ROYAL SUTTON COLDFIELD
TOWN COUNCIL

Royal Sutton Coldfield:

Cultural Strategy

2026-2036

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Executive Summary

The Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield has a unique heritage, exceptional green assets and a strong sense of civic identity.

This Cultural Strategy provides a clear, shared framework for cultural development in the Royal Town through to 2036. It is informed by engagement with residents, community groups, cultural organisations, young people, faith leaders and businesses, alongside survey findings, stakeholder mapping and interviews. Together, this evidence highlights a Royal Town with a strong cultural foundation and an appetite to strengthen its visibility, coordination and quality so that cultural life better reflects Royal Sutton Coldfield's heritage, landscape and civic pride. As the Town approaches the 500th anniversary of its Royal Charter in 2028, there is an opportunity to articulate a confident cultural vision that reflects the character, quality of life, and long-term ambition.

Royal Sutton Coldfield already benefits from a rich and varied cultural ecosystem, including Sutton Park, the Town Hall, theatres, libraries, schools, faith venues, local centres, and a large voluntary and community sector. Cultural activity is widespread and well supported by local energy and volunteering. However, engagement identified opportunities to bring greater coherence and visibility to this activity, to create a year-round cultural offer befitting the Town's Royal status and potential.

Aim of the Strategy

The aim of this Cultural Strategy is to strengthen Royal Sutton Coldfield's cultural life so that residents and visitors can enjoy a high-quality, diverse and engaging cultural offer. Over the next decade, the Strategy will guide how activity is coordinated, quality is raised, participation is broadened, and partnerships are strengthened. It provides a practical framework for prioritising investment, supporting local talent, and delivering a coherent year-round programme that reflects the character and ambition of the Royal Town.



Vision

To deliver this aim, the Strategy sets out a clear vision for Royal Sutton Coldfield to be:

A Royal Town where heritage, landscape and creativity combine to offer exceptional cultural experiences for residents and visitors, all year round.

Delivery is guided by five thematic priorities, which remain constant throughout the Strategy:

Our Themes:

1. **Royal Town Status and Identity**
2. **A Visible Connected and Cultural Life**
3. **Participation, Inclusion and Community Expression**
4. **Creative Places and Cultural Spaces**
5. **Partnerships, Collaboration and Sustainable Delivery**

Together, these themes provide a flexible framework for decision-making, partnership working and investment, rather than a prescriptive programme. They support a distributed model of delivery in which community organisations, schools, venues, volunteers and partners continue their activity, with the Town Council acting as convenor, advocate and facilitator.

Collectively, the themes set out a shared direction of travel for cultural development in the Royal Town. They focus on increasing the visibility and connection of cultural activity; expressing the Town's Royal status with confidence and securing a lasting legacy of the 500th anniversary (quincentenary) of the Royal Charter; broadening participation so that people of all ages and backgrounds, particularly young people, can take part in and shape cultural life; making full and sensitive use of the town's natural and built spaces to support wellbeing and vitality; and strengthening partnerships that enable sustainable, collaborative delivery over time.

A central ambition of the Strategy is to support a more coherent, visible and year-round cultural offer. Rather than relying on isolated events, it promotes an annual rhythm of cultural events that brings together activity across the town centre, Sutton Park, local centres and neighbourhoods. The quincentenary in 2028 is positioned as an early opportunity to bring this approach to life and to set a benchmark for future programming, while the Strategy's legacy ambitions extend well beyond the anniversary year.

The Strategy is outward-looking and regionally connected. It aligns with the Birmingham Cultural Compact "Delivering for Culture framework", while maintaining a clear sense of Sutton Coldfield's own identity. It recognises the benefit of reciprocal cultural relationships with neighbouring areas and regional institutions and positions the Royal Town as both a valued partner and a distinctive destination within the wider regional cultural landscape.

This Strategy is intended to speak to a wide range of audiences. For residents, it sets out how cultural life will become more visible, accessible and woven into everyday experience across the Royal Town. For community organisations, schools, venues and volunteers, it provides a shared framework that supports coordination, collaboration without prescribing activity. For partners, funders and regional institutions, it presents a clear and credible articulation of Sutton Coldfield's cultural direction, priorities and collaborative ambitions.

This Cultural Strategy is not a fixed plan or a costed programme. It is a living framework that supports coordination, quality and ambition over time. By focusing on partnership, visibility and shared purpose, it provides a credible and achievable route to strengthening cultural life in Royal Sutton Coldfield, ensuring culture plays a central role in civic pride, wellbeing, participation and place for the next decade and beyond.



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LEADER'S FOREWORD



Royal Sutton Coldfield is a town with a proud history, a strong identity and a remarkable sense of community. For five centuries, since the granting of our Royal Charter in 1528, culture, civic pride and public life have shaped who we are and how we live together. As we look ahead to our quincentenary in 2028, we stand at a moment of genuine opportunity: to celebrate our heritage, to honour our Royal status, and to define a cultural future that is ambitious, inclusive and distinctly our own.

This Cultural Strategy sets out a clear vision for how we will do that. It recognises the exceptional assets we are fortunate to enjoy — Sutton Park, one of the largest urban parks in Europe; our historic Town Hall; our theatres, libraries, green spaces and heritage; and above all, our residents and community organisations who give this Royal Town its heart.

But it also acknowledges that we can go further. Royal Sutton Coldfield deserves a cultural offer worthy of its history and potential: clear, outward looking, and reflective of the creativity and diversity of our growing community. This Strategy provides a strong foundation for that next chapter.

I am grateful to the many residents, groups, venues, schools, businesses and partners who contributed their ideas, insights and aspirations. Their voices have shaped a Strategy that is rooted in our community and aligned with the wider cultural ambitions of the city and region.

As Leader of Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council, I am determined that culture will continue to play a central role in the life of our town — strengthening wellbeing, supporting our local economy, celebrating our heritage, and inspiring pride across all generations.

We now have a shared vision and a clear path ahead. Together, we can deliver a cultural future that celebrates our past, enriches our present and secures a worthy legacy for the next 500 years of our Royal Town.

Cllr Simon Ward
Leader,
Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture in Royal Sutton Coldfield is defined not only by formal arts and heritage, but by the lived experiences, traditions, celebrations and creative practices of its communities. It includes how people come together through faith, festivals, education, volunteering, green spaces and shared civic life, honouring the past while creating space for new voices and future expression.

Royal Sutton Coldfield is proud of its history. As one of the few towns in England to hold the Royal title, it occupies a distinctive position in the cultural landscape of the West Midlands and of the wider region. Its ancient Royal Charter, historic conservation area and exceptional green spaces provide a setting that is every bit as impressive as its reputation as one of the most desirable places to live.

This Cultural Strategy sets out how Royal Sutton Coldfield will build on that inheritance and shape the next chapter in its story. Commissioned by Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council, it provides a shared framework for how culture, heritage and creativity will be nurtured, celebrated and promoted over the coming decade.

Strategy

Affirms the Royal Town's unique identity and sense of place

Celebrates the strength and breadth of its existing cultural, community and green assets

Sets a clear vision for how culture will contribute to civic pride, health and wellbeing, education, regeneration and economic vitality

Positions Royal Sutton Coldfield as a leading cultural destination within the Birmingham city region and beyond

Provides context for the quincentenary celebrations

Demographic change is reshaping the Royal Town's cultural landscape. Royal Sutton Coldfield has a population of around 95,000 people, with a median age of 45 years, higher than the national average, and a notable proportion of residents aged 65 and over (around 24%) alongside nearly one in five under 16. This age profile reflects both an established population and the presence of families and young people who contribute to community life.

In terms of diversity, census data shows that around 79% of residents identify with a White ethnic group, with the remainder from Asian, Black, Mixed and other backgrounds, and that the non-white population has grown significantly over the past decade.

Although Royal Sutton Coldfield is one of the least deprived parts of Birmingham, the Strategy recognises that not all residents experience the town's opportunities equally.

This Strategy recognises the importance of ensuring that cultural development reflects and celebrates the full breadth of the Royal Town's communities, supporting participation and expression across generations and backgrounds so that culture continues to be inclusive, relevant and reflective of an evolving local identity.

2. ROYAL SUTTON COLDFIELD: PLACE, PEOPLE AND HERITAGE

2.1 Historical Context



From its early origins as a Royal Manor through to the granting of the Royal Charter in 1528, its story has been shaped by royal favour, strategic location and a tradition of civic leadership.

The influence of Bishop Vesey, whose vision and patronage secured the Royal Charter from Henry VIII, continues to shape Royal Sutton Coldfield's identity. His investment in education, civic life and the built environment laid foundations that can still be traced within the town today. Institutions such as Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, Holy Trinity Parish Church and surviving elements of the historic streetscape around High Street and Mill Street offer tangible connections to a place that has long combined prosperity with public purpose, while subsequent layers of development reflect the town's continuing evolution.



2.2 Sutton Park and the green setting of the Royal Town

Sutton Park is the beating heart of the Royal Town's landscape. Once a Royal hunting ground and now a National Nature Reserve of international significance, Sutton Park gives Royal Sutton Coldfield a setting that very few places in the country can match. Its open heathland, ancient woodland, lakes and wide views provide daily access to nature for residents, as well as a powerful draw for visitors.

The Park is not only an environmental asset; it is a cultural one. Generations of residents have walked, played, explored and celebrated there. From historic fairs and attractions to today's charity runs, family outings and quiet walks, Sutton Park is woven into the fabric of the town providing an ideal platform for outdoor arts, events and festivals across the seasons.

2.3 An Impressive base of heritage and cultural assets

Culture in Royal Sutton Coldfield starts from a position of considerable strength. The town already benefits from a breadth of venues, organisations and activities that would be the envy of many places of a similar size, including:

- **The landmark Town Hall, a focal point for performance, gatherings and civic events**
- **Well established theatres and arts venues, including HIghbury Theatre Centre and Sutton Arts Theatre**
- **A resurgent Royal Cinema and a growing offer of hospitality, cafés and restaurants**
- **Churches, faith centres and schools that host concerts, celebrations and cultural programmes throughout the year**
- **A network of libraries, community centres and clubs that support reading, learning and participation and volunteering**
- **Sutton Park and other green spaces that provide unique settings for outdoor arts, walks, festivals and informal gatherings**



There is a large and active voluntary and community sector, delivering everything from sports and youth activity to heritage trails, environmental projects, festivals and local celebrations. This Strategy aims to bring greater visibility, coordination and support to this existing strength, so that the full richness of cultural life in the Royal Town is recognised and celebrated.

2.4 Alignment with Regional and City Priorities

Cultural participation in Royal Sutton Coldfield already extends far beyond local boundaries. Residents routinely travel to nearby centres for high-quality cultural experiences such as ballet, orchestral performance and theatre at flagship venues including, Birmingham Symphony Hall, The Hippodrome Theatre Birmingham, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, The Alexandra and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

This Strategy aligns with the priorities set out in both Birmingham and the wider West Midlands Combined Authority cultural ambitions while recognising the distinctiveness of Royal Sutton Coldfield.

Joint aspirations include improving visibility and access to culture, nurturing local talent, supporting health and wellbeing through cultural activity and building strong partnerships that benefit residents and visitors.

Royal Sutton Coldfield's cultural relationship with its immediate neighbours offers specific opportunities; Lichfield's cathedral, Tamworth's castle and their festival programmes, and Royal Sutton Coldfield's own green spaces, performing arts, community events and emerging year-round offer together form a natural cultural circuit. This Strategy positions Royal Sutton Coldfield as an active partner, working collaboratively where it enhances access and audience development, and coordinated promotion, while maintaining a clear sense of the Royal Town's character, quality and ambition.

2.5 Royal Sutton Coldfield as a Cultural Venue

One of the clearest opportunities is the ambition for Royal Sutton Coldfield to become a recognised satellite location for leading regional cultural institutions.

The ambition is not to replicate the scale of these regional institutions, but to complement them. By hosting selected outreach performances, touring productions, exhibitions, residencies and collaborative programmes, Royal Sutton Coldfield could offer high-quality cultural experiences locally, enabling residents to stay within the Royal Town while enjoying work of regional and national significance. This approach strengthens access, reduces travel barriers and increases the visibility of Royal Sutton Coldfield.

Through joint programming, shared audience development and coordinated promotion, Royal Sutton Coldfield could become a natural extension of the region's cultural offer. This model supports residents by bringing exceptional culture closer to home, while also positioning the Royal Town as a valued partner within the broader cultural ecology of the West Midlands and its immediate neighbours.

2.6 Stakeholder mapping and civic partnerships

Royal Sutton Coldfield benefits from a broad and active cultural ecosystem, involving civic bodies, charitable trusts, heritage organisations, venues, community groups, schools, voluntary associations, faith organisations, businesses and artists.

A stakeholder mapping exercise undertaken in summer 2025 identified more than 420 organisations contributing to the cultural life of the Royal Town. While these groups vary significantly in scale, they collectively represent a substantial cultural infrastructure that few towns of similar size can match.

The mapping highlighted several key strengths:

- **Sutton Park, together with the town's extensive network of green spaces, gives the Royal Town an unparalleled natural setting for outdoor events, wellbeing activities and environmental culture.**
- **Well established venues including Sutton Coldfield Town Hall, Highbury Theatre Centre, Sutton Arts Theatre, and an array of faith and community buildings**
- **Strong educational institutions (primary, secondary and further education) that already deliver extensive cultural, musical and performing arts programme**
- **Sutton Coldfield Heritage Network is a volunteer run, community group which promotes and supports local history and heritage, partnering with all interested groups, venues and individuals**
- **A large and diverse creative workplace living in the Royal Town, despite limited formal local creative infrastructure**
- **Emerging networks, including local arts forums and neighbourhood cultural initiatives such as Boldmere Futures, which demonstrate strong appetite for collboration**

Alongside these strengths, the stakeholder mapping highlighted opportunities to strengthen coordination and visibility across Royal Sutton Coldfield's cultural ecosystem. Many organisations operate independently, with cultural information spread across multiple platforms, making it harder for residents and visitors to discover what is on offer. While local centres host vibrant activity, these are not yet fully connected into a wider town-wide cultural narrative.

This Strategy responds by strengthening partnership working, improving the visibility of cultural activity and supporting better coordination across the ecosystem, helping Royal Sutton Coldfield's cultural life to be more clearly connected, celebrated and confidently presented as part of the Royal Town's future.

3. ENGAGEMENT AND EVIDENCE BASE



This Strategy has been shaped by engagement with residents, young people, community organisations, cultural venues, faith groups, businesses and creative practitioners across the Royal Town. That engagement confirmed Royal Sutton Coldfield's strong cultural foundations, including a high quality of life, exceptional green assets and an active community culture, alongside a shared ambition to build on these strengths over the next decade.

Feedback consistently focused on moving from good to great. Participants called for clearer visibility of cultural activity, stronger coordination between organisations, greater use of Sutton Park and the town centre, and a broader range of family-friendly and locally accessible events. While survey responses were weighted towards existing participants in cultural activity, young people and residents from global majority backgrounds were under-represented.

Demographic change in the Royal Town reinforces the importance of inclusive future development. Full engagement findings are provided in Appendix 1 and underpin the priorities set out in this Strategy.

3.1 Introduction to the themes

The following themes are grounded in the strengths of Royal Sutton Coldfield's existing cultural life, informed by engagement with residents and partners, and aligned with the Town Council's strategic priorities. Each theme reflects a clear area of opportunity to enhance visibility, broaden participation, strengthen partnerships and elevate the quality of cultural experiences across the Royal Town.

These themes set out how this Strategy will be delivered in practice. Each theme combines ambition, direction and measures of success, offering clarity without prescription. Taken together, they are intended to help different audiences understand their role in strengthening Royal Sutton Coldfield's cultural life, whether as participants, organisers, partners or supporters, while allowing activity to remain locally led and responsive.



THEME 1: ROYAL TOWN STATUS AND IDENTITY

Ambition and Context

Royal Sutton Coldfield will build a cultural identity that is unmistakable, distinctive and worthy of its Royal Charter, celebrating its heritage while presenting an assured, future-focused outlook. The Royal Town's history, landscape and civic story will be brought confidently into public view through high-quality cultural expression, blending heritage with contemporary creativity and strengthening Royal Sutton Coldfield's profile within the wider region.

The quincentenary provides a powerful catalyst to articulate Royal Sutton Coldfield's story with clarity and pride, but the ambition extends well beyond a single year of celebration. This theme focuses on ensuring the Royal Town's identity is expressed consistently across cultural programming, public spaces and communications, reinforcing a strong sense of place and securing a lasting cultural legacy beyond 2028.

Delivery Priorites

- Embed Sutton Coldfield's Royal status and heritage within cultural positioning and storytelling.
- Support high-quality programmes and events that create a strong, recognisable identity for the Royal Town.
- Enhance the presentation of the public realm to reflect civic heritage.
- Use the quincentenary as a catalyst to showcase excellence and generate long-term cultural momentum.

Measuring Success and Key Indicators

Success will be reflected not simply in the scale of quincentenary activity, but in the extent to which it strengthens long-term cultural confidence, visibility and identity. Evidence of progress will include sustained cultural programming inspired by the quincentenary, continued collaboration between cultural, civic and educational partners, and heritage interpretation that remains visible and accessible beyond 2028.

Key indicators may include:

- Heritage trails, digital interpretation established or enhanced.
- Ongoing post-2028 programmes of festivals, volunteering and youth participation.
- Stronger and more durable partnerships formed through quincentenary delivery.
- Sustained cultural visibility and programming aligned with regional cultural frameworks.

THEME 2: A VISIBLE, CONNECTED CULTURAL LIFE

Ambition and Context

Royal Sutton Coldfield will cultivate a more visible, cohesive and connected cultural offer that reflects the Royal Town's identity and enhances the experience of residents and visitors alike. Cultural activity will be easy to discover, clearly communicated and consistently presented across the town, supporting better coordination between organisations and a more assured sense of Royal Sutton Coldfield as a place where culture is active, accessible and valued year-round.

The Royal Town has a diverse cultural landscape, from Sutton Park and heritage assets to the Town Hall, theatres, libraries, local centres and community groups. The opportunity now is to strengthen visibility and connection across this landscape so that cultural life feels easy to find, easy to join and clearly part of everyday life in Royal Sutton Coldfield.

Delivery Priorites

- Strengthen visibility and coordination through shared communications and a consistent "what's on" presence.
- Develop a more connected cultural landscape linking Sutton Park, the town centre and local centres.
- Enable collaboration through forums, networks and shared platforms.
- Position Royal Sutton Coldfield as a destination within the wider region through improved signposting and partnerships.

Measuring Success and Key Indicators

Success will be evident where cultural activity across the Royal Town is easier to find, better connected across places and organisations, and more consistently presented as part of Royal Sutton Coldfield's identity. Increased recognition of the Royal Town as a place where culture is present year-round, both locally and beyond, will provide further signals of progress.

Indicative measures of success include:

- Increased awareness of "what's on" among residents
- Use and reach of a centralised cultural communications platform
- Improved cross-promotion between venues, organisations and local centres
- Growth in digital engagement, including social media and newsletters

THEME 3: PARTICIPATION, INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY EXPRESSION

Ambition and Context

Royal Sutton Coldfield will broaden participation and create opportunities for all communities to celebrate, share and express their cultural identities as part of the Royal Town's evolving story. Cultural life will actively welcome people of all ages, backgrounds and neighbourhoods, with a strong emphasis on enabling children and young people to participate, lead and develop creative skills, and on ensuring that cultural activity reflects the full diversity of Royal Sutton Coldfield's communities. The Royal Town is home to both established and emerging communities, each contributing to a rich and changing cultural landscape. Schools, faith groups and community organisations already play a vital role in cultural expression, from festivals and performances to everyday creative activity. This theme focuses on strengthening participation pathways, supporting volunteering and intergenerational activity, and ensuring that cultural opportunities feel relevant, welcoming and accessible across the Royal Town.

Delivery Priorites

- Enable a wider range of cultural expression across communities, neighbourhoods and age groups.
- Support volunteering, youth participation and intergenerational activity.
- Work with schools and community groups to showcase emerging talent and celebrate cultural diversity.
- Ensure major events and festivals are inclusive, accessible and reflective of Royal Sutton Coldfield's communities.

Measuring Success and Key Indicators

Success will be reflected in sustained or increased participation in community-led cultural activity, stronger involvement of schools, youth groups and young people in festivals and programmes, and greater visibility of diverse cultural traditions and forms of expression across the Royal Town. Over time, progress will be evident where cultural opportunities feel welcoming, relevant and embedded within everyday community life.

Particular attention will be given to participation pathways for children and young people, with success indicated by clearer progression from participation to volunteering, leadership or creative development, and stronger collaboration between cultural organisations and educational settings.

Key indicators may include:

- Growth in diverse cultural events, festivals and activities.
- Increased participation across all age groups, particularly children and young people.
- Increased activity within local centres and neighbourhood-based programmes.
- Growth in volunteering for cultural and community events.
- Higher levels of cultural engagement identified through follow-up surveys or feedback.

THEME 4: CREATIVE PLACES AND CULTURAL SPACES

Ambition and Context

Royal Sutton Coldfield will make the most of its outstanding natural and built assets, ensuring cultural activity is rooted in high-quality, welcoming and well-used spaces across the Royal Town. By strengthening the role of culture within Sutton Park, the town centre, local centres and neighbourhood venues, this theme supports wellbeing, social connection and local economic vitality, creating places where people choose to spend time, participate and return throughout the year.

The Royal Town benefits from a range of cultural and civic spaces, including Sutton Park, the Town Hall, Highbury and Sutton Arts theatres, libraries, community venues and local centres. This theme focuses on maximising the use and quality of these assets, encouraging creative programming, temporary uses and partnerships that enhance vibrancy while respecting the character of each place. Well-used cultural spaces reinforce Royal Sutton Coldfield's identity, strengthen pride in place and support an enhanced public realm.

Delivery Priorites

- Enhance cultural use of, the town centre and local centres through high-quality programming, together with a sensitive cultural offer in Sutton Park.
- Strengthen the role of the Town Hall, Highbury and Sutton Arts theatres libraries and community venues as hubs of cultural activity.
- Support temporary, pop-up and flexible cultural use of enhanced public spaces and underutilised venues.
- Improve wayfinding and physical connections between key cultural assets.

Measuring Success and Key Indicators

Success will be reflected in increased and sustained use of cultural and civic spaces for events, performances and participatory activity, alongside positive feedback on the quality, atmosphere and accessibility of those experiences. Over time, progress will be evident where cultural activity contributes to stronger place identity, increased local footfall and more consistent use of spaces throughout the year.

This theme will also be measured through the extent to which cultural activity supports the vitality of the town centre and local centres, encourages people to spend time locally, and enhances Royal Sutton Coldfield's reputation as a place with attractive, well-used and distinctive cultural environments.

Key indicators may include:

- Increased frequency and diversity of cultural activity in the town centre and local centres.
- Sustained use of civic and community venues for cultural purposes across the year.
- Positive audience feedback on the quality and atmosphere of cultural spaces.
- Improved wayfinding, visibility and connections between cultural locations.
- Evidence of increased footfall and dwell time linked to cultural activity.

THEME 5: PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATION AND SUSTAINABLE DELIVERY

Ambition and Context

Royal Sutton Coldfield will strengthen cultural partnerships across the Royal Town and the wider region and immediate neighbours, building the foundations for sustained delivery and long-term impact, through better coordination, shared purpose and proportionate governance. This theme supports collaboration between community organisations, venues, schools, businesses and regional partners, ensuring cultural activity is resilient, well-supported and able to evolve over time.

Cultural life in the Royal Town is already delivered through a wide and active ecosystem of organisations, volunteers and partners. This theme focuses on strengthening how those relationships function, improving coordination without centralising control, and supporting delivery models that are realistic, collaborative and sustainable. The emphasis is on enabling partnership rather than directing activity, ensuring that culture continues to thrive through shared ownership and collective ambition.

Delivery Priorites

- Strengthen coordination and shared purpose through the Cultural Forum and local networks.
- Support organisations to access funding, skills development and volunteer support.
- Build reciprocal partnerships with regional cultural institutions and neighbouring areas.
- Use proportionate governance and shared learning to maintain momentum and adapt over time.

Measuring Success and Key Indicators

Success will be reflected in stronger, more confident partnership working across the cultural ecosystem. Over time, this will be evident through increased collaboration, clearer roles, shared initiatives and improved capacity to deliver cultural activity sustainably.

Progress will also be seen where organisations report greater benefit in working together, improved access to external funding or expertise, and a clearer sense of collective direction. Governance arrangements will remain light-touch, with learning and review supporting continuous improvement rather than compliance or reporting burden.

Key indicators may include:

- Evidence of joint programming, shared promotion or collaborative initiatives.
- Increased participation in the Cultural Forum and partnership networks.
- Successful funding bids or investment secured through collaborative approaches.
- Stronger links with regional institutions and neighbouring cultural centres.
- Partner feedback indicating improved coordination, clarity and confidence.

4. QUINCENTENARY 2028
A ROYAL CELEBRATION FOR A ROYAL TOWN

2028 marks the 500th anniversary of the Royal Charter granted to Sutton Coldfield by King Henry VIII. This milestone offers an exceptional opportunity to celebrate the town's heritage, identity and civic story, and to showcase the enduring qualities that have shaped the Royal Town for centuries. It provides a moment to bring Royal Sutton Coldfield's history into sharper public view, and to share it with residents, visitors, and future generations.



The anniversary year provides a natural platform for testing new ideas, strengthening local partnerships, raising the profile of Royal Sutton Coldfield's cultural offer and demonstrating what a more vibrant, visible and connected cultural life could look like. Activity developed for the quincentenary will help build momentum for the longer-term themes and priorities set out in this Strategy.

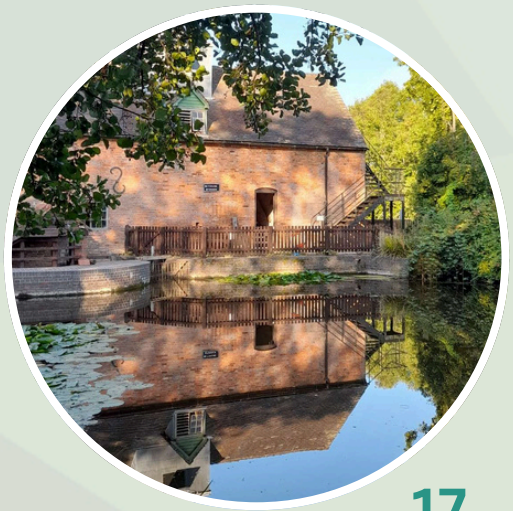
The engagement findings on what participants would like to see in the quincentenary celebration are included in the Trueman Report: Cultural Strategy Engagement Appendix 1.

5. DELIVERING THE STRATEGY



Building on the strengths, challenges and opportunities outlined in Appendix 2, delivery of the Strategy will be grounded in partnership, coordination and shared ownership. The Strategy does not seek to replace or centralise existing activity; rather, it provides a shared framework to support, connect and enhance what is already happening across the Royal Town.

In practical terms, this Strategy is designed to be used rather than simply read. Community groups and cultural organisations should be able to see how their work aligns with the themes and priorities set out here. Schools and youth organisations should find clearer pathways for participation and collaboration. Partners and funders should be able to identify shared ambitions and opportunities for joint working. The Town Council's role is to support these relationships, helping activity to connect, flourish and sustain over time.



Partnership working will be central to implementation. Where appropriate, the Town Council will help broker relationships with regional institutions, neighbouring areas and funders to bring additional high-quality activity, expertise and opportunity into Royal Sutton Coldfield. Delivery will be phased and responsive, allowing priorities to evolve in line with capacity, opportunity and community interest.

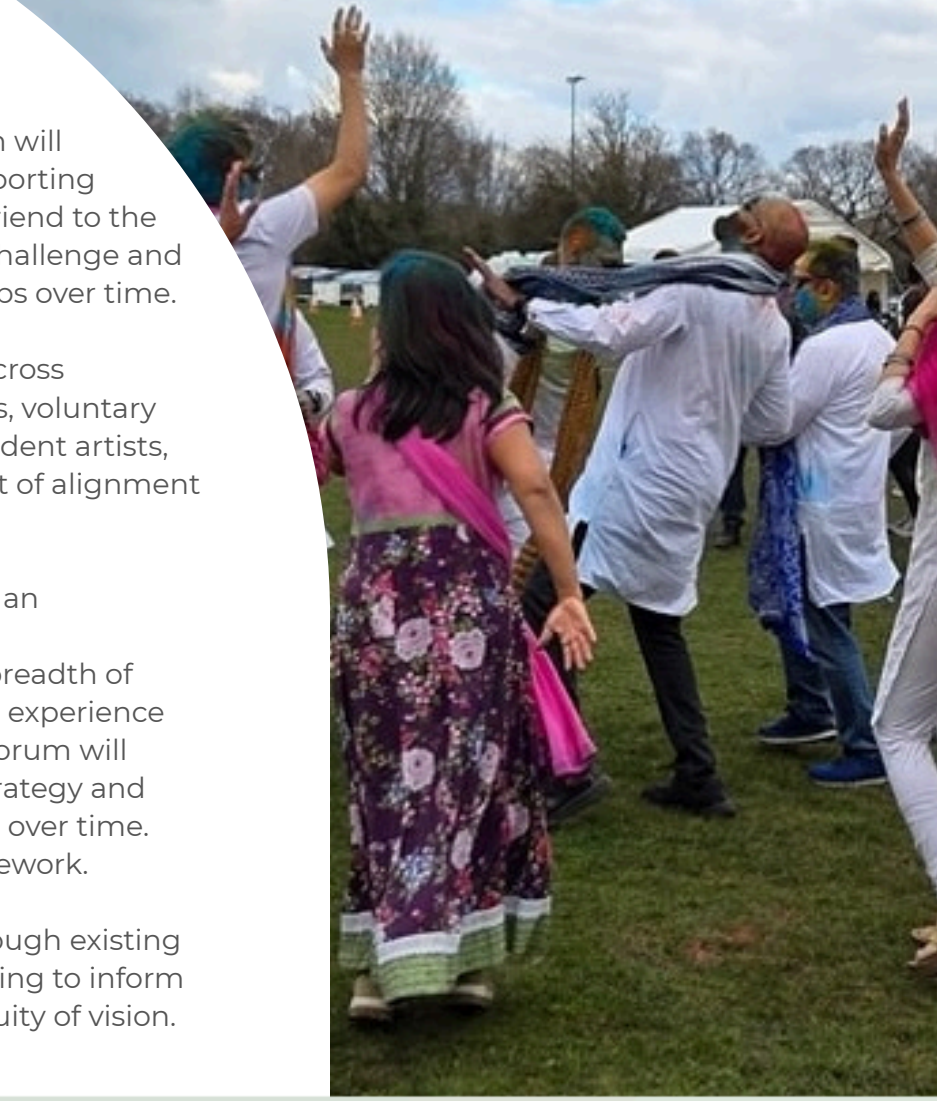
5.1 Cultural Forum

The Royal Sutton Coldfield Cultural Forum will continue to play an important role in supporting delivery. Its purpose is to act as a critical friend to the Strategy, providing insight, constructive challenge and shared learning as cultural activity develops over time.

Cultural delivery will remain distributed across community organisations, venues, schools, voluntary and faith groups, businesses and independent artists, with the Strategy providing a shared point of alignment rather than a prescriptive programme.

As the cultural landscape evolves, there is an opportunity to strengthen the Forum's representativeness so that it reflects the breadth of communities, cultural traditions and lived experience across the Royal Town. A more inclusive Forum will strengthen collective ownership of the Strategy and support better informed decision-making over time. The Strategy will function as a living framework.

Progress will be reviewed periodically through existing partnership arrangements, allowing learning to inform future priorities while maintaining continuity of vision.



5.2 Pride in Place Programme

The Strategy will complement the Pride in Place programme, which sets out a plan to create safer, healthier neighbourhoods where communities can thrive.

PRIDE IN PLACE
LED BY YOU – BACKED BY UK GOVERNMENT

5.3 Alignment with the Town Council's Strategic Plan

The Strategy directly supports the priorities set out in the Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council Strategic Plan 2024–2028, particularly commitments to celebrate arts and heritage, regenerate the town centre, and sustain thriving, healthy communities. Culture provides a practical means of delivering these ambitions in visible and engaging ways.

- Representing our community most effectively
- Regenerating the Town Centre
- Planning for a sustainable future
- Preserving and enhancing Sutton Park
- Delivering more services locally
- Celebrating local arts, heritage & culture
- Sustaining thriving and safe local communities

5.4 Annual Programming and the Cultural Calendar

A central ambition of the Strategy is to support a more coherent, visible and year-round cultural offer. Rather than focusing on individual events in isolation, delivery will emphasise how activity across the Royal Town is brought together into a recognisable annual cultural calendar.

The annual programme will balance indoor and outdoor activity, participation and attendance, and family-friendly, intergenerational experiences across the seasons.





5.5 Quality, Ambition and Development

Building on strong grassroots delivery, the Strategy supports a gradual move from good to great where communities wish to do so. This may include partnerships with professional organisations, mentoring and skills development, collaborative programming or opportunities to pilot new formats and audiences.

The aim is to support cultural activity to grow and evolve sustainably, without undermining its community-led character.

5.6 Resourcing and External Partnerships

Delivery will be supported through a mix of existing resources, partnership working and external funding. In many cases, improved coordination and visibility will deliver immediate benefit. Where additional investment is required, the Strategy provides a clear framework that aligns with key potential funders' priorities and strengthens Royal Sutton Coldfield's case as a credible destination for cultural investment.

5.5 Review and Adaptation

The Strategy will be kept under review to ensure it remains relevant, realistic and responsive. Learning from delivery will inform future priorities and partnerships, supporting continuous improvement while avoiding unnecessary reporting or rigid targets.



6. NEXT STEPS



This Cultural Strategy sets out a clear framework for the future of culture in Royal Sutton Coldfield. It recognises the strength of what already exists: an active civic culture, committed volunteers, strong heritage assets, valued venues and a community that cares deeply about place. At the same time, it is honest about the opportunity ahead: to strengthen quality, coordination and visibility so that culture becomes a defining and widely recognised feature of the Royal Town's identity.

The Strategy is not a fixed programme or a prescriptive plan. It is a shared reference point that brings together ambition, values and practical direction, allowing cultural activity to grow organically while being better connected, supported and championed. Its success will depend not on the creation of new structures, but on the confidence with which existing partners, organisations and communities use it to shape decisions, attract investment and collaborate more effectively.

The quincentenary in 2028 provides a significant opportunity to bring this Strategy to life. As a moment of heightened visibility and civic focus, it offers a platform to test new approaches, strengthen partnerships and demonstrate the role culture can play in shaping place, pride and participation. The legacy of that period should not be defined by individual events alone, but by the stronger cultural infrastructure, relationships and confidence that remain afterwards.

Implementation will be iterative. Priorities will evolve as capacity, funding and partnerships develop, and as new ideas and communities come forward. The Town Council, working alongside its partners, will use this Strategy as a living document: revisiting it periodically, learning from experience and responding to change while holding fast to the long-term ambition it sets out.

Ultimately, this Strategy reflects a shared commitment to ensuring that Royal Sutton Coldfield is not only a place with a proud past, but a Royal Town that is assured in its identity, ambitious in its cultural offer and welcoming to all who live, work and visit here. Through collaboration, confidence and care, culture will continue to play a central role in shaping the town's future.



Appendix 1 Royal Sutton Coldfield Cultural Strategy Engagement

REPORT SUMMARY

1. Strategy Development

The development of the Strategy drew upon:

- Eight facilitated engagement workshops
- An open cultural survey, completed by 274 respondents
- Stakeholder mapping that identified more than 420 organisations active in culture, heritage, sport, community life and volunteering
- A programme of targeted stakeholder interviews with strategic partners, cultural leaders, community organisations and civic institutions
- Supplementary analysis of previous reports, demographic data and national/regional cultural policy documents

2. Survey insights

Survey respondents expressed strong pride in Royal Sutton Coldfield's identity and landscape. However:

24% **Only 24 percent** described the current offer as good or excellent

61% **61 percent** reported that they do not receive enough information about what is happening

42% **42 percent** said they would participate more if the range of activities matched their interests

Participation is strongest for cinema, food and drink events; weakest for multicultural, heritage, visual arts and environmental activities

Residents frequently travel elsewhere for arts, exhibitions, heritage and theatre — indicating unmet demand locally

Barriers include information, accessibility, cost and evening transport. Word of mouth and social media remain the dominant information channels.

3. Workshop findings

Across all workshops, several consistent themes emerged:

Identity and pride
Royal Sutton Coldfield's Royal status, heritage, green spaces and distinct identity matter deeply to residents. Many would like to see these attributes promoted more.

Connectivity and coherence
There is a strong desire for connections — physically (park to town centre), socially (between groups), and informationally (clear, centralised communication).

Vibrancy and visibility
Residents want more festivals, more colour, more creativity and a clearer presence of culture in everyday life.

Inclusion and diversity
While the town is perceived as safe and welcoming, participants stressed the need for cultural activity that reflects all communities, all ages and all neighbourhoods.

Young people as co-creators
Young people stressed that they want to participate, lead and contribute — not simply watch.

Town centre renewal
Many stakeholders view culture as essential to a more vibrant, confident and experience-led town centre.

Legacy
Residents and organisations want cultural development to be sustained, not sporadic — especially around the quincentenary.

These findings strongly shaped the Strategy's five thematic priorities.

4. Stakeholder mapping

The stakeholder mapping exercise revealed a rich cultural ecosystem.
Key insights include:

- Over 420 organisations delivering activity across heritage, sport, arts, culture, faith, events, volunteering and community life
- A strong educational sector, with schools and colleges delivering extensive arts, music, drama and cultural enrichment
- A variety of venues hosting performances, concerts, community groups and learning
- Heavy reliance on small volunteer-led organisations, often at capacity
- A lack of a single cultural narrative tying these assets together

This Strategy responds directly by prioritising coordination, communication and a shared Royal Town cultural identity.

5. Stakeholder interviews

A series of interviews with key civic and cultural figures provided deeper strategic insight.
Key themes included:

- Strong support for elevating the Town's Royal status
- The need for better partnership working
- A strong desire for culture to animate the town centre
- Commitment to youth leadership, talent pipelines and skills development
- The quincentenary should have a lasting legacy

6. How evidence shaped the Strategy

The engagement and evidence base directly informed the Strategy's vision, themes, aims, delivery priorities, and the framing of the quincentenary.

It therefore reflects both the aspirations of the Royal Town and the realities of how culture is currently experienced. It provides a coherent response that builds on strengths while addressing the clear gaps identified by residents, partners and stakeholders.



Appendix 2 Strengths and Challenges

1. Strengths and Challenges

Royal Sutton Coldfield enters this Strategy from a position of strength. The Royal Town is widely considered one of the most desirable places to live in the region, with exceptional green space, high performing schools, strong civic pride and a thriving network of community organisations. These factors provide an enviable foundation for a cultural offer of real distinction.

2. Strengths

A Royal Charter
Few places in the country have a Royal Charter

Exceptional green and natural assets
Sutton Park, together with the town's extensive network of green spaces, gives the Royal Town an unparalleled natural setting for outdoor events, wellbeing activities and environmental culture

Strong community energy and volunteering
The Royal Town benefits from a large, active and committed civic and voluntary sector. More than 420 organisations contribute to community life, underpinned by strong levels of volunteering, mutual support and local pride

Well-established cultural and civic venues
The Town Hall, Highbury and Sutton Arts theatres, the Royal Cinema, libraries and faith venues form a diverse and flexible cultural infrastructure that already supports participation across all ages

Schools with high educational attainment.
Local schools provide extensive arts and cultural enrichment, with strong appetite for collaboration, leadership and talent development

Thriving local centres
Boldmere, Mere Green, Walmley, Wylde Green and other centres each contribute distinctive character, hospitality and community engagement, offering multiple platforms for cultural activity across the Royal Town



3. Challenges and Opportunities

While the Royal Town is exceptionally well positioned, delivering the full ambition of this Strategy requires collective action to address a small number of challenges. These challenges are not reflections of weakness, but opportunities for the community, partners and volunteers to shape the future cultural life of the Royal Town together.

3.1. Coordinating a large and active ecosystem
The Royal Town benefits from a rich tapestry of organisations, venues, clubs, schools and groups. The scale of this ecosystem means coordination is essential to ensure opportunities are aligned, visible and mutually reinforcing. Strengthening coordination is an opportunity to maximise shared impact, avoid duplication and enhance the Royal Town's cultural identity.

3.2. Information, communication and visibility
Residents consistently expressed a desire for a clear, and reliable source of information about events and activities. Developing a unified cultural communications platform will help the whole community participate more fully and ensure local organisations receive the visibility they deserve.

3.3. Volunteer capacity and sustainability
Much of the Royal Town's cultural life is delivered through volunteer leadership. While this is a major strength, it also means that time, capacity and sustainability can be stretched. Supporting volunteers with coordination, training and manageable expectations will help secure the long-term health of the community sector.

3.4. Funding and external pressures
Cultural organisations across the UK face increased financial pressures due to wider economic conditions outside local control. Developing collaborative funding approaches, strengthening partnerships and securing sponsorship for major events — particularly the quincentenary — will be key to unlocking opportunities.

3.5. Time and governance
Large-scale cultural programmes, including quincentenary activity, require coordinated project management, clear governance structures and sufficient lead-in time.

3.6. Regional and citywide context
As part of the wider Birmingham and West Midlands cultural ecosystem, the Royal Town could align with regional priorities and opportunities while maintaining its distinctive identity. This is both a challenge and a strategic opportunity to promote the Royal Town within the region.