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Canterbury Society Response to the Canterbury Culture Strategy (2026-2036)

Dear colleagues,

The Canterbury Society welcomes the opportunity to respond to Canterbury City Council's Draft Cultural Strategy (2026–2036) and thanks the Council for the early stakeholder engagement held in April 2025, which helped inform the draft. As a civic society with a long-standing interest in culture, heritage, place and community life across the District, we see this response as part of our role in supporting informed public debate, civic engagement and constructive scrutiny.

Our submission is grounded in a transparent and mixed evidence base. This includes a public-facing blog post on our website setting out the draft Strategy in accessible terms, a short open-ended community survey asking residents what culture means to them, and analysis of Canterbury City Council's own datasets, in particular the Residents' Survey 2022. We also draw on the Council's earlier Cultural and Community Facilities Survey undertaken in 2021, recalled at a thematic level, alongside lived experience from across the arts, education, heritage and voluntary sectors. We understand that this survey is not currently available to inform the draft Strategy; its absence is notable, given its role in providing prompted, culture-specific evidence that complements the broader Residents' Survey. Together, these sources provide both statistical context and qualitative insight into how culture is experienced, valued and constrained across the District.

Several cross-cutting themes emerge consistently from this evidence. Residents tend to understand culture less as a narrow set of venues or institutions and more as an everyday lived experience shaped by place, belonging, shared spaces and community activity. Clean, safe, accessible and well-maintained public environments repeatedly appear as prerequisites for cultural participation rather than peripheral considerations. The evidence also points to clear place-based differences between Canterbury, Whitstable, Herne Bay and rural areas, and to the importance of educational continuity and early cultural engagement in building long-term cultural confidence and participation.

Our response is structured to support both rapid overview and detailed analysis. Appendix A sets out the core insights and practical implications of our evidence in a short, strategic summary, intended to be read first.

Our detailed responses to the Council's consultation questions are provided in Appendix B, supported by qualitative quotations and analysis. Appendix C summarises key findings from the 2022 Residents' Survey, the most recent district-wide dataset available for Canterbury.

Yours sincerely,

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Appendix A: Strategic Summary of Key Insights and Actions

Purpose

This appendix summarises the Canterbury Society's core insights from evidence and sets out their practical implications for the Cultural Strategy and its delivery.

Strategic insights summarised

Core insight	What this means in practice	Opportunity for the Strategy
Culture is suppressed by daily barriers	Participation depends on access, safety and the quality of public space	Treat public realm, walkability, amenity and safety as cultural infrastructure
Provision does not equals participation	Events and venues alone will not grow audiences	Add visibility, relevance and cultural confidence to success measures
One size does not fit all	Different places face different barriers to engagement	Adopt place-based priorities by ward or settlement
Culture is not a standalone sector	Cultural outcomes sit inside planning and regeneration systems	Align the Cultural Strategy with the Local Plan, town centre strategies and CIL/S106
Informal culture has the widest reach	Everyday, low-cost activity engages most residents	Shift emphasis towards parks, streets, libraries and shared spaces
Youth gaps are about confidence	Young people do not see culture as "for them"	Link culture to schools, youth services and informal settings
Evidence needs to track change properly	Attendance data misses suppressed demand	Track perception, visibility and confidence over time
Institutions matter, but connection matters more	Formal organisations struggle to reach beyond core users	Strengthen links between venues and everyday community spaces

How to use this evidence to test the draft Cultural Strategy

The evidence presented in this response suggests that cultural participation in the District is being suppressed by enabling conditions, low visibility and limited cultural confidence, rather than by lack of interest or aspiration.

We therefore suggest that each theme, ambition and action in the final Cultural Strategy is tested against the following questions:

- **Does this ambition improve the everyday conditions that enable participation?**
  (for example access, safety, walkability, public space quality)
- **Does it make culture more visible and relevant in residents' everyday lives?**
  (particularly outside formal venues and established audiences)
- **Does it build cultural confidence over time, especially for children and young people?**
  (through continuity, familiarity and informal engagement)
- **Is it sensitive to place-based differences across the District?**
  (city, coastal and rural areas face different barriers and opportunities)
- **Is delivery aligned with planning, regeneration, education and public realm policy?**
  (rather than relying solely on cultural programming)
- **Will success be measured beyond outputs and attendance?**
  (including perception, awareness and participation in low-engagement areas)

If an ambition does **not** improve enabling conditions, visibility or cultural confidence, the evidence suggests it is **unlikely to increase participation**, regardless of the scale or quality of provision

Appendix B: Response to Specific Consultation Questions

Q2a: Do you have any other comments or suggestions on the proposed themes of the draft Cultural Strategy?

The Canterbury Society broadly welcomes the framing of the draft Strategy around inclusive and relational themes. However, our evidence suggests that the themes would benefit from being more explicitly grounded in lived experience, place, and enabling conditions, rather than assuming that cultural participation follows automatically from provision.

1) Culture as lived experience, not a sector

Findings from the Residents Survey (2022) show that culture, arts, heritage and events are almost entirely absent from residents' own language when describing their areas, appearing in around 1.5% of open-text responses. This does not indicate indifference. Instead, it reflects what our analysis identifies as cultural invisibility and suppressed demand, where residents recognise that something is missing but do not articulate culture as part of everyday life or as a solution.

This aligns strongly with our mini-survey, where respondents consistently described culture as:
"a sense of place and belonging"
"everyday encounters with architecture, landscape, history and shared spaces"
"something participatory and experiential rather than institutional"

As one respondent put it:
"I don't see myself as a passive recipient of culture, rather an active agent seeking cultural interactions… A sense of place is important to me."

Suggestion
The Strategy's themes should explicitly define culture as a lived, everyday experience shaped by place, environment and participation, not only as activity delivered by venues or organisations.

2) Foundational conditions must sit within the themes

Across our analysis of qualitative responses within the Residents Survey dataset, cultural participation is shown to be constrained by compound barriers, particularly where parks, public realm, access and safety issues intersect. In most of the highest-need wards, cultural concerns co-occur with access and safety constraints, with parks and green spaces acting as proxy indicators for wider system failure. Residents overwhelmingly frame problems as infrastructure and service failures, not behavioural issues, and do so in the present tense. Culture struggles to surface where daily frustrations dominate.
The Society's own mini-survey reinforces this. Respondents repeatedly linked cultural life to walkability, cleanliness, safety and the ability to linger in shared spaces, rather than to specific programmes.

Suggestion
The Strategy's themes should acknowledge that clean, safe, accessible and welcoming public environments are preconditions for cultural participation, and that

cultural ambition must be integrated with public realm, parks and neighbourhood infrastructure.

3) Place-based difference needs to be reflected thematically

The 2022 Residents Survey shows clear geographic variation:

- Urban wards experience access, traffic and safety pressures that crowd out cultural engagement.
- Coastal wards show amenity and hospitality gaps alongside strong place identity.
- Rural and parish areas report the highest youth activity deficits, but zero cultural references, indicating untapped potential rather than lack of need.

Our mini-survey responses echo this, particularly around youth engagement and rural access, and caution against a single District-wide narrative.

<u>Suggestion</u>

The themes should more clearly signal that culture will look and function differently across the city, coast and rural areas, and that delivery will need to be locally calibrated rather than uniform.

4) Education, continuity and confidence-building

A consistent gap across both datasets is the absence of cultural confidence, particularly among young people. Culture appears invisible as a solution even where youth needs are clearly articulated.

One contributor reflected on this disconnect:

"They said 'Miss, we don't have culture'… not because it wasn't there, but because they couldn't see themselves in it."

This points to the importance of educational continuity and early engagement, not as an add-on but as a core cultural function.

<u>Suggestion</u>

The themes should explicitly recognise education, confidence-building and long-term cultural literacy as foundational to participation, linking schools, informal learning, and community-based cultural experience.

We suggest the proposed themes in the draft strategy would be strengthened by:

Q2a.1 explicitly defining culture as everyday, participatory and place-based

Q2a.2 embedding foundational conditions (access, safety, public realm) within the cultural narrative

Q2a.3 recognising place-based difference as a thematic principle

Q2a.4 foregrounding education and continuity as core cultural enablers

Q4: Do you have any other comments or suggestions on the proposed ambitions of the draft Cultural Strategy?

The Canterbury Society welcomes the intent and breadth of the proposed ambitions. However, our evidence suggests they would be strengthened by being more explicitly grounded in delivery conditions, place-based realities and measurable pathways. The 2022 Residents Survey and our own mini-survey both show that cultural participation is shaped less by aspiration than by enabling conditions such as safe access, quality public space, visibility, and everyday relevance. Ambitions applied uniformly across the District risk reinforcing existing inequalities, given clear geographic variation in access, youth engagement and cultural visibility.

We therefore recommend that the ambitions explicitly recognise enabling infrastructure, adopt place-based prioritisation, address visibility and cultural confidence alongside provision, and align more clearly with planning, regeneration and education systems so that cultural outcomes are realistic, resilient and capable of being tracked over time.

1) Ambition must recognise enabling conditions, not assume participation

The Residents Survey 2022 shows that cultural participation is consistently constrained by compound barriers. In the highest-need wards, cultural concerns are rarely isolated; they sit alongside issues of access, safety, public realm quality and environmental maintenance. Culture does not fail because of lack of aspiration, but because conditions for participation are not in place.

This is reinforced by our mini-survey, where respondents emphasised that cultural engagement depends on being able to walk, linger, feel safe, and access shared spaces easily. Culture was described as something that emerges once these basics are met.

<u>Suggestion</u>

Ambitions should explicitly acknowledge that cultural growth depends on enabling conditions such as clean streets, safe access, usable parks and welcoming public spaces, and commit to aligning cultural delivery with these foundations rather than treating them as external dependencies.

2) Ambition should be place-based, not uniformly applied

The 2022 dataset highlights strong geographic variation:
- Herne Bay shows the highest concentration of unmet needs per ward, particularly around amenities and social spaces.
- Whitstable shows pronounced youth engagement gaps.
- Rural and parish areas report the highest proportion of youth-related concerns, but almost no cultural visibility, indicating suppressed demand rather than low need.
- Canterbury City experiences access and traffic pressures that crowd out cultural participation.

A single set of ambitions applied uniformly risks reinforcing existing inequalities, with cultural benefit accruing disproportionately to already-visible areas.

<u>Suggestion</u>

The ambitions should be framed as District-wide in intent but place-specific in delivery, with an explicit commitment to prioritising wards and communities where cultural visibility and participation are currently lowest.

3) Ambition should include visibility and relevance, not just provision

The 2022 Residents Survey analysis shows that culture, arts, heritage and events are almost entirely invisible in residents' own language, appearing in fewer than 1% of open-text responses. This invisibility is not neutral: 16 of 21 wards show no cultural references at all, despite identifying unmet needs in amenities, youth activity and community life.

Our mini-survey suggests the same disconnect. People describe culture vividly when prompted, but do not instinctively associate it with council strategies or local provision.

As one respondent noted:
"I don't see culture as something delivered to me. It's something I need to feel part of, in the places I already use."

Suggestion
Ambitions should explicitly include making culture visible and relevant in everyday life, particularly through informal, outdoor, community and youth-focused activity, rather than relying primarily on institutional or event-based provision.

4) Ambition should address education and continuity over time

Both of our datasets point to a lack of cultural confidence and continuity, particularly among young people. Youth activity gaps are among the most frequently identified deficiencies, yet culture is almost never named as a solution. This indicates a failure of connection, not of potential.
Cultural ambition that focuses on outputs without addressing how people learn to see themselves as cultural participants risks short-term impact only.

Suggestion
The ambitions should more clearly articulate education, early engagement and long-term cultural literacy as outcomes in their own right, linking schools, informal learning, youth provision and community-based culture.

5) Ambition should be measurable and resilient

Finally, ambition without clarity on how success will be assessed risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative. Given the low baseline visibility of culture in resident discourse, progress needs to be tracked not only in outputs, but in perception, access and confidence.

Suggestion
Ambitions should be supported by clear, realistic indicators, for example:
- increased visibility of cultural activity in resident feedback
- improved participation in areas currently identified as cultural "deserts"
- stronger links between youth need and cultural provision;

-   improved awareness and engagement with cultural opportunities.

We suggest the proposed ambitions would be strengthened by:

Q4.1   explicitly linking cultural ambition to enabling conditions
Q4.2   explicitly defining culture as everyday, participatory and place-based
Q4.3   embedding foundational conditions (access, safety, public realm) within the cultural narrative
Q4.4   committing to place-based prioritisation
Q4.5   addressing visibility and relevance, not just provision
Q4.6   embedding education and continuity as core outcomes
Q4.7   and setting out measurable indicators of success

Q8: Are there particular types of cultural activity you'd like to see more of in the district?

Our evidence suggests that residents are less concerned with adding more of a narrow set of "cultural products" and more interested in cultural activity that is visible, accessible, place-based and relevant to everyday life. Where specific activities are requested, they cluster around participation, youth engagement, and the activation of shared spaces.

1) Informal, everyday and outdoor cultural activity

The Residents Survey 2022 shows that physical accessibility (transport/access) dominates resident concerns across all areas, accounting for 40–60% of priority mentions. While these are often raised as deficiencies, they also represent the most consistent opportunity for cultural activation within nearby spaces.
Our mini-survey responses strongly reinforce this, with residents describing cultural experience as walking, observing, reflecting, and encountering creativity in shared spaces, rather than attending formal events alone.

One respondent wrote:
"I need to live in an environment where I can experience and be part of human creativity past and present… places to walk, or a space to reflect and feel rooted."

<u>Suggestion</u>
Increase informal, low-threshold cultural activity in parks, streets and public spaces, including outdoor performance, visual art, storytelling, and seasonal activity that does not require specialist venues or advance booking.

2) Youth-focused cultural activity that builds confidence, not just attendance

Youth activity gaps emerge repeatedly in the 2022 dataset, particularly in rural and parish areas (where youth concerns account for up to a third of identified deficiencies) and in Whitstable. Yet culture, arts and events are almost never named as solutions, indicating a disconnect rather than a lack of need.
Mini-survey responses echo concern about young people's access to meaningful cultural experience, and the importance of continuity from education into community life. As one contributor reflected:
"They said 'we don't have culture'… not because it wasn't there, but because they couldn't see themselves in it."

<u>Suggestion</u>
Prioritise participatory cultural activity for children and young people, including making, performing, storytelling and creative skills, delivered in familiar settings (schools, community spaces, parks) and linked across age transitions rather than as one-off projects.

3) Community-led and participatory activity

Across the Residents Survey, residents frame quality-of-life issues as systemic and place-based, not individual. Culture is mostly not visible as something done with communities rather than for them.

Where culture does appear in the mini-survey, it is described as something people actively participate in, not passively consume.

<u>Suggestion</u>

Support community-led cultural activity, including small-scale festivals, neighbourhood projects, choirs, craft, food, and local storytelling, with simple funding routes and practical support rather than complex commissioning.

4) Heritage and place-based interpretation that connects past and present

Heritage appears only rarely in open-text survey responses, yet when it does appear in the mini-survey it is described as deeply meaningful, especially when encountered experientially rather than formally.

Respondents spoke about architecture, streets, and historic spaces as cultural experiences in their own right.

<u>Suggestion</u>

Expand place-based heritage and interpretation activity that animates historic spaces through walking, performance, creative interpretation and contemporary use, rather than relying solely on static or institutional models.

5) Culturally inclusive and affordable activity

Several mini-survey respondents raised issues of affordability, accessibility and cultural confidence, particularly in relation to formal venues.

The 2022 data suggests that where access and safety pressures dominate, residents disengage from cultural life altogether.

<u>Suggestion</u>

Increase low-cost or free cultural activity, particularly in areas identified as cultural "deserts", and prioritise formats that do not rely on prior cultural confidence or specialist knowledge.

Rather than focusing on a narrow list of art forms or venues, the evidence points to demand for:
- informal and outdoor cultural activity
- participatory, youth-focused culture
- community-led initiatives
- place-based heritage experiences
- accessible, low-cost formats embedded in everyday settings

We suggest that embedding these forms of activity within the Strategy would better fit cultural provision with residents' lived experience, help address suppressed demand, and expand participation across the District.

Q9: Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding cultural activity in these areas?

Our evidence suggests that cultural activity across the District is experienced unevenly and is strongly shaped by place-based conditions rather than by a lack of interest in culture itself.

Analysis of the 2022 Residents Survey shows that residents rarely articulate cultural activity in isolation. Instead, cultural participation is implicitly constrained by access, safety, and the availability of everyday venues. In Canterbury City, for example, open-ended responses are dominated by **traffic, pedestrian safety and mobility concerns** (**24.56%** of mentions), followed by **gaps in venues and amenities (5.74%)** and **community cohesion (5.44%)**. Explicit references to culture, heritage, arts and events each account for less than 1% of responses. This pattern indicates that cultural activity becomes marginal in people's thinking when the conditions that enable participation are weak.

This finding aligns closely with the themes we recall from the 2021 Cultural and Community Facilities Survey, which consistently showed that:
- usage of cultural venues was highly uneven across the District
- participation dropped sharply where facilities were hard to reach, poorly connected, or felt unwelcoming
- dissatisfaction was often linked not to the quality of cultural provision itself, but to practical barriers such as transport, parking, opening hours, affordability, and lack of nearby complementary spaces (such as cafés or informal meeting places).

Taken together, these datasets point to a common conclusion:
cultural activity is most likely to flourish where it is embedded into everyday, accessible places and supported by basic infrastructure, rather than delivered as stand-alone provision.

For Canterbury City in particular, the evidence suggests that strengthening cultural activity depends less on creating new headline events and more on:
- enabling smaller-scale, local cultural activity that can take place within neighbourhoods
- improving the conditions around existing cultural assets so they are easier to access on foot, by public transport, and at different times of day
- supporting informal and community-led activity that builds confidence and participation over time, rather than assuming residents will travel into the city centre for programmed culture.

By contrast, the data for Whitstable, Herne Bay and rural areas points to different dynamics, including seasonal pressures, youth activity gaps, and limited local venues. While these areas clearly merit attention, the strongest and most detailed evidence currently available relates to Canterbury City, where infrastructure and access constraints most consistently suppress cultural participation.

We therefore suggest that the final Strategy:
- **Q9.1** avoids a uniform, District-wide model of cultural activity
- **Q9.2** explicitly recognises place-specific barriers and enablers, and

Q9.3 treats cultural participation as something that grows from local conditions, everyday spaces and continuity of engagement, rather than from provision alone.

Q10: Are there any local organisations that you feel are particularly important to your cultural experience in the district?

The evidence suggests that residents rarely frame their cultural experience in terms of named organisations. Instead, they describe culture through places, everyday activities, and informal community settings. This is itself an important finding and should shape how the Strategy understands cultural infrastructure.

In the 2022 Residents Survey, explicit references to cultural organisations, arts bodies, heritage institutions or events are extremely rare. As referenced in Q9, mentions of culture, arts, heritage and events together account for less than 1% of open-ended responses, and 16 out of 21 wards contain no such references at all. This does not indicate a lack of cultural interest, rather it points to low visibility, uneven reach, and weak connection between formal cultural organisations and residents' everyday lives.

What does emerge strongly from the data is the importance of:
- community venues and informal gathering places (such as cafés, pubs, halls, parks and open spaces),
- education-linked cultural exposure, including schools and youth settings as early points of contact,
- and voluntary and civic organisations that enable participation, stewardship and local identity, even where they are not labelled as "cultural".

This pattern is consistent with what we recall from the 2021 Cultural and Community Facilities Survey, which showed that residents were more likely to engage with culture where it was; local and familiar, affordable and informal, embedded in multipurpose spaces and supported by voluntary or community-led organisations rather than delivered solely through formal institutions.

Our own recent open-ended survey responses reinforce this. When residents describe what matters culturally, they point to choirs, festivals, walking routes, food, shared traditions, heritage streetscapes, libraries, and places of learning, rather than naming individual organisations. One respondent described culture as "the places that help me feel rooted and part of something larger than myself," highlighting that cultural experience is often relational and spatial rather than organisational.

That said, this should not be interpreted as diminishing the value of established cultural organisations. Instead, it suggests that their impact depends heavily on:
- how visible they are beyond their core audiences
- how well they connect to everyday spaces and community life,
- and how effectively they work in partnership with schools, civic groups and local networks.

We therefore recommend, to better reflect how culture is actually experienced across the District, that the final Strategy:

    Q10.1   avoids over-reliance on lists of cultural organisations as a proxy for cultural life

> **Q10.2** recognises informal, voluntary, educational and civic organisations as part of the district's cultural ecosystem
>
> **Q10.3** focuses on strengthening the connective tissue between formal cultural bodies and the places and communities where residents already spend their time.

Q11: How could the council better support cultural life in the area?

The evidence indicates that the Council's most effective role in supporting cultural life is not primarily as a commissioner of standalone cultural activity, but as an enabler of the conditions that make cultural participation possible, visible and sustainable.

Across the 2022 Residents Survey, cultural activity is consistently overshadowed by concerns about access, safety, cleanliness, traffic and the quality of public space. These issues dominate open-ended responses and appear repeatedly as compound barriers that suppress participation. Where residents experience unsafe streets, poor pedestrian access, limited toilets, or degraded public environments, cultural activity becomes peripheral, regardless of its intrinsic value. Supporting culture therefore requires addressing these enabling conditions directly, rather than treating culture as separate from them.

The data also shows that visibility and awareness matter. Residents who feel better informed about council services report lower dissatisfaction with infrastructure and public realm issues. This suggests that improved communication, clearer signposting, and consistent local engagement can have a tangible effect on how people experience their environment and their ability to participate in community and cultural life. Cultural activity that is poorly communicated or disconnected from everyday information channels remains invisible, even where it exists.

A further finding is the geographic inequality of cultural visibility. Sixteen of twenty-one wards show no mention of culture, arts, heritage or events at all, despite residents identifying deficiencies in amenities, youth activities and community life. This points to suppressed demand rather than disinterest. Council support should therefore prioritise place-based approaches, helping cultural activity reach areas where residents already identify gaps in social infrastructure, rather than concentrating provision in locations that already have cultural critical mass.

There is also strong evidence that residents experience culture through multi-use, informal and shared spaces, rather than through single-purpose institutions. Parks, community halls, libraries, schools and everyday high-street venues appear repeatedly as the settings where cultural life either could happen or is currently constrained. Council support should reflect this by:
- enabling flexible use of public buildings and outdoor spaces
- reducing barriers to temporary, meanwhile or low-cost cultural use
- supporting partnerships between cultural organisations, schools, voluntary groups and local communities.

Importantly, the Council can also support cultural life through its planning, regeneration and infrastructure roles. While culture is not always explicitly recognised as infrastructure, many of the conditions that enable participation sit within planning policy and investment decisions.

Clearer alignment between the Cultural Strategy, the emerging Local Plan, town and city centre strategies and the use of CIL or Section 106 contributions would strengthen the Council's ability to support cultural outcomes in practice, particularly where cultural activity contributes to place-making, community cohesion and wellbeing.

Finally, the evidence highlights the importance of early and sustained cultural engagement, particularly for young people. Youth activity gaps are prominent in rural and coastal wards, yet culture is rarely named as a solution. This disconnect suggests the need for closer alignment between cultural provision, education and youth services, so that cultural participation becomes part of everyday learning and community life rather than an optional add-on.

The Council can best support cultural life by:

Q11.1 treating access, safety and public realm quality as foundational cultural infrastructure

Q11.2 improving visibility, communication and local awareness of cultural opportunities

Q11.3 adopting place-based, equity-focused approaches that address suppressed demand

Q11.4 enabling flexible, shared use of community spaces; and

Q11.5 embedding culture within planning, education, youth engagement and community development.

Q12: Is there anything else you would like to share that could help shape the final Cultural Strategy?

A central issue emerging from our evidence is the need for the Cultural Strategy to be clearly integrated with the Council's wider place-making, planning and regeneration frameworks. Residents do not experience culture as a standalone sector. They experience it through streets, parks, town centres, community buildings, safety, access and everyday environments. Where these enabling conditions are weak, cultural activity becomes invisible or inaccessible, regardless of interest or potential demand.

This is particularly important given that the Draft Cultural Strategy is being developed in parallel with the Canterbury District Town Centre Strategies and the emerging Draft Local Plan. At present, these documents appear adjacent rather than fully aligned. The Town Centre Strategies correctly position culture, heritage, events and animation of public space as core to town centre vitality, while the Draft Local Plan frames culture more implicitly within broader objectives around quality of place, heritage and wellbeing. The Cultural Strategy therefore has a critical role to play in bridging this gap and providing a clear programme-level articulation of how cultural ambition will be delivered spatially and infrastructurally.

Evidence from the 2022 Residents Survey reinforces this need for alignment. Residents overwhelmingly prioritise access, safety, cleanliness, traffic and the availability of everyday amenities. Cultural activities, arts and heritage are rarely named directly, not because they lack value, but because unresolved place-based constraints dominate lived experience. This suggests that cultural participation is being suppressed by infrastructure and environmental barriers that sit squarely within planning, public realm and regeneration policy. If the Cultural Strategy is not explicitly linked to these agendas, there is a risk it will be perceived as aspirational but detached from delivery.

The emerging Draft Local Plan provides an important opportunity to address this. While it references vibrant cultural and creative places, it does not yet clearly define cultural infrastructure as a distinct component of community or social infrastructure. This lack of clarity makes it harder to justify the use of planning obligations, including CIL and Section 106, to support cultural outcomes. The Cultural Strategy should therefore be used to inform the final Local Plan, helping to establish cultural infrastructure — including community cultural spaces, creative workspaces, heritage activation and programmable public realm — as legitimate infrastructure eligible for developer contributions where it supports place-making, wellbeing and town centre vitality.

Finally, the evidence points to a need for greater visibility, coordination and continuity. Many residents struggle to name cultural assets or activities, even in areas where unmet social and community needs are clearly articulated. This indicates suppressed or latent demand rather than indifference. The Strategy would be strengthened by a commitment to ongoing engagement, clearer communication, and a place-based approach that aligns cultural delivery with town centre renewal, education, youth engagement and community development.

The Society encourages the Council to ensure that the final Cultural Strategy:

Q12.1   is explicitly aligned with the Town Centre Strategies and emerging Local Plan

Q12.2   treats culture as an enabler of place, not a parallel sector

Q12.3   strengthens the policy basis for using planning contributions to support cultural infrastructure

Q12.4   grounds cultural ambition in the everyday conditions that residents identify as shaping participation and belonging.

This integration will be <u>essential</u> if the Strategy is to deliver meaningful, equitable and lasting cultural outcomes across the District.

Appendix C: Summary of 2022 Canterbury Residents Survey Data

The Canterbury District Residents Survey 2022 provides the most recent District-wide snapshot of resident views available to the Council. It combines structured questions (where respondents select from defined options or score issues on scales) with open-text questions, allowing both quantitative analysis and verbatim insight.

How we have used the dataset
We treat the survey as a baseline for district-wide perceptions and lived experience, and we focus on:
- Barrier patterns that suppress participation (access, safety, public realm quality, cleanliness, traffic)
- Geographic concentration of unmet needs and hotspots.
- Visibility gaps (for example, the low frequency of explicit "culture/arts/events" language despite wider place-based concerns).

We have used the Residents Survey alongside our mini-survey to test whether these patterns still feel current and to add qualitative depth.

Important limitation for culture planning
The open-text question format ("what do you like least") naturally foregrounds immediate frustrations (traffic, roads, litter, safety). That can mask latent demand for cultural activity and facilities, because residents often lack shared everyday language for "cultural infrastructure" unless directly prompted.

This is one reason the dedicated 2021 Cultural and Community Facilities Survey evidence matters as it would have provided targeted, culture-specific prompts to complement the Residents Survey's unprompted framing.

Appendix B1 - Geographic Distribution of Cultural Visibility and Suppressed Demand

The 2022 residents survey data reveals a critical imbalance in how different geographic areas articulate cultural and youth infrastructure needs:

Table 1 - Cultural, Youth and Community Mentions by Area (Q3 Open Text)

Area	Total Responses	Culture / Arts / Heritage / Events mentions	Youth Activities mentions	Community / Amenity Gap mentions	Cultural - to - Youth Ratio
Canterbury City	676	26	13	62	2.0
Whitstable	470	12	11	29	1.09
Herne Bay	272	6	7	28	0.86
Rural / Parish	172	4	2	14	*Not meaningful (low counts)*
Other Urban	157	2	2	14	

Summary by Area
- **Canterbury City** leads in absolute cultural mentions, suggesting greater awareness or expectation of cultural programming. However, culture still represents <4% of concerns, indicating substantial unmet demand.
- **Whitstable** shows the most balanced cultural-to-youth demand articulation (1.09 ratio), suggesting residents perceive both needs as legitimate concerns. However, absolute numbers remain low, indicating suppressed or under-articulated demand in a coastal town.
- **Herne Bay** shows the lowest cultural visibility despite being a traditional seaside resort town with heritage tourism potential. Youth activity concerns slightly exceed cultural mentions, yet absolute culture references (only 6 mentions in 272 responses) indicate dramatic invisibility. Coastal area advantage appears unactivated.
- **Rural** areas show minimal cultural articulation (4 mentions) and worryingly low youth activity mentions (2 mentions). This reflects severe infrastructure invisibility in rural settings where even basic amenity complaints dominate discourse.

Appendix B2 - Infrastructure Barriers vs Cultural Mentions (Suppression Effect)

Analysis of the 2022 Residents Survey Q3 open-ended responses ("What one thing do you like the least about the area you live in?") shows that resident dissatisfaction is dominated by everyday practical barriers to participation, rather than by dissatisfaction with cultural provision itself.

The strongest themes relate to:
- traffic congestion, road condition and pedestrian safety
- access and mobility constraints
- environmental quality issues such as litter, noise and poorly maintained public spaces.

These issues appear repeatedly as compound barriers, where multiple problems combine to limit people's ability to move around safely, spend time in public places, or access shared facilities. In many responses, barriers such as speeding traffic, poor pavements, lack of crossings, and unsafe or unpleasant streets are explicitly linked to reduced walking, lingering, or social interaction.

By contrast, explicit references to missing amenities, social venues, or cultural activities are relatively infrequent and often expressed in broad or indirect terms, such as "nothing to do" or "lack of facilities," rather than as specific demands for cultural infrastructure.

This pattern indicates that residents frame dissatisfaction primarily through the lens of functional daily experience, with cultural participation implicitly constrained by access, safety and environmental conditions rather than rejected or deprioritised in principle.

Table 2 - Ratio of Infrastructure Barriers to Cultural Mentions

Category*	Mentions	% of Total Responses
Access / Traffic / Safety	767	40.39%
Litter / Environmental Quality	363	19.12%
Community / Amenities	90	4.74%
Culture / Arts / Heritage / Events	16	0.84%

Responses can be tagged to more than one theme, so total mentions exceed total responses.

This analysis supports the Society's position that cultural participation is being suppressed by foundational barriers, not by lack of interest. It reinforces the argument that improving access, safety and public realm quality is a prerequisite for cultural engagement, and that cultural strategy must be aligned with these enabling conditions rather than treated as a standalone intervention.

Appendix B3 - What the Residents Survey Captures Well vs Poorly

The 2022 Residents Survey reveals a significant visibility gap between lived cultural need and the language residents use to express dissatisfaction. While residents frequently describe barriers that limit community life and social participation, they rarely frame these issues explicitly in cultural terms.

Across the Q3 open-ended responses:

- traffic, access and safety issues account for a large share of comments
- environmental and public realm concerns form a substantial secondary tier
- explicit mentions of culture, arts, heritage or events account for a very small proportion of responses

This does not imply that culture is unimportant to residents. Rather, it suggests that:

- cultural needs are often experienced indirectly, through the absence of places to meet, walk, linger or gather
- residents lack shared, everyday language to articulate "cultural infrastructure" unless directly prompted
- cultural demand is frequently displaced by more immediate and concrete frustrations when respondents are asked to identify a single negative issue

This pattern is consistent across wards, including those where residents report strong dissatisfaction with community life, youth provision or local amenities but make no explicit reference to cultural activity.

Table 3 - What the 2022 Residents Survey Captures Well vs Poorly

Captured Well (Unprompted)	Weakly Captured	Largely Invisible
Traffic and safety	Community life	Cultural infrastructure
Road condition	Social spaces	Arts participation
Litter and cleanliness	Informal venues	Heritage activation

This finding explains why reliance on unprompted resident feedback alone risks systematically underestimating cultural need. It underpins the Society's argument that cultural demand is latent and suppressed, and that the Strategy should be informed by targeted cultural evidence and place-based analysis rather than headline frequency counts alone.

It also highlights the importance of complementary, culture-specific datasets. The apparent unavailability of the Council's most recent Cultural and Community Facilities Survey means that a key source of prompted, sector-focused evidence is not currently informing the Strategy. Without such targeted data, there is a risk that cultural need is inferred indirectly from general quality-of-life indicators rather than assessed directly.
Locating or refreshing this form of survey evidence would strengthen the Strategy's evidential base and help ensure cultural demand is properly understood across different places and communities.