

Counting Culture



Prosperity & Purpose

The Case for the Cultural and
Creative Sector in Greater Essex

**MADE IN
ESSEX**



Taking the pulse of the Greater Essex creative powerhouse

Greater Essex is a county defined by its restless energy, ancient roots, and infinite reach. From the Roman heartbeat of Colchester to the trailblazing neon of Southend, culture and creativity are the very fabric of our lives and the economic heartbeat of our communities, connecting the lives of the 1.9 million people who call our county home.

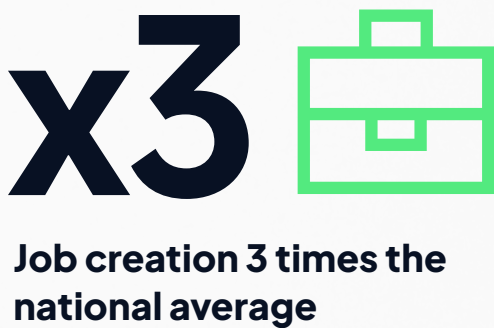
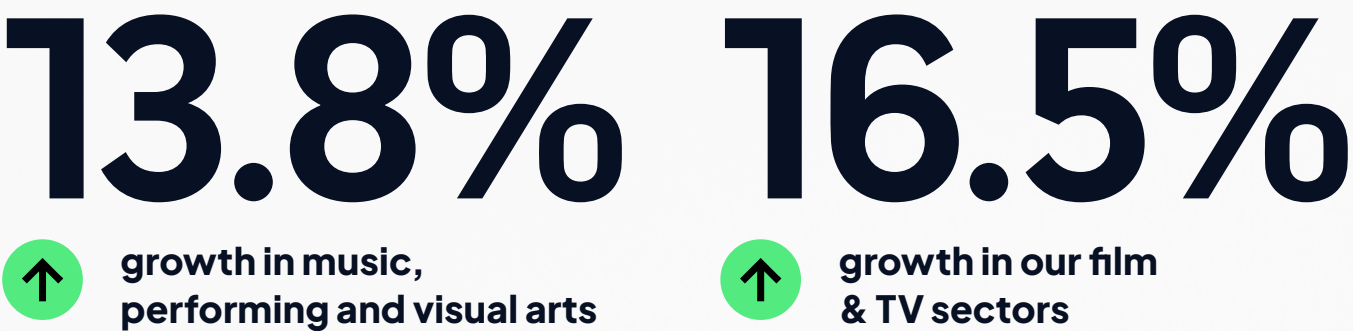
Nationally, the cultural and creative industries are titans of the economy, contributing £124.6 billion annually¹ – larger than the aerospace, automotive and life sciences sectors combined. Greater Essex’s creative and cultural sector is a landscape of bold innovators—a county of makers and risk-takers – and here in Greater

Essex, we aren’t just participating in this boom; we are well-positioned to lead it.

With a 36,000–strong creative workforce² outpacing the national average, and 91%³ of our residents actively engaging in culture, our reach is truly universal. From the production powerhouse of the Thames Estuary to the film sets of the West, from the venues, museums and galleries of Colchester, Southend and Chelmsford to Harlow’s pioneering innovators, and Basildon’s digital and design excellence, we are driving strong economic growth, building profound social resilience, and nurturing healthier residents.



Blur show live in Colchester Arts Centre



Executive summary

Culture and creativity bring us together

9 out of 10 people get it

1.4 million adults—91% of the entire adult population⁴—engage with culture in Greater Essex.

Outperforming sport

That’s more than double the number of people estimated to have attended a league football match in Greater Essex in 2024/25.

The tourism magnet

54.2 million⁵ visitors were attracted to the region last year, contributing £3.5 billion to the local economy.



Economic velocity and productivity: our key characteristics

Our high-growth sectors

The film and TV sector surged by 16.5% across 2020–2023, while music, performing and visual arts grew by 13.8%⁶.

Our productivity premium

Every creative worker generates nearly twice the economic value of the average worker in other local sectors.

A sector of job creators

Creative employment in Greater Essex is expanding at three times the national average.

The multiplier effect

Every £1 spent on a cultural ticket generates an additional £2.50 to £4.00 for local restaurants, hotels and transport⁷.

An innovation and production powerhouse

At the crea-tech frontier

42% of our creative businesses are already operating at the intersection of creativity and technology, such as CGI and video games⁸.

The Estuary opportunity

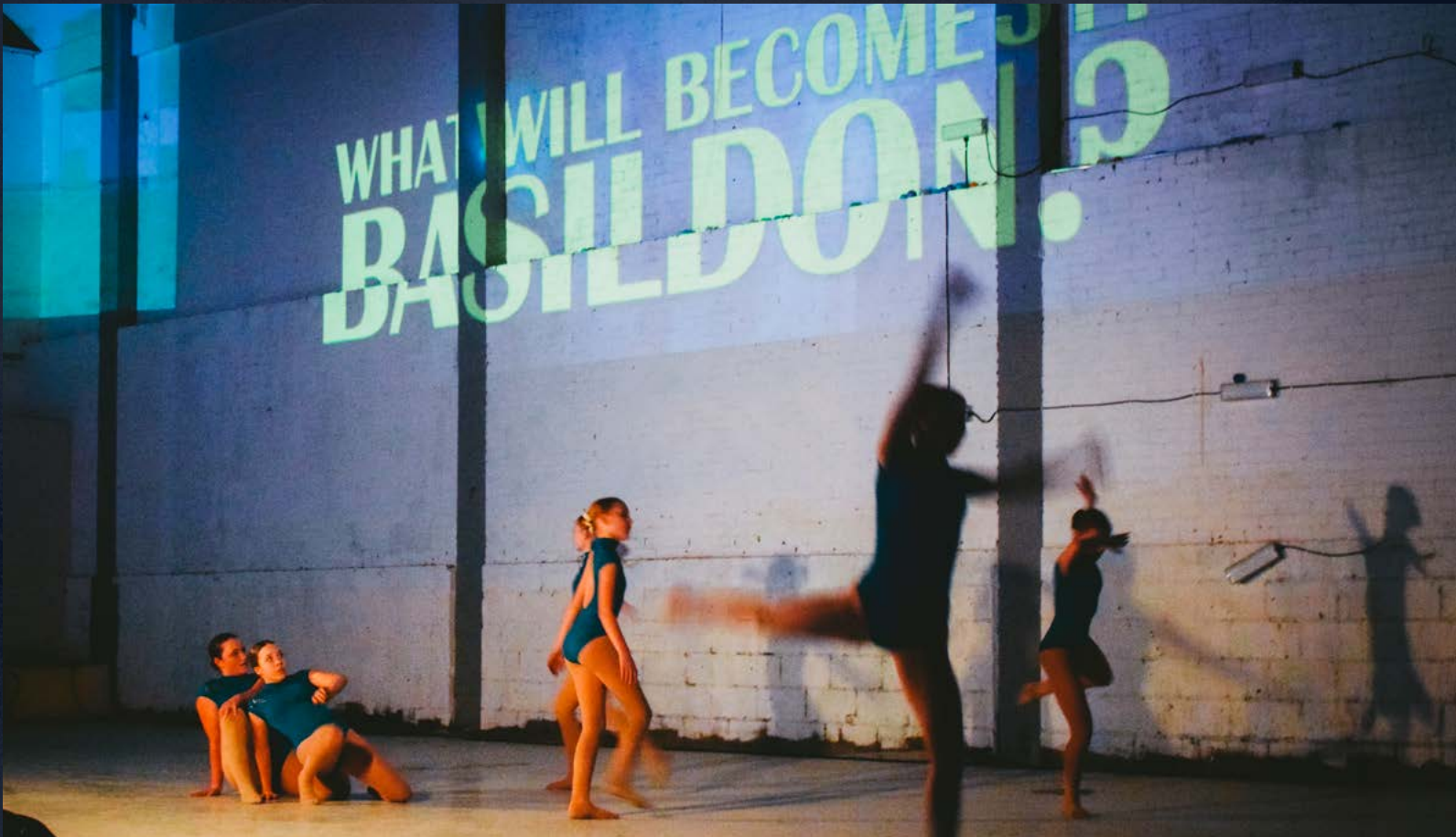
The Thames Estuary Production Corridor is projected to create 50,000 new jobs and £3.7 billion in annual GVA⁹.

Made locally, but thinking globally

20% of our creative businesses are already active exporters¹⁰.

An entrepreneurial ecosystem

96% of the county’s 6,360 creative businesses are micro-enterprises, driven by independent creators and freelancers¹¹.



A new social prescription: our health and social ROI

We’re public health pioneers

53 major creative health initiatives are currently being delivered to tackle poor mental health, loneliness and aging, making us creative health pioneers.

The ultimate resilience booster

66% of people who engage with these creative health programmes report a significant contribution to their personal resilience¹².



The resounding heartbeat of Greater Essex

From the Roman foundations of Colchester to the neon lights of Southend and the quiet backwaters of the Estuary, culture and creativity are woven into everyday life for the vast majority of people living in Greater Essex.

Creativity and culture bring us together

In 2024/25, 1.4 million adults across Greater Essex—91% of the population—engaged with culture either in person or digitally. An impressive 1.2 million people attended a cultural event, more than twice as many as went to a league football match that year¹³.

Future makers and risk takers

Last year, 100,000 children took part in cultural programmes in Greater Essex, building creative confidence and tech skills needed for tomorrow’s high-growth jobs¹⁴.

54 million tourists

Last year, Greater Essex attracted an incredible 54.2 million tourists, who contributed approximately £3.5 billion to the local economy¹⁵.



Turning ‘places to live’ into ‘places to belong’

Across Greater Essex, culture and creativity are what gives a postcode its positive personality, giving meaning to, and putting smiles on the faces of, the people who live here.

From ‘somewhere I live’ to ‘somewhere I belong’

In cities, towns and villages, culture and creativity directly elevate people’s quality of life, nurture a profound sense of rootedness and civic pride, combat isolation and encourage social cohesion and mobility.

Driving high street regeneration

From Tendring and Chelmsford to Southend and Thurrock, our work is a proven model for cultural-led renewal, reducing vacancy rates and demonstrating that imagination and ambition are the most potent fuel Greater Essex has.

Space that matches our ambition

Our ambition is outstripping the infrastructure, and there’s huge demand for new creative workspace. We are ready to build and to grow; we just need more space.



Entrepreneurialism runs through our DNA

Greater Essex’s creative and cultural sector is a driving force for innovation and entrepreneurial know how. We are a county of makers and risk-takers.

A 36,000-strong creative workforce

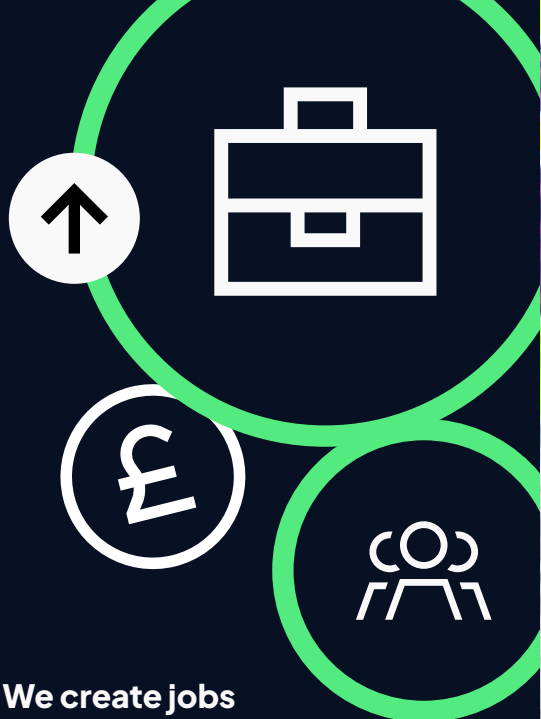
From the film sets of the West to our coastal digital studios, we boast a workforce larger than many traditional industries.

A workforce of agile entrepreneurs, not corporate monoliths

96% of our 6,360 creative businesses are micro-enterprises and a third of our workers are freelancers¹⁶.

We create jobs

Creative industries are a major driver of employment growth in Greater Essex, with jobs expanding at three times the national average.



We’re about high-velocity productivity and global reach

Moving faster than the world around it, the creative and cultural sector is already a major driver of economic growth across Greater Essex: a powerhouse for growth.



Outpacing the market

While other regional industries stall, Greater Essex’s film and TV sector growth surged by 16.5% in recent years, and our music, performing and visual arts sectors by 13.8%¹⁷.

We’re super-productive

Every member of our creative and cultural sector workforce generates nearly twice the economic value of the average worker in other local sectors.

Built to last

A striking 81% of local creative businesses reported stable or improved performance last year, proving ours is an enduringly resilient sector¹⁸.

Made locally, but thinking globally

20% of creative businesses are already exporters, meaning that much of what’s made in Essex already has a global stage¹⁹.

The multiplier effect: we’re powering the wider economy

Culture acts as the ‘economic oxygen’ for our high streets and hospitality sectors, generating a massive return on every pound spent.

A magnet for inward investment

We are a premier destination for the UK’s £6.27 billion film and TV industry; productions like The Crown create millions of spend on local logistics, technical trades and hospitality.

The £3.2 billion heritage and tourism ‘wow factor’

Our heritage and tourism sites are the primary life support for rural and coastal communities, outperforming manufacturing and pumping £3.2 billion into the regional economy²⁰.

Keeping the hospitality tills ringing

For every £1 spent on a theatre or museum ticket, an additional £2.50 to £4.00 is generated in the local economy through ‘ancillary spend’ on restaurants, hotels and transport²¹.





The future frontiers: tech clusters and a production powerhouse

We are anchoring the high-value industries of tomorrow by bridging the gap between creativity, technology, and local talent.



Breaking the tech frontier

With crea-tech already accounting for 42% of our creative businesses, Greater Essex is fast becoming a hub for CGI, gaming and design innovators.



The £3.7 billion Estuary opportunity

Through the Thames Estuary Production Corridor, we anchor a world-class production hub that will create 50,000 new jobs and an extra £3.7 billion in annual GVA²².



Reversing the ‘brain drain’

Culture gives our brightest minds a reason to plant roots, ensuring the next generation of innovators – and their skills, entrepreneurialism and spending power – remain here.

A new social prescription: creative health in action

In Greater Essex, our creative and cultural sectors aren’t just building a richer county — we’re building a healthier one.

Social prescribing: a foundation stone for health and wellbeing

In Greater Essex we are pioneers in ‘creative health’. With 53 major initiatives being delivered, we’re teaming up with health colleagues to tackle poor mental and physical health, loneliness and the challenges of an aging population²³.

It’s working too

In our communities, two-thirds of people who engage with creative health programmes report a direct increase in their personal resilience²⁴.

Tackling health inequalities

Across Greater Essex, creative health programmes act as a ‘leveller’, reaching people from diverse populations often missed by traditional health services.



ABOUT



Counting Culture is the creative sector’s blueprint for how we can help unlock the full potential of Greater Essex. At a time of unprecedented local and regional change, it provides the clear, united voice needed to influence the decisions that will shape the county’s future.

We’re coming together because the sector is ready to lead. As we move towards a new Mayoral landscape, deeper devolution arrangements and significant local government reform from 2027, the choices made now will determine how culture is supported, funded and positioned for years to come. Without coordinated advocacy, a sector of this scale and impact risks being under-recognised at precisely the moment its contribution is most needed.

Counting Culture meets this moment with purpose. It sets out:

- a clear, evidence-driven case for culture’s role in prosperity, health and place-making
- a shared set of priorities for growth, investment and infrastructure
- a coherent voice for a sector that spans hundreds of organisations, disciplines and communities

- a practical framework that supports decision-makers to embed culture in economic planning, regeneration and public service delivery

The programme has two parts:

1. **The Case (April 2026)**
– this document: a definitive, data-rich narrative demonstrating the sector’s full economic, social and civic value.
2. **The Prospectus (July 2026)**
– a forward-looking investment proposition shaped with those working inside the sector, setting out the opportunities Greater Essex is ready to seize.

Grounded in extensive engagement and reflecting Made in Essex’s collaborative ethos, Counting Culture ensures that culture is not an afterthought in the next phase of regional leadership, but a strategic asset at the heart of Greater Essex’s ambitions.

ABOUT



Working together to unify the creative sector, amplify our collective voice and enable better collaboration.

Our membership spans the full breadth of the sector — from hyper-local creative networks and grassroots practitioners to sub-sector bodies, and national portfolio organisations operating across every corner of the county.

We were set up in response to conversations with creative and cultural leaders across Greater Essex. Partners agreed unanimously that the creative economy has huge growth potential but is hampered by a lack of unified voice and cross-boundary cooperation.

Vision & Mission

A more vibrant, resilient, and connected creative and cultural sector in Essex.

Made in Essex exists to do two things:

Firstly, to create a united and cohesive voice for the county’s creative and cultural sector, in order to influence and inform strategy, policy and investment decisions.

Secondly, to increase collaboration by making it easier for people in our sector to work in partnership and share information, resources, knowledge and best practice.

We do this because we are stronger together and because collaborating is more fun than working alone.

For more information visit:
www.MadeinEssex.org.uk

Credits

We would like to thank our Advisory Group and External Advisors for their support.

Advisory Group

AJ Scrutton, Dlala Studios
Claire Gevaux, Culture Chelmsford
Emma Edmundson, TOMA
Samantha Glover, Healthwatch Essex
Grace Hart, Creative UK
Lorraine Cox, Creative Estuary
Rob Sharp, Museums Essex
Roxie Curry, Start Thurrock
Steve Mannix, Mercury Theatre

External Advisors

Julia Gregory, Greater Essex Business Board
Natalie Jones, Arts Council England
Trevor MacFarlane, Culture Commons
Martin Prendergast, Martin Prendergast Communications

Designed by Creative Coop, a worker-owned design studio based in Colchester who also developed the Made in Essex and Counting Culture visual identities.



Sources

¹[DCMS, Gross Value Added Estimates, 2022.](#)
²[Essex Creative Evidence Report, Culture Essex, 2025.](#)
^{3, 4}[Participation Survey 2024–25 Annual Publication, GOV.UK, 2025.](#)
⁵[Visit Essex, Tourism Worth £3.5bn, 2024.](#)
^{6–8}[Essex Creative Evidence Report, Culture Essex, 2025.](#)
⁹[Thames Estuary Production Corridor: Case for Investment, London.gov.uk, 2020.](#)
^{10, 11}[Essex Creative Evidence Report, Culture Essex, 2025.](#)
¹²[Mapping Creative Health in Essex, Creative Lives, 2025.](#)
¹³[Participation Survey 2024–25 Annual Publication, GOV.UK, 2025.](#)
¹⁴[Arts: Taking Part Survey 2019/20, GOV.UK.](#)
¹⁵[Visit Essex, Tourism Worth £3.5bn, 2024.](#)
^{16–19}[Essex Creative Evidence Report, Culture Essex, 2025.](#)
²⁰[Importance of Past, Eastern Arc, 2025.](#)
²¹[Essex Creative Evidence Report, Culture Essex, 2025.](#)
²²[Thames Estuary Production Corridor: Case for Investment, London.gov.uk, 2020.](#)
^{23, 24}[Mapping Creative Health in Essex, Creative Lives, 2025.](#)
²⁵Ibid

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Page 2 Blur Live Show Colchester Arts Centre Phoebe Fox Newspaper	Page 7 Global Village Essex Cultural Diversity Project Jo Nancarrow
Page 4 Care Contractors Creative Basildon Luke Bligh	Page 8 T100 Purfleet Walk Kinetika Mike Johnston
Page 5 What will become of Basildon Creative Basildon Alfie Winters	Page 9 Theatre Technician Chelmsford Theatre Lucy Hogger
	Page 11 The Thank You Dance (Platinum Jubilee Pageant) Kinetika Matt Crossick

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