

# Culture Strategy

2026 – 2028

**The best of culture, creativity, events and experiences**



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## 1. Why Culture Matters in Chorley

### A strategy built on evidence and engagement

This Cultural Strategy is the result of a deliberate, staged process rather than a standalone exercise. A comprehensive programme of research, mapping and consultation has been undertaken to establish a robust, independent evidence base for future cultural development.

This research work brought together:

- Mapping of cultural, creative and heritage activity across the borough
- Engagement with cultural organisations, volunteers, creative practitioners and partners
- Analysis of participation, funding, infrastructure and digital maturity
- Alignment with local, regional and national policy contexts, including Chorley's Destination Management Plan.

This ensures that the strategy is grounded in lived experience, sector insight and data, rather than assumptions or short-term priorities. It also provides a shared foundation for dialogue with partners and stakeholders, many of whom contribute significantly to Chorley's cultural life, operating outside direct council provision.

This strategy translates the research and findings into a clear narrative, a set of priorities and a delivery approach. It represents the next stage in an ongoing conversation with communities and partners and provides a strong platform for future investment, funding bids and decision-making through to 2028. It sets out a detailed, place-based vision for culture in Chorley from 2025–2028. It responds directly to the research work undertaken and is designed to sit alongside, and strengthen, Chorley’s Destination Management Plan (DMP).

The strategy is intentionally time limited, with local government reorganisation anticipated following this period. It focuses on actions that can be realistically delivered now, while also positioning Chorley as a confident, distinctive cultural place within any future unitary authority. Rather than being a holding document, this strategy is a statement of intent: it articulates Chorley’s cultural identity, clarifies priorities, and sets out how culture can drive place-making, regeneration, wellbeing and the visitor economy.

This strategy also establishes a clear foundation for Chorley’s Town of Culture ambition. Whether or not Chorley secures the Town of Culture designation, the process of applying, planning and piloting activity will become a catalyst for strengthening the borough’s cultural ecology, telling Chorley’s story more boldly, and embedding culture more deeply into everyday life.

## **2. Our vision for Chorley**

Chorley Council is committed to ensuring the borough is in the best possible position for the future. This strategy, along with the DMP, provides an ambitious framework to drive forward Chorley’s vision of:

**Enabling strong communities, a resilient economy, excellent services, a greener future and successful people.**

Embracing the borough’s unique assets, experiences and heritage, we have set out to grow our visitor economy and boost community pride, positioning Chorley as:

**The best of Lancashire, all in one place.**

More than just a badge or a strapline, this concept embodies the borough’s mix of historic treasures, vibrant markets, countryside retreats, family friendly attractions, large scale events and central location in Lancashire.

By 2028, Chorley will be recognised as a confident, distinctive cultural place where culture is not hidden behind buildings or institutions, but lived, shared and experienced across town centres, villages, parks and everyday spaces.

Chorley's cultural strength lies in participation: in amateur theatre and music, in village halls and libraries, in markets and parks, in heritage cared for by volunteers, and in creative activity embedded in daily life. This strategy champions that strength and turns it into a visible, coherent cultural identity.

### **Culture in Chorley will:**

- Be something people do, not just something they attend
- Strengthen pride of place and belonging
- Animate regeneration and public spaces
- Support wellbeing, skills and the visitor economy
- Position Chorley as a confident cultural partner within Lancashire

This vision is deliberately ambitious. It sets Chorley up not only to deliver between now and 2028, but to make a compelling case for Town of Culture status and to influence cultural priorities beyond local government reorganisation.

## **3. Chorley: Context, place and people**

### **Context**

This strategy aligns with:

- [Chorley's Destination Management Plan 2025–2030](#) – utilising culture as a driver of place, identity and boosting the visitor economy. This plan is reliant on a strong cultural sector - and the opportunity to further develop a compelling offer will benefit visitors and residents alike.
- Chorley Council's [corporate priorities](#), specifically the themes of 'An enterprising economy with vibrant local centres in urban and rural areas' and 'Healthy, safe and engaged communities'. Our cultural programme will support wider council policies and objectives for example equality and inclusion, improving health and wellbeing and reducing social isolation.
- Lancashire wide visitor economy and cultural strategies to ensure Chorley is well positioned for partnership working, investment and advocacy at a county and sub-regional level.
- [Town of Culture](#) ambitions and assessment criteria

- Anticipated [Local Government Reorganisation](#)

Culture is positioned as core infrastructure for place-making and identity, supporting regeneration, community cohesion and economic resilience rather than operating as a standalone service.

## **Place**

Chorley's distinctiveness lies in the relationship between its historic market town centre, surrounding villages and exceptional natural landscape. From Astley Hall and Park to Rivington Terraced Gardens, from the market to village halls, culture in Chorley is experienced across everyday spaces rather than concentrated in a single cultural quarter.

The borough has a strong tradition of participation: amateur theatre, live music, choirs, craft groups, heritage societies and youth provision play a central role in cultural life. This participatory culture, combined with high-quality heritage assets and a growing programme of large-scale events, gives Chorley a cultural profile that is rooted, welcoming and community-facing.

There are a good number and a variety of cultural venues in Chorley, including:

- Built heritage assets such as:
  - Astley Hall
  - Hoghton Tower
  - Heskin Hall
  - Brinscall Baths
- Natural heritage assets such as
  - Leeds-Liverpool canal
  - Astley Park
  - Cuerden Valley Park
  - Rivington Terraced Gardens
  - Rivington Pike
  - Liverpool Castle
  - Pigeon Tower
- Venues that regularly host cultural activities such as
  - Chorley Theatre
  - Astley Hall and Astley Coach House
  - Chorley Town Hall
  - Chorley Market and 1498

- Inspire Youth Zone
- Libraries
- Independent retailers for example Ebb and Flo, Heskin Hall Shopping Village, Hepplestone Fine Art, Bygone Times, Rivington Brewery, Brindle Distillery – all places with history and unique stories
- Informal venues like bars and pubs, and a range of other settings from churches and community centres to school halls and gardens
- A high level of activity being offered by the commercial / private sector (e.g. dance classes, acting lessons for adults as well as young people, including a Northwest school for professional actors and theatre / drama industry) and the voluntary / third sector (e.g. craft clubs, heritage groups).

## **Chorley Stories**

Chorley is a town steeped in remarkable and distinctive stories. From Cromwell’s bed at Astley Hall and Hoghton Tower’s legendary claim as the birthplace of “Arise Sir Loin,” to the Leo Baxendale’s Bash Street connection, the borough’s heritage is full of character and intrigue. Chorley also shares historic transatlantic links through Myles Standish, who played a pivotal role in the founding of modern America, and Charles Lightoller, second officer aboard the ill-fated- Titanic. It’s home to Preston England Temple, a striking landmark and the largest Latter-day Sain temple in Europe. Together, these tales offer a wealth of captivating content ready to be rediscovered, celebrated, and passed on for future generations to enjoy.

## **Driving forward Chorley’s town centre development**

Chorley’s town centre is undergoing one of its most ambitious periods of regeneration, driven by a £20 million Levelling Up Fund award and a clear vision to create a more vibrant, connected and future ready- place.

Plans include the creation of a new civic square envisioned as a central hub for events, social spaces, commercial units, apartments and improved parking—which will redefine the heart of the town.

Alongside this, a major redevelopment of the Bengal Street depot will introduce high-quality, -energy efficient homes and new commercial opportunities, improving one of the key gateways into the town centre. The wider programme also incorporates upgrades to the Union Street offices and public realm improvements linking key areas such as Hollinshead Street and Astley Park, enhancing accessibility and creating greener, more attractive routes for residents and visitors. Together, these projects form

a transformative, once in a generation investment designed to boost the local economy, attract new businesses, support town centre living and ensure Chorley remains- a thriving destination for years to come.

### **Theatre in Chorley**

Chorley has a strong theatre offer which builds its reputation and brings footfall into the town centre every week of the year. Chorley Theatre is at the heart of it with a wide range of shows across two performance spaces, with music concerts, youth shows, workshops, and hosting some of the biggest names in comedy, including John Bishop, Sarah Millican and James Acaster. The award-winning Chorley Amateur Dramatic and Operatic Society (CADOS) draw on local talent, staging classic shows and world premieres alike. Films have been shown continuously since 1910, making it one of the oldest purpose-built cinemas in the world and currently runs with support from the BFI NW Film Hub screening new films, classics, and event cinema. Members of CADOS have gone on to win BAFTAs, Ivor Novellos, work on Oscar-winning films and performed for royalty. There are now plans to develop its professional management, changing from volunteer-run to introducing several key paid roles. This will support the theatre's resilience and development. The theatre has skilled arts technicians, programmers and marketers which could be an excellent resource for any cultural network.

Alongside other groups and clubs, including national drama brands like Stagecoach Performing Arts. There is also Cartwright Drama School, led by award-winning playwright / actor Jim Cartwright, who lives locally but works nationally, the school offers training and actors-agency services for professional actors and is a key creative industries pathway (for example Junction 8 company flowered on the back of this, as have other initiatives). Jim is an under-utilised resource in Chorley's theatre and drama scene/reputation, and there is potential to develop a relationship which might encompass writing, performing - such as a series of site-specific productions, written by Jim and performed/produced by a company of professional actors and community. (Recent examples of this sort of approach include Huddersfield's 'Beowulf').

### **Inspire Youth Zone**

Part of the OnSide group, Inspire is Chorley's Youth Zone which delivers an enormous range of programmes, activities and interventions for low or no cost. Whilst its services focus on young people, there is also provision for adults where Inspire has areas of expertise, and it has attracted nearly 300,000 visits since it opened 5 years ago. The facilities include a makerspace, recording studio, photography, crafts, and plenty more.

The wide range of skills development programmes are innovative and industry-focused and are supported by links into further and higher education where appropriate.

### **Wildwood Days and Rivington Terraced Gardens**

Wildwood Days is predominantly a forest school based in Brinscall Woods but offers an excellent range of creative wellbeing activities for all ages. They have secured funding from the likes of the National Lottery Community Fund in recognition of the social impact their activities have on communities. Connections with the social prescribing service could be a way of enabling even more people to benefit from being creative in the outdoors.

Chorley town centre dominates the local cultural consciousness, but Wildwood Days and Rivington Terraced Gardens demonstrate that the borough's natural environment is a huge asset. Since becoming the recipient of a major National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, Rivington Terraced Gardens has vastly improved the visitor offer and is cherished by locals and visitors alike.

### **Astley Park and Estate**

Astley is one of Chorley's most significant cultural assets, not solely because of Astley Hall itself, but because of the estate. The site brings together historic buildings, parkland, play spaces, woodland, formal gardens, event infrastructure and everyday recreational use, making it one of the most accessed cultural spaces in the borough.

Recent investment in Astley Hall has transformed the quality and confidence of the heritage offer and opened up new opportunities for a broader programme of exhibitions, artist residencies, learning activity and interpretation. At the same time, Astley Park functions as a lived cultural space: hosting large-scale events, informal performance, family activity, volunteering, wellbeing and creative participation.

This strategy positions Astley not just as a heritage attraction, but as a cultural hub – a place where heritage, nature, creativity, events and community life intersect. Its scale and flexibility make it central to Chorley's cultural identity and to future ambitions around place-making, participation and Town of Culture delivery.

### **Chorley Markets**

Chorley Markets has been at the centre of local life for over 500 years, dating back to 1498, and today it remains one of the borough's most recognisable and best-loved

assets. Whether you're a regular visitor or discovering it for the first time, Chorley Markets continue to offer an experience that's vibrant, welcoming and uniquely Chorley.

Chorley boasts two main markets — the historic Covered Market, open four days a week, and the bustling Tuesday Street Market, when over 100 stalls line the town centre's streets including Fazakerley Street, Chapel Street, New Market Street and Market Street. From fresh produce and food-to-go to clothing, homewares, gifts and crafts, the markets bring together friendly traders and fantastic local businesses that make shopping in Chorley truly special.

A specialist Food and Craft Market also takes place on the second Saturday of each month, attracting talented makers and artisan producers from across the region

The 1498 area has quickly become one of Chorley Market's standout features offering a modern, social space offering a relaxed seating area surrounded by independent food and drink traders. As well as welcoming space for regular visitors, it also plays host to events and evening activity, giving visitors even more reasons to stay.

## **People**

Chorley is a place powered by community pride. Local people are passionate about sharing what makes the borough such a fantastic place to live and visit, creating a strong network of community champions who actively celebrate the area. This enthusiasm fuels a vibrant mix of events, activities and groups made up of people who truly care about showcasing the very best of Chorley.

These include:

- Chorley's Tourism Network – relaunched in February 2025 this group has representatives from local tourism businesses and stakeholders and meets every quarter, visiting new member locations each time. It is a space to share ideas and to jointly support the future delivery of the DMP
- The Creative Network – a grass roots, non-profit community group that partners with the council on Chorley Live. The network brings together hundreds of creative people of all ages, providing opportunities to perform and to be a part of live entertainment
- Chorley Heritage Society – a group of volunteers dedicated to preserving and retelling the heritage stories of Chorley. The town also benefits from the knowledge and dedication of local historian Stuart Clewlow of the Fellow of the Royal Historian Society, as well as a Town Crier.

- Chorley in Bloom – a community initiative created to add to the beauty of Chorley through gardening, floral displays and community engagement. The group works closely with the council and has a strong track record of success in regional and national competitions
- Totally Locally Chorley - a community led initiative to encourage people to shop locally, bringing together businesses from across the borough
- Event Chorley – the team behind Chorfest and Jingle all the Way, creating much loved events and fundraising for local charities.
- Town Centre Team – Chaired by the council, this group brings together key town centre stakeholders, including local businesses and representatives from Totally Locally, the tourism network, Chorley in Bloom, the county council, Lancashire Police, and council officers. The team focuses on strengthening and improving the town centre, sharing ideas for promotion, and collaboratively addressing any issues raised.
- Chorley Hospitality Hub – a business network working together to share best practice and promote Chorley’s hospitality offer.
- Chorley FC Community Foundation – working in the community to improve quality of life through sport, social and educational opportunities.
- Friends groups including the Friends of Astley Hall, the Friends of Astley Park and the Friends of Astley Walled Garden – these groups work collectively to maintain and enhance the offer of each location and provide engagement opportunities for visitors.
- Chorley and South Ribble Economic Partnership board – a stakeholder group created to coordinate economic development activity across partners, boost growth and prosperity, improve productivity and competitiveness of local businesses and create sustainable employment opportunities.
- Education providers

## **Participation**

Chorley hosts a vibrant and varied programme of events that play a major role in supporting the local economy, strengthening community pride, and enhancing the borough’s cultural offer. Each year, the council delivers a packed calendar ranging from largescale flagship moments like Chorley Flower Show to lively town centre experiences such as Chorley Live, which brings together dozens of venues and hundreds of performances to boost the nighttime economy. Family friendly favourites like What’s Your Story Chorley, Picnic in the Park, Chorley Flower Show, Light up Astley, the Chorley 10k and 2k Family run, outdoor theatre, seasonal celebrations and community led festivals attract tens of thousands of residents and visitors. These events not only drive

footfall and local spending but also foster wellbeing, encourage participation and shine a positive spotlight on Chorley as a thriving place to live, work and explore.

### **What's Your Story, Chorley?**

A firm fixture in Chorley Council's events calendar, What's Your Story Chorley is a place-based storytelling programme that celebrates local voices, heritage and lived experience. In 2026 this event is being expanded from a one-day event to a month-long celebration of literature. By visiting residents to share stories through performance, creative activity and public engagement, the programme reinforces pride of place and strengthens Chorley's cultural identity. The approach exemplifies the type of participatory, inclusive and scalable activity that this strategy seeks to grow rooted in experience, adaptable to different communities and capable of evolving year-on-year. It provides a strong foundation for future development through a Town of Culture approach and for embedding storytelling more deeply into Chorley's cultural offer.

### **Chorley Live**

A successful event run since 2013, with over 35 venues participating, 250 performers and 10,000 visitors per year, Chorley LIVE is considered a 2-day highlight of the events calendar. This family-friendly event gets stronger every year, programming in all sorts of spaces around the town, boosting numbers to local pubs and restaurants and including venues such as the bus station, vacant units and even the local dentist!

Looking further ahead, the wider impact and legacy of this event needs to be considered: where does it fit in a more strategic ambition for the music ecology in Chorley; what is the year-round offer; or opportunities for emerging talent in Chorley? In what ways does Chorley 'own' live music as part of its distinctiveness and place reputation? These suggestions, and many other considerations, could take an already successful event to new heights.

Lancashire Music Association is a potential additional partner with a remit to deliver to such an agenda and is currently identifying its first-round of places across Lancashire to develop strategic projects.

### **Chorley Flower Show**

Chorley Flower Show has grown into one of the North West's premier events— a flagship occasion that not only showcases stunning garden design and floral excellence

but also acts as a platform for Chorley's wider cultural ambition and year-round creative activity. The show consistently delivers spectacular attractions:

- Show gardens, floral art and creative community displays, including gardens produced by schools, charities and local groups.
- Expert demonstrations from leading horticultural and interior design professionals
- Amateur competitions, gardening theatre and hands-on workshops — helping nurture creativity and interest across age groups.
- Family-friendly fun including rides, circus skills, face painting, alpacas, dog activities and more, all adding to its wide appeal. Plus, children accompany adults for free.
- Live music including local musicians, choirs, dancers and performers
- A range of food and drink
- Entry to the historic Grade I listed Astley Hall is included for all show visitors.

In summary, Chorley Flower Show is more than a horticultural showcase — it is a cultural engine for the borough. With its evolving themes, expanding entertainment programme and community involvement, the show continues to strengthen the Chorley's identity as the best of Lancashire, all in one place.

### **Chorley's Social Prescribing service**

Chorley Council is rightly proud of its Social Prescribing service. There are a multitude of case studies which demonstrate the enormous benefit and impact it has on residents. This includes specialist provision for families and children, as well as one of the most active 'Talkin' Tables' programmes in the country. The service works collaboratively with multiple stakeholders such as Chorley Sheds, the Youth Zone. This local expertise is a point of distinctiveness for Chorley within the proposed new Unitary Authority, so any work to develop this now will support that even further. The service does engage with culture, but there is appetite within the service to expand the provision to include more arts, culture and heritage participation activities

Case study:

Client D's husband had 2 strokes in 2023. He was recovering but his GP referred them to Social Prescribing as although physically much improved, their lives had become more restricted in terms of leaving the home. The Social Prescriber carried out a home visit and talked to husband about local socialising events. Although he was unsure about going out, he eventually agreed to try Sporting Memories with his Social Prescriber. It was a success and so the Prescriber suggested another group focussing on music at

Inspire Chorley because client D's husband used to play the piano before his stroke. Not only does her husband now regularly attend both groups (and has started piano lessons again), but over the past year client D now has the confidence herself to take part in social activities. She now goes to exercise classes twice a week and has started teaching at a support group for people who have a visual impairment.

## 4. What the evidence tells us

In 2025, Chorley Council commissioned an extensive research programme to inform to creation of this cultural strategy. This included:

- An area familiarisation tour, visiting principal places, visibility of cultural assets and their connection between one and another. This included walking visits of Chorley town centre and market, Astley Park and Hall, Rivington; drop in visits to Cedar Farm, Chorley Theatre, Cartwright Drama School; and draws on frequent visits and knowledge of more rural parts of the borough over many years.
- Consultations with 44 individuals (from over 25 organisations and groups) in the form of online and in-person conversations. A full list of those consulted is included in Appendix 1.
- Small group conversations focused on community heritage groups, heritage venues, town teams, heritage tenants, arts groups, and councillors.
- A survey distributed to all target contacts which generated 40 responses.
- Review of existing available data sources, reports and relevant consultations for other strategies such as the Chorley Council Destination Management Plan.
- Primary research to map 147 cultural and heritage assets across Chorley. This dataset combines information from the following sources:
  - Organisations funded by Arts Council England (2014–present)
  - Check out Chorley
  - Lancashire Libraries
  - Lancashire History Federation members
  - Search Engine searches
  - Primary research to digitally map cultural activity across the borough.

Our research highlights that Chorley:

- Ranks 9th in a survey of UK's happiest places to live - reasons for that include its charm, good schools and community, a sufficiency of things to do and easy access to nature.
- Is recognised and supported as the centre for all communities within the borough.

- Has several established cultural and heritage venues and assets, they are well distributed across the borough.
- Has real strengths in heritage assets and stories; an established tradition of live performance – notably music and drama; a place on the national comedy circuit, and provision for young people through the Youth Zone and Lancashire Music Service.
- Has an annual major events programme led by Chorley Council which adds to the resident offer and the profiling and positioning of the town. Alongside Chorley Council-led events, major events with a countywide draw are also programmed at significant partner venues like Hoghton Tower and Rivington.
- Has most of the cultural activity located in the town centre. Rural villages in the west of the borough are the second highest location of cultural events primarily due to a cluster of creative businesses who run many activities and workshops at Cedar Farm in Mawdesley. The rest of the town has a relatively even distribution of activity
- Has a relatively low level of digital maturity, both within council operated assets and other cultural assets, with opportunity to improve to future-proof organisations
- Has strong heritage assets, an established events programme and a lively voluntary and amateur cultural sector
- Benefits from high levels of in-person cultural participation
- Has growing population centres and a strong pride of place
- Loses cultural spend to neighbouring towns and cities. With direct road and rail connections to other cultural centres in Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Liverpool, it is relatively easy for residents to access the professionally marketed, larger-scale, or ‘culturally significant’ events and experiences that are for example Arts Council-funded / West-end touring etc in neighbouring authorities.

## **Challenges and opportunities**

Research and stakeholder engagement have highlighted the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

### **Strengths**

- Plentiful and varied offer of participatory activities across the borough
- Relatively happy and healthy population with a strong sense of pride in place - all which creates a propensity to engage with culture.
- Renovation works at Astley Hall have transformed the experience and status of this asset - and additional activity in progress enables additional diversity -such as exhibitions, artist-in-residence schemes and collections.

- Well-loved and supported local assets such as Astley Hall, Chorley Theatre, Rivington Terraced Gardens, Cuerden Valley Park.
- Hugely popular events programme, attracting over 50,000 people each year
- Reputation for theatre, comedy and live music
- Chorley Market regeneration creating more opportunities for cultural vibrancy and vibe in the centre.
- Good transport links including bus, train and motorways
- In addition to the Youth Zone, cultural provision for young people is enhanced by the presence of Lancashire Music Service and a wide-range of paid-for lessons, clubs and groups across all artforms
- In-house Culture and Heritage team, with experience of the management and interpretation of heritage assets and increasing participation and inclusivity
- Skilled events team, with the energy and external knowledge to review and refresh the existing programme
- Dedicated tourism marketing team and graphic designer with the ability to promote Chorley's cultural offer alongside the visitor economy and community campaigns.
- Excellent links to the community through the council's communities' team and social prescribing service that understands the importance of arts / culture / heritage activities.
- A new Destination Management Plan where culture overlaps with tourism
- Growing visitor numbers. Up 1.4% to 3.17 million visitors a year in the latest STEAM figures provided by Marketing Lancashire, bucking the trend elsewhere across the county where half of the districts have either remained static or declined.
- Excellent community networks and strong local voices, linked through spaces including the town Centre team, the tourism network and the economic partnership board
- Existing investment in town centre development

### **Weaknesses**

- Extremely low level of Arts Council England funding per head, and underperformance with National Heritage Lottery Funding
- Declining levels of cultural participation, and 'loss' to neighbouring cultural centres
- No dedicated heritage/arts centre
- No specific network for culture or support programmes for creative professionals, or for volunteer groups leading to missed opportunities, fragmentation and isolation
- Historically limited engagement with Lancashire's strategic development partners e.g. Lancashire County Council, Creative Lancashire, Arts Lancashire and with regional / national strategic development partners eg Museums Development North, Arts Council England, English Civic Museums Network

- Limited digital maturity and infrastructure of other organisations and groups, in need of supporting interventions
- Limited collaborative marketing effort between cultural activity providers and low visibility of cultural and creative opportunities.

## **Opportunities**

- To better connect culture in Chorley, supporting and amplifying what already exists through improved digital marketing and shared opportunities
- Exploring opportunities to sell cultural activities online e.g. entrances to Astley Hall and creating a platform that other assets across the borough can join, looking at a cultural pass whereby people can buy different experiences in one digital location
- For the culture and heritage team to harness the delivery of this cultural strategy along with the wider Communications and Visitor Economy team, strategic partners and funders
- To utilise the Destination Management Plan enabling a more place-based and distinctive approach to cultural programming
- A rapidly growing population, with more families with children, and at the other end of the spectrum an aging population - both of which offer scope for engaged volunteering as well as consumers, participants and users.
- To connect strong existing local voices through a new cultural network
- To support heritage groups to develop programmes and apply for funding
- To increase participation and accessibility to culture through a renewed programme activity, supporting the existing events calendar and expanding on popular events such as Chorley Live and What's Your Story Chorley
- Reimagining how we deliver culture through our assets including parks and open spaces and venues including Astley Hall
- Creating a new activity programme attracting diverse audiences and positioning Astley Hall, Park and, Information Centre and Coach House as a visitor destination and cultural hub
- Maximising in house expertise through training to develop and deliver a clear action plan, to ensure Chorley stays up to date with national trends, to increase accessibility and engagement and to put together future funding bids
- Introducing volunteering opportunities, starting with roles at Astley Hall
- Ensuring culture, heritage and creative industries are central to Chorley's positioning throughout Local Government Reorganisation
- Embedding culture and heritage into Chorley's town centre regeneration programme
- Attracting further funding to enable the delivery of this strategy
- Through its grant to Youth Zone, Chorley Council is not only investing in young people, but also in a stronger cultural and creative industries future. Opportunities to

extend activities outside of YouthZone would help accelerate this - such as Teenage Markets; programming takeover at Chorley Theatre - or perhaps a Youth Panel; a battle of the bands at Chorley Live or a regular open-mic slot at 1498/Bobbin Inn; an annual youth garden for Chorley Flower Show and so on – building creative content and encouraging civic engagement

- There may also be an opportunity to develop filmmaking and the promotion of places to film. Film and TV Production is a growing industry in the UK, and many productions have been filmed in the North-west with knock-on opportunities to develop screen tourism
- Increased engagement with Lancashire County Council and key cultural partners and stakeholders.

### **Threats**

- Lancashire devolution and Local Government Reorganisation - failure to prepare the cultural groundwork will mean that the early opportunities and benefits will be missed
- Achieving the right balance between prioritising tourism and income generation, and the delivery of a strong cultural programme
- Further leakage of visitors, cultural consumers and professionals to other nearby areas (e.g. Manchester, Liverpool, Blackpool).

## **5. Our Priorities: What we will focus on**

Each priority outlined below is shaped by Chorley's lived reality and by the ambition to scale activity. This approach is not limited to a single year or designation. In Chorley, it refers to a way of working that prioritises collaboration, participation, capacity-building and legacy. It uses culture as a tool for place-making, skills development and community pride, testing new ideas through pilots, partnerships and shared delivery rather than one-off activity.

### **Priority 1: Culture as place-making**

On a typical weekend in Chorley, culture is already everywhere: a rehearsal in a village hall, families gathering in Astley Park, a market alive with conversation, walkers moving between heritage landmarks and open landscapes. This strategy builds on that reality by placing culture at the heart of how Chorley understands and shapes itself.

Culture will be used intentionally to animate public spaces, support regeneration and reinforce Chorley's identity as a place of shared experience.

This will be achieved through creative programming in parks and green spaces, partnerships with environmental and wellbeing organisations, artist-led interpretation of landscapes and heritage, and by embedding nature-based culture within the events programme rather than treating it as a separate offer.

**Focus:**

- Strengthening Chorley's cultural identity through heritage, landscape and lived experience
- Embedding culture into regeneration, planning and public realm
- Utilising our parks and open spaces as well as venues to host cultural activity
- Ensuring villages and rural areas are integral to the cultural offer

**Key actions (2025–2028):**

- Integrate cultural programming into town centre redevelopment and the new civic square from the outset
- Commission and support artist- and community-led activity in parks, markets, libraries and non-traditional spaces
- Champion Chorley's natural and historic environment as cultural assets, not just visitor attractions

**Priority 2: Connected cultural ecology**

Chorley's cultural life is rich but fragmented. Many organisations and individuals operate in isolation, often relying on volunteers and goodwill. This strategy seeks to connect what already exists, reducing duplication and increasing resilience.

A connected cultural ecology is essential for our Town of Culture ambitions: it allows ideas to circulate, partnerships to form, and capacity to grow without over-reliance on the council.

**Focus:**

- Supporting volunteer-led and small organisations
- Encouraging collaboration rather than competition
- Making it easier to co-design and co-deliver activity

**Key actions:**

- Establish a Chorley Cultural Network, linked to the existing Tourism Network and Town of Culture development
- Create regular moments for shared planning, knowledge exchange and partnership building
- Improve internal coordination between council teams to support external partners more effectively
- Use the Town of Culture bid process as a catalyst for new collaborations and shared delivery models

### **Priority 3: Events with purpose and legacy**

Chorley already has one of the strongest events calendars in Lancashire. The ambition now is to move from delivery to legacy: ensuring events deepen cultural participation, strengthen local identity and contribute to long-term place-shaping.

This strategy provides an opportunity to rethink events as platforms for collaboration, storytelling and skills development, rather than standalone moments.

Delivery will focus on piloting small-scale thematic approaches within existing events, testing progression routes such as volunteer development, artist mentoring and behind-the-scenes roles, and scaling what works over time rather than creating additional pressure on resources.

#### **Focus:**

- Distinctive, place-rooted programming
- Participation and co-creation
- Year-round cultural impact

#### **Key actions:**

- Review the council-led events programme against clear cultural, social and destination outcomes
- Increase opportunities for local artists, volunteers and communities to shape and deliver events
- Pilot new thematic approaches to events aligned with Chorley's cultural story and the Destination Management Plan
- Strengthen pathways from participation to skills, volunteering and creative careers

### **Priority 4: Digital visibility and access**

Much of Chorley's cultural life remains invisible beyond word of mouth. Improving digital visibility is essential not only for audiences and visitors, but for equity, access and sustainability.

We will create a step-change in how culture is discovered, shared and booked.

### **Focus**

- Visibility, discoverability and access
- Shared systems rather than bespoke solutions
- Audience-centred digital experiences

### **Key actions:**

- Align cultural content and listings with Check Out Chorley as a single, trusted platform
- Support partners to improve digital skills, imagery and online booking
- Pilot shared digital infrastructure that could scale across Lancashire
- Ensure digital approaches improve access for residents as well as visitors
- Promote Chorley as a place to film

## **Priority 5: Talent, skills and creative enterprise**

Behind Chorley's cultural offer are artists, freelancers, volunteers, creative businesses and community organisers who make things happen, often with limited support or visibility.

This strategy recognises talent as infrastructure. Supporting people is essential to delivering a successful Town of Culture bid and to sustaining culture beyond 2028.

This priority focuses on enabling and supporting Chorley's existing creative workforce rather than creating new structures. By improving visibility, access to space, networking opportunities and links to youth and skills provision, the strategy takes a realistic, incremental approach that is achievable within existing resources and partnerships.

### **Focus:**

- Retaining and attracting creative talent
- Supporting volunteers and micro-enterprises
- Aligning culture with skills, youth and wellbeing agendas

**Key actions:**

- Improve understanding of Chorley’s creative workforce through better mapping and engagement
- Encourage use of meanwhile and non-traditional spaces for creative activity
- Strengthen links between cultural activity, youth provision and skills development
- Use Town of Culture planning if we progress to the bid stage to test new commissioning, mentoring and leadership models.

## 6. From strategy to action

This Cultural Strategy is designed as a practical delivery framework rather than a static policy document. It translates Chorley’s cultural ambition into a focused set of achievable actions to be delivered between 2025 and 2028.

Delivery of the strategy will be driven through a small number of clearly defined SMART actions set out in the Action Plan below. These actions respond directly to the evidence base, stakeholder engagement and opportunities identified through the research process, ensuring that the strategy moves beyond diagnosis to delivery.

The Action Plan provides clarity on what will be delivered, over what timeframe and through which partnerships. It is intended to be a working document that supports annual service planning, funding applications and partnership development. Progress against the Action Plan will be reviewed after year one, allowing actions to be refined or adapted in response to changing circumstances, funding opportunities and the wider context of Local Government Reorganisation.

### 6.1 Action Plan 2025 – 2028

ACTION	PRIORITY	SMART Action (What we will do)	LEAD	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES
Action 1	Culture as place-making	By March 2026, develop and agree a clear, place-based cultural narrative for Chorley, aligned with the Destination Management Plan and Town of Culture	Culture and Heritage	March 2026	A clear and shared cultural identity for Chorley; consistent messaging; stronger sense of place and external perception.

		ambitions, to be used consistently across council-led programming, marketing and partnerships.			
Action 2	Culture as place-making	Between 2026-2028, embed cultural activity within town centre regeneration projects, including the new civic square, by working with regeneration and planning teams to programme creative and participatory uses within public realm delivery.	Culture and Heritage / Major Projects	2026 – 2028	Activated public spaces; increased footfall; culture embedded within town centre regeneration as well as our parks, open spaces and venues, resulting in more animated public spaces, and stronger links between regeneration and cultural activity.
Action 3	Culture as place-making	Astley Hall and Park will play a central role in delivering this priority, acting as a flagship example of how heritage, landscape, events, volunteering and participation can come together to create a distinctive cultural place. This will include opening up online booking, a volunteering programme, improved signage, increased activity and improved partnership working across the site.	Culture and Heritage / Spatial Planning	April 2026 – 2028	Astley Park and estate operating as sustainable, year-round cultural destination with improved access, participation and resilience across the whole site.

Action 4	Connected cultural ecology	By April 2026, establish a Chorley Cultural Network bringing together cultural organisations, volunteer groups and creative practitioners, supporting collaboration, shared planning and at least one co-designed initiative per year from 2027	Culture and Heritage	April 2026	Improved collaboration and reduced fragmentation across Chorley's cultural sector, with stronger partnerships and shared delivery models in place Increased rates of volunteering. .
Action 5	Events with purpose and legacy	From March 2026 to 2028, use existing flagship events to pilot thematic approaches and progression pathways for artists, volunteers and communities, scaling successful approaches where resources allow.	Events and Culture and Heritage	2026-2028	An events programme that delivers long-term cultural, social and place-based value alongside visitor economy benefits that tells the story of Chorley.
Action 6	Events with purpose and legacy	Review and refresh the council led events programme to ensure events contribute to long-term cultural participation, skills development and place identity, alongside visitor economy outcomes.	Events and Culture and Heritage	2027	Clear progression routes from participation skills, volunteering and creative development within Chorley's events programme.
Action 7	Digital visibility and access	By the end of 2026, improve visibility of Chorley's cultural offer by aligning listings with	Communications and Culture and Heritage	2027-2028	Increased discoverability; improved access to cultural activity for residents and visitors,

		Check Out Chorley and supporting partners to improve digital skills, imagery and online booking between 2026-27.			supported by stronger digital confidence across the sector.
Action 8	Talent, skills and creative enterprise	Between 2026-2028, strengthen support for Chorley's creative workforce by improving visibility, access to space, networking opportunities and links to youth and skills provision, focusing on enabling existing talent.	Culture and Heritage  Partners	2026-2028	A better supported local creative workforce with improved visibility, connections and access to opportunities in Chorley.
Action 9	Talent, skills and creative enterprise	Between 2026-2028, Chorley Council will proactively identify, coordinate and support external funding and investment opportunities to deliver the cultural strategy. This will include developing and submitting funding bids, supporting partner-led applications where appropriate, and using the Cultural Strategy as a core evidence document to strengthen proposals to funders such as Arts Council, the National Lottery	Culture and Heritage	2026-2028	Increased capacity to attract external investment and deliver cultural activity through sustainable funding and partnership models.

		Heritage Fund and other relevant programmes.			
Action 10	Talent, skills and creative enterprise	Between 2026-2028 with partners including Inspire Youth Zone, Lancashire Music Service, schools and community organisations to create accessible cultural opportunities for young people. Activity will focus on participation, skills development and progression routes within existing cultural programmes and events, enabling young people to engage as audiences, participants, creators and future leaders.	Culture and Heritage	2026-2028	Increased engagement of young people in cultural activity, with clearer pathways for participation, skills development and leadership.
Action 11	Talent, skills and creative enterprise	From 2026 onwards, a new programme of education and engagement activity will be developed, considering the latest school curriculum, locations across the borough and different age groups.	Culture and Heritage Open Spaces Park Rangers	2026 - 2028	Expanded reach and engagement in cultural activity and development of skills for people of all ages.
Action 12	Digital visibility and access	From 2026 – 2028, Chorley Council will explore opportunities to develop Chorley as a location for film, television	Communications and Culture and Heritage	2026-2028	Improved profile of Chorley as a film and screen location, supporting place visibility, screen tourism and

		and digital content. This will include identifying suitable locations, developing relationships with regional screen agencies and partner, and supporting place-based storytelling that raises Chorley's profile and contributes to screen tourism and the local creative economy.			putting us on a national stage.
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## 7. Town of Culture: A catalyst for Chorley

Chorley's ambition to become Town of Culture represents an opportunity to accelerate the delivery of this Cultural Strategy and to strengthen the borough's cultural confidence, capacity and visibility. It provides a unifying framework through which culture can support place-making, participation, skills development and the visitor economy.

A Town of Culture approach is not limited to a single year or formal designation. In Chorley, it describes a way of working that priorities collaboration, participation and long-term legacy. It focuses on testing ideas through partnerships, pilots and shared delivery, rather than creating one-off activity or sustainable programmes. This approach ensures that cultural investment delivers lasting benefit, whether formal Town of Culture status is secured.

Chorley is well placed to adopt this approach. The borough already has a strong tradition of participation, a well-established events programme, significant heritage and natural assets, and a committed network of volunteers, cultural organisations and creative practitioners. The scale of Chorley allows for experimentation and collaboration, enabling activity to be ambitious while remaining manageable and community focused.

The Town of Culture approach will be used to:

- Strengthen collaboration across cultural organisations, community groups and council services
- Pilot new models of commissioning, programming and co-creation
- Support local talent, volunteers and the creative workforce
- Increase visibility of Chorley's cultural offer locally, regionally and nationally
- Embed culture more deeply into everyday spaces, including parks, town centres and heritage sites

Development of Town of Culture activity will be closely aligned with the priorities and actions set out in the strategy. The Action Plan provides a clear framework for delivery, ensuring that Town of Culture-related activity contributes to long-term outcomes rather than short-term celebration.

Importantly, the Town of Culture approach also supports Chorley's readiness for future change. By strengthening networks, building capacity and establishing shared ways of working, the borough will be better positioned to respond to Local Government Reorganisation, funding opportunities and regional partnerships. This ensures that culture remains a visible and valued part of Chorley's identity beyond the life of this strategy,

Through this approach, Chorley will use culture not only to celebrate what already exists, but to build confidence, connection and resilience, positioning the borough as a distinctive and ambitious cultural place within Lancashire and beyond.

## **8. Delivery, outcomes and legacy - looking beyond 2028**

Delivery of the strategy between 2026 and 2028 will be led by Chorley Council's Culture and Heritage function, working in close collaboration with Events, Communications, Tourism and Communities teams, and in partnership with cultural organisations, volunteers and creative practitioners.

Beyond 2028, the emphasis will shift from delivering a defined programme of activity to sustaining the networks, partnerships and ways of working established through the strategy. By embedding culture into regeneration, town centre development, events planning and community engagement, cultural delivery will continue to be integrated into core council functions rather than relying on standalone initiatives.

### **Outcomes achieved by 2028**

By the end of the strategy period, Chorley will have:

- A clearer and more confident cultural identity rooted in place, heritage and participation
- Stronger collaboration across cultural organisations, volunteer groups and creative practitioners
- Improved visibility and access to cultural activity for residents and visitors
- An events programme that delivers lasting cultural, social and economic value
- Better support for local talent, volunteers and the creative workforce
- A more connected and resilient cultural ecology capable of adapting to change

These outcomes will provide a strong platform for future cultural development, investment and partnership working.

### **How progress will be tracked**

KPIs will include:

- Participation numbers,
- Visitor numbers to Astley Hall and Coach House
- Number of events/activities delivered
- Website traffic and social media engagement
- Customer reviews
- Funding sourced
- Geographic spread of visitors/participants

The strategy reviewed midway to assess impact, refine programme, and ensure alignment with local needs and the wider economic impact.

### **Legacy beyond 2028**

The legacy of this strategy will not be defined by a single programme, funding stream or designation. Instead, it will be measured by the strength of Chorley's cultural infrastructure: confident communities, connected organisations, supported volunteers and a shared understanding of culture as central to place-making, wellbeing and economic resilience.

By prioritising collaboration, capacity-building and realistic delivery, the strategy ensures that cultural activity can continue to evolve beyond 2028. The networks, partnerships and delivery models developed through this period will enable Chorley to respond positively to Local Government Reorganisation, regional opportunities and future investment.

Ultimately, this strategy positions Chorley not only to deliver cultural activity in the short term, but to sustain and grow its cultural offer in the long term – ensuring culture remains a visible, valued and integral part of life in the borough.