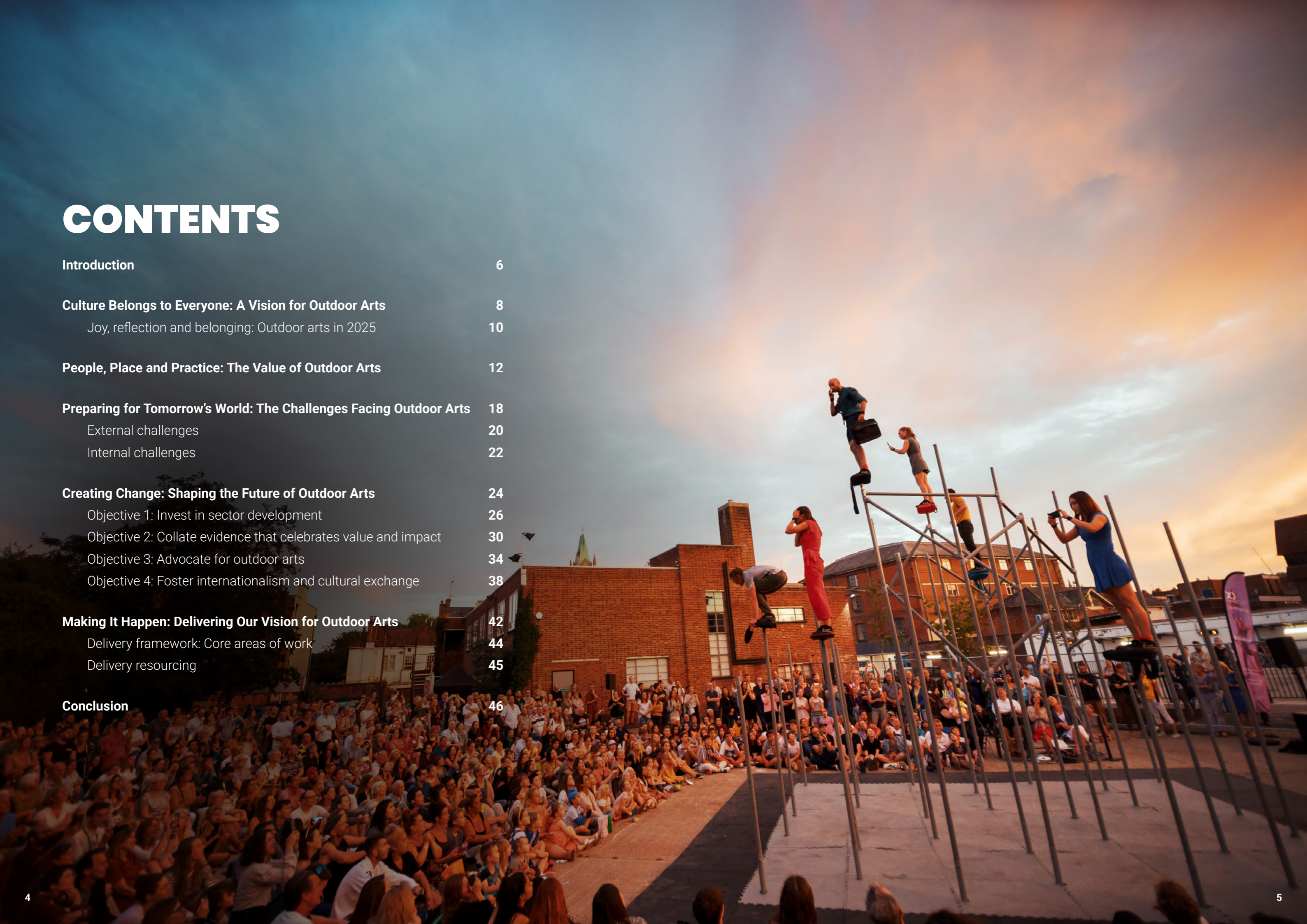
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# INTRODUCTION

Outdoor arts is unique: culture that meets people where they are. It brings high-quality artistic work into the heart of communities, often inviting those communities to help create it – and in doing so, it turns public space into shared space and shared space into civic life.

The outdoor arts sector has a strong and persuasive track record of contributing to local placemaking and regeneration ambitions, and of providing tangible benefits to local economies large and small. It is well placed to make a vital contribution to one of the central questions facing regional and national policymakers:

“How can we make the arts accessible to all so that individuals and communities can reap the social and economic benefits that culture can create?”

But despite this, the outdoor arts sector still struggles for recognition, and remains vulnerable to being left out of funding routes and support systems.

This strategy responds to that reality. It has been created in collaboration by leading voices within the outdoor arts sector, with contributions from key individuals in funding bodies, heritage organisations, groups delivering place-based initiatives, and local and combined authorities. It offers a shared vision and a practical framework to strengthen the sector’s foundations and build its visibility in a bid to secure its future.

The strategy is designed to serve as a collective expression of our identity, and as a tool to help everyone across the outdoor arts sector to collaborate, advocate and lead with clarity, vision and purpose. At its core is a conviction that outdoor arts is a powerful contributor to cultural democracy and a key component of a cultural vitality that must be at the very heart of our towns, cities and communities.

The sense of joy and belonging that outdoor arts brings to communities is needed now more than ever. With this strategy, we invite the outdoor arts sector, and those with a stake in our nations’ cultural life, to join us and help to realise the full potential of this unique and vibrant artform.





# CULTURE BELONGS TO EVERYONE

## A VISION FOR OUTDOOR ARTS

Imagine a society where culture bursts into life in every street, square and green space – lit up by music, colour and story. Whoever you are, wherever you are, outdoor arts invites you to come together, connect and be moved by a shared experience.

Outdoor arts exists to fulfil the simple yet powerful idea that culture belongs to everyone – and public space is where that idea becomes reality.

Outdoor arts is a cornerstone of cultural democracy, often turning people across society into active participants in culture – not only audiences but also performers and artistic collaborators, creating unforgettable art that reflects the stories and experiences of their home towns and cities.

Outdoor arts events and festivals break down the physical, financial and cultural barriers that ordinarily separate artists and performers from their audiences, creating a shared experience like no other in the arts. They strengthen connections between people and place, building civic confidence, local pride and a sense of shared ownership regarding public space. And they can contribute to our vision

of a nation where creativity is woven into communities' everyday lives: visible, shared and accessible to all.

The heart of our vision for outdoor arts is the idea that joy is not merely a fleeting emotion felt by a lone individual – it can also serve as a civic force for good. The joy generated when people gather in public space to experience a beautiful, surprising and moving artwork or participate in a performance or carnival is one of the most effective tools we have for building trust, empathy and social cohesion – not for nothing has outdoor arts been central to every successful UK City of Culture, including the recent Bradford 2025 celebrations. Outdoor arts brings joy to everyone, for free, in the places where they live their lives.

Our vision is built on the belief that outdoor arts can play a central role in shaping healthier, more connected and more imaginative communities.

It can help to forge a society where creativity is understood as a civic good; where communities influence the culture made with and for them; and where shared cultural experiences are recognised as essential to public life.

Outdoor arts takes creativity out of institutions and places it in the shared spaces of everyday life, giving everyone the opportunity to be both an audience member and a co-creator of unforgettable public art.

Defined by innovation, by imagination and by its resonance with the public, outdoor arts belongs at the heart of the UK's cultural future – an essential civic practice that strengthens communities, deepens democracy and makes culture visible, accessible and meaningful to all. This strategy sets out how to make this vision a reality.

## JOY, REFLECTION AND BELONGING: OUTDOOR ARTS IN 2025

Contemporary outdoor arts brings together many traditions – some ancient, some forged within living memory. Civic festivals, carnivals, melas, processions, market fairs, street theatre, site-responsive performance, dance, commedia dell'arte, contemporary circus – all these and more have shaped an artform defined by its relationship with place, people and collective experience.

The last three decades have seen a huge expansion in the visibility and potency of outdoor arts in the UK – inspired both by historic British groups such as Welfare State International and by the success of leading international companies such as Transe Express, Kamchatka, Teatr Biuro Podróży and Legs on the Wall. The work of these groups and others expanded people's understanding of what was possible in public space, while also providing host locations with both economic benefits and an impetus for civic regeneration. Meanwhile, diverse communities have reinvigorated and reinvented cultural traditions through carnival and mela – bringing hundreds of thousands to the streets and reflecting the creativity of our country.

Outdoor arts continues to gather together people of all backgrounds to share unforgettable moments of joy, reflection and belonging. Such moments light up urban locations: from the Notting Hill Carnival to Royal Deluxe's The Sultan's Elephant (London, 2006) and Sea Odyssey (Liverpool, 2012), from the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad to Capital, City and Borough of Culture celebrations.

Outdoor arts also brings engagement and excitement to smaller towns and cities – such as through Light Up the North, whose winter light festivals in the likes of Salford, Wakefield and Wigan delivered an estimated economic impact of £17.5m during 2023–2025<sup>1</sup>. And they take art to rural locations through programmes such as Nature Calling, created with Activate Performing Arts and the National Landscapes Association, the work of Applause to commission new outdoor rural touring projects, and the work of internationally-celebrated landscape theatre company Wildworks.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought even greater prominence to outdoor arts. With venues closed, artists working outdoors became some of the only cultural practitioners able to operate safely, and streets, parks and housing estates quickly became their stages. But the Culture Recovery Fund, launched by the government to address the COVID-inspired crisis in the arts, disproportionately favoured existing and more traditional arts institutions – and left many of the artists, freelance creatives and independent producers who make up a large part of the UK's outdoor arts infrastructure out in the cold.

Brexit has also thrown up new challenges. Until 2016, EU initiatives such as Creative Europe and Interreg, as well as networks such as IN SITU, Circostrada and ZEPA (the European Zone of Artistic Projects), fostered mobility, co-production, skills development and long-term partnerships, helping to sustain decades of artistic innovation. Brexit removed not only funding but also continuity, sharply reducing opportunities for mobility and narrowing creative horizons.

A decade of austerity has further reshaped the environment. Just as local authorities lost arts teams, events budgets and infrastructure, causing a reduction in publicly funded outdoor arts events, so rising costs and high inflation have pushed scale, ambition and reach into retreat.

And yet through every challenge, outdoor arts has continued to reinvent itself. Its resilience comes from the people who make it: artists, producers and communities who keep gathering, experimenting, adapting and asserting that culture belongs to everyone.

Today, outdoor arts is not a single form or tradition but a rich ecology spanning interactive street theatre, procession, installations, large-scale spectacle, contemporary performance, ritual and community-rooted practise.

The diversity of outdoor arts is its strength. It reflects the many ways people create and gather in public space, and it embodies the social, creative and cultural plurality of the UK.



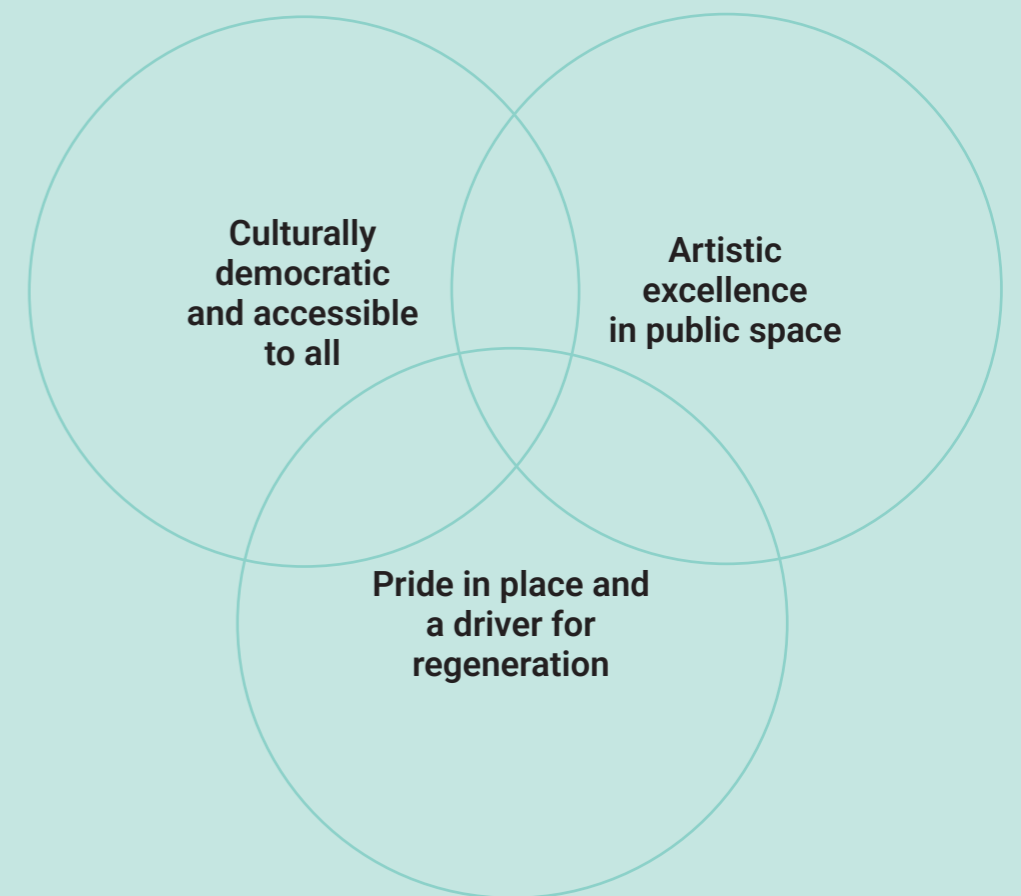


# PEOPLE, PLACE AND PRACTICE

## THE VALUE OF OUTDOOR ARTS

Culture, creativity and the arts are currently being asked to prove their purpose and value to society more than ever before. Outdoor arts offers the perfect riposte to those who might question their importance. It is civic, democratic and profoundly rooted in place. And with investment and support, the outdoor arts sector can share its successes with policymakers, place-makers and the wider cultural sector.

The strength of the outdoor arts sector comes from three interlocking foundations:



Each of these foundations plays a distinctive and irreplaceable role in the UK's cultural life – as this chapter explains.



**Meeting people where they are:  
Culturally democratic and  
accessible to all**

Outdoor arts is one of the UK's most effective gateways to culture. Free, visible, informal and woven into daily life, it removes barriers of cost, confidence and cultural capital. It meets people in the spaces they already inhabit – streets, estates, markets, seafronts, parks and so on – and turns familiar environments into shared stages for unforgettable art.

Outdoor arts is often the first cultural experience for people who may never enter formal arts venues – especially children and young people, many of whose first encounters with culture are through free outdoor arts events, festivals and carnivals presented in the places where they live. It can build confidence, spark curiosity and instil a sense of belonging to cultural life – serving as an open door to culture, one of the few that remains genuinely open to everyone.

**Quality and innovation:  
Artistic excellence in  
public space**

Outdoor arts defines its excellence through resonance and relevance. Its practitioners intimately understand the relationship between their work, its context and its audiences.

This work responds not just to the public and the space where it is presented, but also to external and uncontrollable environmental factors – live and in the moment. Above all, it demands adaptation, accountability and responsiveness from those who create and present artistic work, existing through an implicit contract with the public, who enter into a relationship of trust and exchange with the artists. Outdoor artists know that the public only stays to watch if it wants to.

Innovation thrives in this interdisciplinary environment, which can bring together theatre, dance, circus, visual design,

architecture, puppetry, ritual, light, sound, digital practice and carnival. As widely documented<sup>2</sup>, cross-disciplinary practice is a key driver of cultural innovation. Networks and festivals such as Without Walls, Out There and Inside Out, as well as the Mela Partnership and UK Centre for Carnival Arts, provide the frameworks for artists to test ideas, scale ambitions and take risks in public, while spaces such as 101 Outdoor Arts invite artists to experiment, explore and create.

Outdoor arts can also bring urgent contemporary issues such as identity, inequality and climate change into shared civic space, making them more visible to all. By situating big issues in everyday environments, outdoor arts reframes them as matters of common concern rather than specialist discourse, supporting democratic engagement by enabling people from all walks of life to encounter and respond to complex issues and ideas.



Interest has been continuing to grow among artists in working in public space, driven by the desire to reach wider audiences, respond to social context and work outside traditional institutional constraints. Research has highlighted increased cultural activity taking place outside traditional venues<sup>3</sup>; while more recently, Without Walls has been among the organisations reporting sustained demand from artists seeking to move into outdoor and place-based work.

Outdoor arts naturally involves a higher level of artistic and logistical risk than venue-based work, as artists must contend with everything from unpredictability of public space to the vagaries of the great British weather<sup>4</sup>. What's more, each outdoor arts performance is by definition specific to its local context – meaning that artists must adapt their work for every location and every potential audience. Such creative risk has the potential to deliver substantial artistic rewards<sup>5</sup>.

Outdoor arts is also uniquely scalable – from one-person shows to mass participation events, and from intimate neighbourhood work to spectacles for audiences in the thousands. Few artforms can embed participation across such a wide social spectrum, bringing together people of different ages, backgrounds and levels of prior engagement in a singular shared experience<sup>6</sup>.

## Changing how people feel about place and about each other: Pride in place and a driver for regeneration

Outdoor arts events not only bring economic benefits to the places where they occur – it also transforms how people see the places where they live. When a well-known publicly accessible location – a high street, a riverbank, a housing estate, a national park – becomes a stage for creativity, people's perceptions of that location instantly change: from neglected to alive, from overlooked to valued, from anonymous to shared.

Evidence from large-scale and long-term programmes, including festivals and carnivals, shows that:

- Outdoor arts events and festivals increase civic pride, strengthen belonging and animate local economies<sup>7</sup>.
- Outdoor interventions reshape city identity and accelerate community cohesion<sup>8,9</sup>.
- Major outdoor events can have a transformative economic effect on the places that present them<sup>10</sup>.
- Consistent outdoor arts activity helps residents progress from spectators to volunteers, co-creators and community leaders – building local capacity<sup>11</sup>.

Outdoor arts strengthens people's emotional attachment to the places where they live, increasing their sense of pride and belonging in the locations they know better than any other. It takes everyday spaces and neighbourhoods, the kind that people often take for granted, and reframes them as places with great cultural meaning and emotional resonance<sup>12</sup>.

In addition, outdoor arts supports wider regeneration not through buildings but through relationships – helping people reconnect with place and with each other, and serving as a low-capital, high-impact tool for delivering immediate social and economic benefits while informing longer-term development decisions. It supports hospitality business and night-time economies without the need for major spending on infrastructure, improves residents' perceptions of both the safety and the cultural vibrancy of their towns and cities, attracts visitors, and strengthens local business ecosystems<sup>13</sup>. It helps places imagine themselves differently – and think about themselves with greater confidence.





## **PREPARING FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD** THE CHALLENGES FACING OUTDOOR ARTS

The entire arts sector is facing a wealth of challenges, and outdoor arts is by no means insulated. Outdoor work continues to reach people who don't encounter culture anywhere else, but it does so in an environment that is less stable, less open and less well-resourced than a decade ago. This section discusses some of the key challenges that the outdoor arts sector must overcome, alone or in partnership with others, in order to lay solid foundations for its future growth.

## EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

Many of the external challenges faced by the outdoor arts sector are faced by other organisations across the arts. Others, though, are specific to outdoor arts – and some are already having a negative impact on the sector and those who work in it.

### Reduced budgets and funding

The outdoor arts sector is operating in a cultural landscape reshaped by long-term austerity, rising living costs and shrinking public budgets. Local authorities, many of which have served as the backbone of outdoor events, are now run on survival budgets, with arts and events treated as discretionary spending. Many of the places where outdoor arts has historically flourished – including coastal and market towns, and the rural North and East of England – are now at the highest risk of cultural quietening<sup>14, 15, 16</sup>.

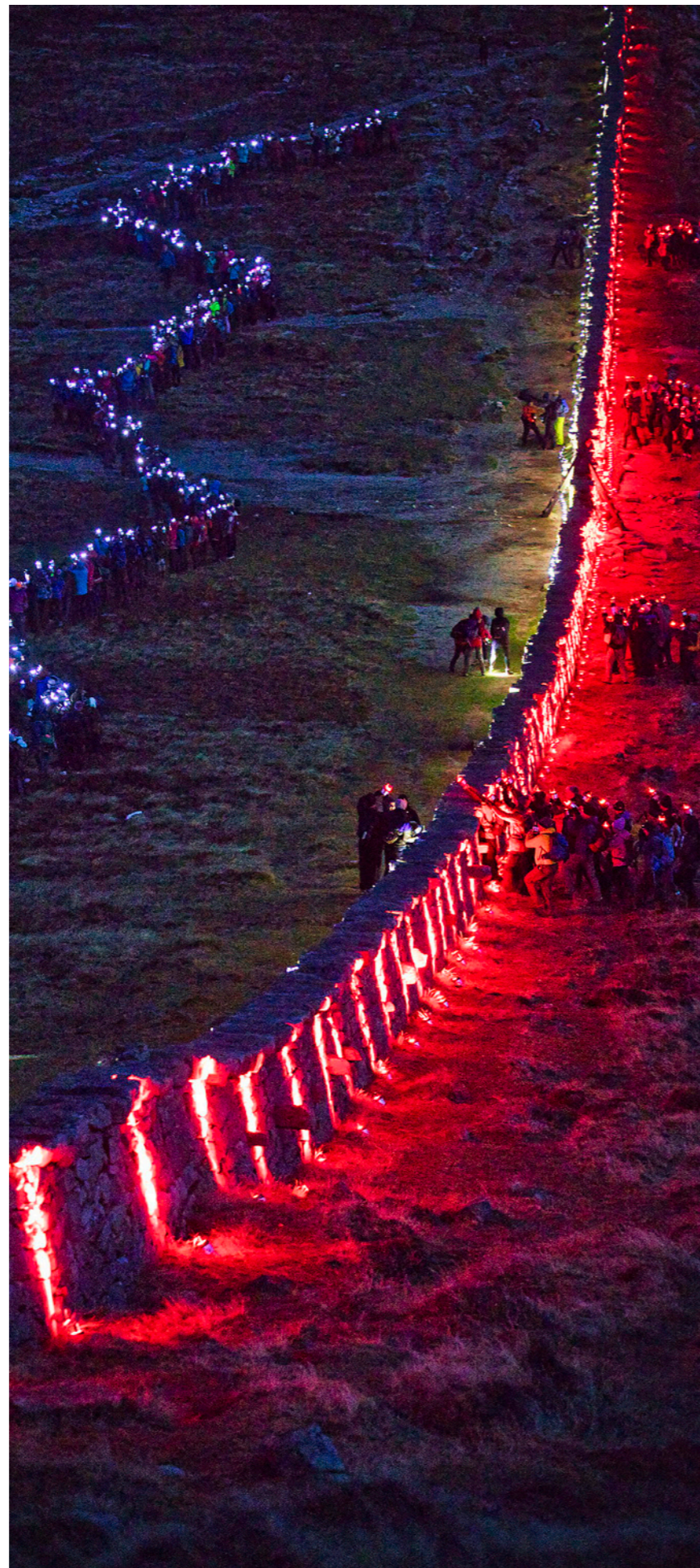
### Inequalities amplified by regional devolution

The increase in devolution within England, from national government to local and combined authorities, is creating new centres of power – and also establishing new inequalities. Some combined authorities are developing bold cultural strategies and commissioning models, but others lack the mandate, the capacity or the confidence to invest.

Outdoor arts connects with many key issues, challenges and ambitions faced or fostered by local government – regeneration, health, civic pride, tourism, education, community development and so on – but too often lacks a clear home in any of them.

### Challenges with space and infrastructure

The very spaces on which outdoor arts depends are under pressure. High streets are hollowing out; civic gathering places are disappearing or being privatised, securitised or commercially controlled; and public space is increasingly treated as an asset to be managed rather than a common good to be shared. At the same time, the already-reduced infrastructure open to artists and arts organisations is under threat due to vastly increased maintenance and operating costs.



### Complex logistics and higher costs

Post-Brexit visa and customs regulations have made international touring and collaboration far more difficult and expensive, particularly for smaller companies – reducing both opportunities for work and opportunities for partnerships with international organisations, as discussed elsewhere in this strategy.

### Climate change and environmental pressures

The accelerating impacts of climate change are reshaping the conditions under which outdoor arts operates and are becoming a more significant and persistent factor in both artistic and operational decision-making.

More frequent extreme weather events, rising temperatures and increasing unpredictability are

affecting the feasibility, safety and scheduling of outdoor activities, while also increasing costs associated with technical adaptation, contingency planning and insurance. Touring and production models developed under more stable environmental and economic conditions are increasingly under strain, particularly for work that relies on long-distance travel, complex logistics or short-term installations.

## INTERNAL CHALLENGES

Alongside these external pressures, outdoor arts carries its own internal tensions. The artform's power comes from holding opposites in balance – spectacle and intimacy, free access and sustainable practice, innovation and continuity, global connection and deep localism. However, these generative tensions are now turning into faultlines, which demand care and support to address.

### Ensuring access for all

The sector's long-standing commitment to free and open access underpins much outdoor arts practice, but sustaining this openness carries practical and structural pressures.

Creating high-quality, accessible work in public space depends on the availability of skilled staff, technical capacity, rehearsal time, safeguarding, partnerships and fair pay. But as funding becomes more constrained and less predictable, responsibility for maintaining public access is increasingly falling on freelancers, small organisations and community-embedded producers.

Evidence also points to an uneven distribution of representation and decision-making across the sector. While outdoor arts frequently engages diverse audiences, the composition of those involved in producing, commissioning and programming decisions needs to better reflect the diversity of the country's population.

### Balancing supply and demand

Interest in outdoor work has grown over the past few decades. Governments, local and combined authorities and other funders have commissioned more new work each year, and more festivals and programmes of work have been developed at the same time.

But despite major investment designed to help meet this demand, costs have soared, fees have tightened or stagnated, touring circuits have weakened – and an increasingly strained sector is struggling to retain skilled artists and professionals who believe that they cannot sustain long-term careers in outdoor arts. With increasingly limited resources available, there is a risk that perceptions of gatekeeping, uneven influence and opaque decision-making can complicate a field that should function as a distributed ecology.

### Demand for innovation

A need and desire for innovation are woven into outdoor arts practice, yet the sector's ecology is being nudged towards tried and tested ways of working. Tight budgets, risk-averse commissioning and a pressure to prove impact are encouraging the repetition of safe formats and known models, even while the industry's rhetoric continues to celebrate experimentation.

There is no shortage of ideas. What's missing, though, are conditions for sustained research and development, safe prototyping and multi-year support, along with both space and resources in event programmes that can support emerging and experimental work.

Knowledge and craft are also too often held tacitly in founder-led organisations, with limited mechanisms to pass them on at scale, creating risks for continuous sector development and succession planning.

### Balancing size and scale

The balance between spectacle and intimacy is increasingly fragile. Large-scale events have always been a key plank of outdoor arts: spectacular, impactful and highly visible experiences that can serve as a centrepiece of wider cultural programmes, commanding political attention and attracting funding. Yet current priorities and financial exigencies are placing the focus on smaller, relationship-led, hyper-local work, for which outdoor artists play a key role in engaging communities with culture.

A well-resourced cultural ecosystem allows for both extremes – yet increasingly, the choice feels forced, threatening the sustainability of both forms. The sector's twin local and international identities are also under strain.

### Tensions between place-based work and touring

Outdoor arts can play a unique role in celebrating place – mining civic and natural histories, creating powerful and resonant local imagery, and bringing artists, audiences and participants together to create one-off site-specific work. These bespoke experiences linger long in the memories of those who experience them but by their nature are ill-suited to remounting in other locations. Maintaining a range of quality, affordable UK work available into the future and sustaining many artists' practice also relies on a healthy touring economy to complement place-based working.



## CREATING CHANGE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF OUTDOOR ARTS

Our vision calls for the activation of public space through art to be treated not as a cultural nice-to-have but as an essential service to society, bringing benefits to businesses, local authorities, communities and individuals alike.

Delivering this vision means investing in the skills, networks and infrastructure that enable artists and producers to work safely, sustainably and ambitiously in the public realm – and so to help guide its delivery, this chapter sets out four key objectives for the future of outdoor arts.

Our objectives outline what we see as the practical steps required to build a fairer, more resilient and more imaginative ecology for outdoor arts. A number of these objectives and their

related recommendations already exist as individual ambitions or targets for many outdoor arts organisations – but this strategy is designed to instil a far greater sense of collective responsibility to help us achieve them together.

This chapter is an attempt to define, much more clearly, the roles that different organisations and partners can play to help achieve the overarching ambitions set out in this strategy.

## OBJECTIVE 1: INVEST IN SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Outdoor arts can only thrive if its foundations are strong: if artists have the skills and time to innovate; if outdoor arts events and festivals can grow over multiple editions rather than living and dying as one-offs; and if there are spaces to facilitate and support the creation of new work with ambition and care.

Strengthening these foundations is essential not just for our sector, but also for meeting the wider placemaking and regeneration goals that outdoor arts is increasingly asked to play a part in delivering. Only with sustained investment in people, programmes and places can the outdoor arts sector meet the civic, cultural and economic expectations now placed upon it.

This objective focuses on building capacity across three interconnected areas:

- **Outdoor arts events and festivals**, which act as civic animators and engines of local participation.
- **Artists and creative processes**, which need specialist frameworks to work meaningfully with people and place.
- **Creation spaces and infrastructure**, which remain unevenly distributed and critically under-resourced.

### KEY AMBITIONS

Greater support, stability and creative freedom for artists, producers and festivals.

A cultural ecosystem that rewards ambition, experimentation and collective responsibility.

Infrastructure that is regionally balanced, sustainable and accessible, fostering creativity, skills development and civic connection.



## OBJECTIVE 1: RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1.1 Strengthen potential support and resilience for existing and new outdoor arts events and festivals

**Why** Outdoor arts events and festivals are the civic animators of togetherness. The benefits that such events provide to society are far greater when they are repeated as opposed to mere one-offs. Given sustained support, festivals can maximise their impact and develop new models for local relevance and civic renewal.

- Implementation pathways**
- Support event and festival organisers in creating new frameworks that can help to maximise artistic excellence, developing new collaboration and partnership models that make best use of existing resources.
  - Support festivals and events to align with multi-year local development strategies, advocating for sustained investment from stakeholders to deliver long-term civic, placemaking and regeneration impacts.
  - Support event and festival organisers, touring networks and other operators to develop community-involvement and local leadership, enabling a range of local voices to contribute to and shape artistic content and relevance.
  - Support festivals to build meaningful partnerships with organisations working in heritage, environment, science, education and other sectors.
  - Support event organisers to develop shared programme frameworks that positively impact areas such as public health, skills training, community cohesion, civic pride and the local economy.
  - Help festivals embed sustainability and environmental stewardship in their work, building resilience and maximising resource efficiency.

### 1.2 Establish a new creation framework that helps artists align with local placemaking and regeneration agendas

**Why** Many frameworks and case studies show the benefits of community-led decision-making for programming and commissioning – but there are comparatively few detailed examples that help artists show how their work can work in synergy with local agendas and ambitions.

- Implementation pathways**
- Create new opportunities for artists to research, develop and document place-based creation processes that align with local placemaking and regeneration priorities, enabling the sector to build from its community-driven roots.
  - Ensure that high-quality local insights into the local context, needs, histories and ambitions are provided as standard within commissioning briefs, supporting artists to work meaningfully with place.
  - Support long-term creation processes, including creative testing environments that are safe and supportive for artists of all backgrounds, to maximise both artistic quality and local impact.
  - Develop national initiatives to test and document place-based creation models across regions, including how they could be adapted for touring or mobility.
  - Amplify the artists' voice in placemaking and regeneration agendas.
  - Show how touring work can align strongly with localised civic strategies, and include them as a priority in the case for greater and more sustained multi-year investment in outdoor arts events.
  - Ensure the range of supported artists are representative of national demographics and that sustainability and environmental stewardship are central considerations in their creative processes.

### 1.3 Secure sustained capital and revenue investment in outdoor arts-specific creation spaces

**Why** There is clear evidence both of a lack of creation spaces dedicated to outdoor arts and of a regional imbalance in terms of where those creation spaces are currently located.

- Implementation pathways**
- Undertake feasibility studies to identify where new creation spaces are most needed, prioritising regions that are under-served by the outdoor arts sector as well as strategic growth areas such as ACE's Priority Places 2021–2027.
  - Upgrade existing creation spaces to improve sustainability, accessibility, capacity and technical infrastructure.
  - Embed low-carbon, circular-design principles and shared-resource models into all new and refurbished creation spaces.
  - Invest in connectivity and digital infrastructure, including hybrid creation and production facilities, to support future-facing artistic and creative practice.



## OBJECTIVE 2: COLLATE EVIDENCE THAT CELEBRATES VALUE AND IMPACT

The outdoor arts sector must be able to articulate its impact with confidence, consistency and authority if it is to secure its future. To do this, it requires more robust evidence – not just data collection but also a shared language and toolkit that help artists, outdoor arts event producers and organisers, local authorities and others to tell a coherent, engaging and exciting story.

The outdoor arts sector already delivers immense public value: strengthening social cohesion, animating public space, improving health and wellbeing, building local pride, supporting creative careers and so on. However, this value is too often discussed only anecdotally or held within isolated local evaluations.

Outdoor arts cannot influence policy at scale, make the case for investment or demonstrate its essential role in placemaking and regeneration without a shared, sector-wide evidence base. It must move from a sector that knows its impact to a sector that can *prove* its impact – credibly, comparably and repeatedly.

The sector's ability to influence the future is reliant on the fulfilment of two major ambitions:

- The development of a unified way of describing the public value of outdoor arts, aligned with the policy priorities that matter to the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), Arts Council England (ACE), local government, regeneration bodies and public health.
- The creation of a cohesive outdoor arts data and research infrastructure – supported by universities and funders, and capable of gathering evidence through longitudinal studies that shows how outdoor arts delivers economic, social and cultural benefits over time.

### KEY AMBITION

Outdoor arts becomes a more data-rich and confident sector, better equipped to advocate for investment and influence.





## OBJECTIVE 2: RECOMMENDATIONS

### 2.1 Build a shared language of public value

**Why** Developing a shared language of public value – covering everything from tangible benefits such as economic impact to intangible benefits in areas such as placemaking, public health and civic pride – would ensure the outdoor arts sector could more clearly demonstrate its impact, and could speak to policymakers and funders with greater authority.

- Implementation pathways**
- Agree a sector-wide narrative that defines outdoor arts' public value in terms that resonate with national and local policy priorities.
  - Establish a shared monitoring framework to document key social and civic benefits, including greater social cohesion, increased civic confidence, and positive changes in audience attitudes and behaviours.
  - Ensure that any definition of public value includes community attributes that are harder to measure or quantify, such as local pride and belonging, cultural literacy and community skills development.
  - Incorporate artist-based and place-based impacts, covering artist career development and wider regeneration/economic benefits.

### 2.2 Develop a cohesive and comprehensive data collection framework

**Why** A unified approach to data collection is essential if the outdoor arts sector is to demonstrate its accountability, present tangible evidence of its benefits, and show funders, stakeholders and the wider public the clear and measurable value of its work.

- Implementation pathways**
- Establish a national research partnership with universities, funders and sector bodies in order to design a cohesive and scalable data collection framework that aligns with public value priorities.
  - Create standardised data tools and methods (surveys, indicators, templates, qualitative methods and so on) that can be used consistently by events, artists and local authorities, ensuring that regions can be compared as far as possible on a like-for-like basis.
  - Establish the importance of longitudinal assessment, tracking the long-term impact of creation processes, touring models and outdoor arts events rather than relying on single-year evaluations.
  - Build shared sector capacity by providing guidance, training and digital infrastructure – including in fast-growing areas such as artificial intelligence (AI) – so organisations of all sizes can collect, analyse and report data effectively and confidently.

## OBJECTIVE 3: ADVOCATE FOR OUTDOOR ARTS

The outdoor arts sector needs a stronger and more unified public voice if it is to secure long-term investment, influence public policy and help to shape the future of towns, cities and rural locations. Bolder advocacy will help others recognise that outdoor arts is essential to cultural life, civic wellbeing, regeneration and the wider creative economy – which means the sector must tell its story with greater confidence, clarity and compelling evidence.

This objective focuses on the need to build the platforms, partnerships and policy mechanisms to help outdoor arts speak with authority at local, regional and national levels. It calls for the development of a shared storytelling framework, greater peer-learning and exchange, stronger sector-wide structures to support sector representation, and the inclusion of outdoor arts within major public policy agendas – from culture and heritage to public health and civic regeneration, and from tourism to the environment and economic development.

### KEY AMBITION

Outdoor arts becomes a more data-rich and confident sector, better equipped to advocate for investment and influence.



## OBJECTIVE 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

### 3.1 Build a bigger and bolder platform to share sector achievements, impact and learning

**Why** A platform that can amplify shared learnings, celebrate successes and connect practitioners, policymakers and communities with the stories and evidence that matter will help to strengthen visibility and collaboration across the outdoor arts sector.

**Implementation pathways**

- Create a sector-wide storytelling framework, allowing all organisations to communicate shared narratives backed by consistent data.
- Publish an annual 'State of Outdoor Arts' report, bringing together national data, case studies and evidence of impact.
- Develop a website to host shared data, tools, metrics and evaluation frameworks, feeding into the National Cultural Data Observatory and Arts, Culture and Heritage Taxonomies (ACHTaxonomies), and make it accessible across the sector.
- Strengthen sector visibility and exchange by establishing a national outdoor arts peer-learning network and launching National Outdoor Arts Awards, celebrating innovation, care, participation and public engagement.

### 3.2 Secure outdoor arts representation in national and regional cultural policy forums

**Why** Outdoor arts remains one of the UK's most accessible and socially impactful art forms, yet it is not consistently given a seat at strategic policy tables. Such representation is essential in order to ensure the sector is visible, valued and supported at levels that reflect its contribution to society.

**Implementation pathways**

- Create national and regional Outdoor Arts Policy Forums to advocate for representation with DCMS, ACE, arm's-length bodies, combined authorities and cultural investment boards.
- Focus through the Forums on embedding outdoor arts in national, regional and local cultural and industrial strategies, including in plans for regional devolution.
- Use the Forums to develop delivery plans that enhance the civic impact of outdoor arts, strengthening collaboration and local leadership within the sector.
- Formalise outdoor arts' position within national frameworks – secure clear categorisation within the structures at DCMS and ACE, and align the sector with the DCMS's Creative Industries Sector Vision to help recognise a growing socially engaged, non-commercial practice.

### 3.3 Embed outdoor arts into wider public policy agendas

**Why** Outdoor arts strengthens communities, activates public spaces and drives both local participation and civic pride. Integrating outdoor arts into broader policy areas – such as regeneration, health, tourism, heritage and the environment – would ensure that these benefits are strategically harnessed to support healthier, more connected and more vibrant places.

**Implementation pathways**

- Build cross-departmental partnerships with NHS integrated care boards, partnerships, heritage bodies, tourism boards and environmental agencies to position outdoor arts within wider public policy agendas, health agendas, regeneration plans, tourism and skills development.
- Create co-investment schemes that link outdoor arts to wellbeing, sustainability, placemaking, community development and other cross-cutting priorities.
- Demonstrate policy alignment by producing guidance and case studies showing how outdoor arts delivers benefits in such areas as health, environment, heritage, tourism and regeneration.
- Develop shared funding models that allow cultural and non-cultural agencies to jointly commission outdoor arts as part of major policy programmes and place-based initiatives.



## OBJECTIVE 4: FOSTER INTERNATIONALISM AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Revitalising internationalism in the UK outdoor arts sector is essential for artistic innovation, for creative livelihoods and for the nation's cultural identity. It supports talent development, strengthens the UK's global cultural presence, extends the touring circuit for UK artistic work and ensures that the outdoor arts sector continues to learn from, contribute to and participate in international practice.

Outdoor arts is and has always been an outward-facing artform, shaped by global traditions, cross-border collaboration and the continual exchange of skills and ideas. Rising costs and new administrative barriers have narrowed creative horizons, eroded long-standing partnerships and made it harder for UK artists to operate on

the world stage – all at a moment when global collaboration feels more important than ever.

This final objective focuses on ways to rebuild the channels through which the UK outdoor arts sector makes international connections: touring pathways and exchange programmes.

### KEY AMBITION

A globally connected, environmentally responsible sector contributing to international dialogue and cultural diplomacy.



## OBJECTIVE 4: RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Re-establish funding channels for international touring and exchange

**Why** International cultural exchange generates significant economic returns and enhances the UK's global reputation. Reinstating funding pathways would allow the UK to remain competitive, visible and influential on the world stage.

- Implementation pathways**
- Continue and develop sector-wide research into the realities of post-Brexit touring, platforming and international engagement to identify barriers, costs and opportunities.
  - Advocate for reinstated or reimagined funding streams for outdoor arts through ACE, the British Council and new bilateral cultural agreements.
  - Develop transitional support schemes to help artists and companies manage visas, carnets, customs processes and administrative demands for international work.
  - Create dedicated funds for international exchange and export support that support touring, showcasing, residencies, co-productions and cross-border collaborations, prioritising equitable access for emerging and regionally based artists.

### 4.2 Strengthen and develop international partnerships

**Why** International partnerships expose artists and organisations to new ideas, practices and perspectives. Re-energising these networks would fuel innovation, support creative risk-taking and deepen shared learning across borders.

- Implementation pathways**
- Sustain and strengthen UK participation in key international networks such as IN SITU, Circostrada, the International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM) and others central to outdoor arts practice.
  - Increase UK visibility at major international platforms and festivals, building on the work done by sector organisations such as Xtrax to ensure artists, producers, and organisations have opportunities to present work and build global relationships.
  - Work with partners in the UK and abroad to develop international collaboration, co-production and reciprocity.
  - Establish regional international labs across the UK to decentralise access to global collaboration, and support multi-year international partnerships so that these labs can host repeat visits and deepen relationships.
  - Create structured exchange programmes, enabling artists and producers from different regions to engage with international peers through labs, workshops and collaborative rehearsals.
  - Develop coordinated sector delegations to international gatherings, enabling shared learning, stronger UK representation and collective advocacy abroad.
  - Facilitate long-term partnership building by supporting UK organisations to host and exchange with international peers, embedding global collaboration into year-round activity.

### 4.3 Encourage more innovative and more sustainable touring models

**Why** Rising costs and climate commitments make traditional touring unsustainable, requiring the exploration of lower-carbon models that protect and enhance artistic ambition and sector resilience.

- Implementation pathways**
- Support slow-travel residencies that prioritise extended stays, low-carbon transport and deeper engagement with local contexts.
  - Invest further in digitally driven creative processes and co-production models that harness the potential of technology to help artists and partners work collaboratively across borders with minimal travel.
  - Develop concept-touring approaches, where ideas, designs and methodologies travel (rather than full productions) and are adapted in response to local conditions, which would reduce the environmental impact of touring.
  - Provide guidance to encourage funding and support for environmentally responsible touring across the sector, embedding sustainability in planning and commissioning.





# MAKING IT HAPPEN DELIVERING OUR VISION FOR OUTDOOR ARTS

The implementation of this strategy must be anchored in robust and transparent structures that are representative of the outdoor arts sector in all its creative diversity and regional variety.

Outdoor arts operates as a distributed ecosystem. Artists, festivals, carnival organisers, producers, local authorities and partners each hold part of the system, and no single organisation can carry responsibility alone.

For this strategy to succeed over the next decade, its delivery must reflect this reality through shared decision-making, cross-sector collaboration and long-term investment models capable of withstanding political, financial and cultural change.

# DELIVERY FRAMEWORK: CORE AREAS OF WORK

We have organised our delivery framework around three core areas of work.

## Core area 1: Governance – Shared and distributed leadership

Purpose: Ensure the strategy remains sector-owned, transparent and representative of the diversity of outdoor arts.

### Mechanisms:

- Establish a rotating Strategy Stewardship Group made up of artists, event organisers, producers, funders and civic partners.

- Embed inclusive governance principles across all structures, ensuring regional balance, lived experience and equitable representation.
- Create annual progress dashboards to publicly track achievements, gaps and next steps.
- Run regular open calls for evidence and feedback to keep the strategy rooted in real practice and sector-wide experience.

## Core area 2: Participation and learning – Collective intelligence in action

Purpose: Build a culture of shared knowledge, collaboration and sector-wide learning that strengthens delivery.

### Mechanisms:

- Develop structures for ongoing collaboration across organisations, regions and scales. For example:
  - Working groups could be established to explore and achieve each of the objectives set out on pages 28.
  - Relevant organisations with the resources should look to support Recommendations 1.2 (Establish a new creation framework for artists), 2.2 (Develop a cohesive and comprehensive data collection framework), 3.1 (Build a bigger and

bolder platform to share sector achievements, impact and learning), 4.2 (Strengthen and develop international partnerships) and 4.3 (Encourage more innovative and more sustainable touring models).

- Anchor implementation in peer-learning networks, specialist working groups and cross-sector exchanges.
- Ensure artists, event organisers, producers, funders and partners have access to open tools, data and guidance developed through Objectives 2 (Collect evidence that celebrates value and impact) and 3 (Advocate for outdoor arts).
- Use learning gathered through pilots, labs and research to refine best practice across the sector.

## Core area 3: Adaptation and review – A strategy that evolves with the sector

Purpose: Keep the strategy alive and able to respond to change without losing direction.

### Mechanisms:

- Use annual data, qualitative evidence and sector feedback to review and adjust priorities.
- Update tools, frameworks and guidance to reflect what is learned through practice and evaluation.

- Introduce iterative improvement cycles, ensuring implementation strengthens over time.
- Maintain flexible structures so regions and partners can adapt delivery to local needs and contexts.

# DELIVERY RESOURCING

Every objective and recommendation in this strategy rests on a simple truth: without serious, sustained investment, none of it can happen.

Outdoor arts has survived for too long on ingenuity instead of adequate infrastructure, on unpaid labour instead of fair conditions, and on short-term grants instead of long-term commitments. Freelancers, small organisations, event organisers and creation spaces have carried risks that should be held by the system, not by individuals.

If the outdoor arts sector is to stabilise and grow, its resourcing model must shift from fragmented, project-based funding to long-term, blended and future-facing investment. Only then can the ambitions of this strategy take root.

## Funding the future

The outdoor arts sector requires stable and patient investment, aligned with public value, if it is to bring this strategy to life. Key priorities include:

- Securing greater commitment to investment from DCMS, ACE, combined authorities and devolved governments to enable the strategic and multi-year planning of events.
- Developing new civic co-commissioning models, embedding outdoor arts across health, heritage, environment, tourism, design and community development.
- Sourcing funding for research through universities and other research bodies in order to help achieve Objective 2 and disseminate its findings.
- Introducing tax relief for free outdoor performance, aligning outdoor arts with established theatre and orchestral relief schemes.
- Building blended finance models that combine public funding, philanthropy, social finance and private-sector partnerships.
- Reconnecting with European and other international cultural funding through bilateral, multilateral or reimagined cross-border agreements.

The outdoor arts sector has the ideas, the talent and the civic mandate. What it now needs is the investment architecture to match its potential.

## Sharing responsibility

We suggest that OutdoorArtsUK could act as the coordinating anchor, working closely with outdoor arts sector groups that represent independent artists and producers, outdoor arts event organisers. This would help to ensure that the nationwide sector moves with a shared purpose, not to say a united voice in advocating for the investment this strategy requires. Delivering this resourcing shift cannot fall to any single organisation – it requires a coordinated sector-wide partnership.

The outdoor arts sector has already proven what it can achieve without either adequate resources or a coordinated, sector-wide strategy for growth. By uniting behind this strategy, and by collaborating as a sector to fulfil its objectives and achieve its ambitions, we could achieve so much more.



# CONCLUSION

Outdoor arts has always been more than just great art. It is a civic act: meeting people where they are, transforming the everyday into the extraordinary, and demonstrating that culture belongs to everyone.

No other artform meets people so directly, responds so sensitively to local context or brings together such a diversity of communities on shared ground. At a time of social fragmentation and uncertainty, outdoor arts offer something uniquely powerful: art made in public, for the public, often with the public.

The benefits this brings are well evidenced. From small local gatherings to festivals, carnivals and major national moments, outdoor arts consistently builds belonging, trust and shared identity. It is not a peripheral part of the cultural ecology, but its most visible and democratic expression.

The ambition of this strategy is to secure a healthy, sustainable future for outdoor arts: to increase recognition of its civic value; to better connect the diversity of voices, practices and places that make up the sector; and to ensure the funding, infrastructure and support needed to continue producing bold, life-changing work. This cannot be achieved in isolation. It depends on collective effort and shared responsibility.

This strategy is not an endpoint but a starting point. It sets a shared direction for the outdoor arts sector, supported by a framework designed to be tested, refined

and strengthened as contexts change. It prioritises collaboration over uniformity and action over hesitation.

Acting together, the outdoor arts sector can continue to lead as both a cultural practice and a civic necessity, helping to build more connected, imaginative and resilient places. The immediate next step is to develop collective stewardship, with shared and transparent governance ensuring the strategy remains sector-owned, accountable, and grounded in lived practice.

Delivering this strategy will require coordinated leadership, long-term investment and a willingness to act. While there is always a risk in change, the greater risk lies in inaction. Without decisive movement, skills will continue to erode, regional imbalances will deepen and the civic impact of outdoor arts will be weakened.

The opportunity is immense. Outdoor arts stand ready to strengthen communities, support regeneration and rebuild cultural confidence across the country by animating public spaces. With the right structures, greater investment and strong yet shared leadership, our sector can flourish: innovating across artforms, reaching more people and helping to shape healthier, more creative places.



