

Barnet Culture Strategy 2024-2029

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LONDON BOROUGH

Forewords

Local Government can sometimes feel like a formless and faceless institution. It can mean different things to different people. Your interaction with it could be infrequent and generic, or it could be recurrent and complex.

Typically, little thought is given to the role of Local Government in enabling people to lead fulfilling lives, and the relevance of Local Government in the realisation of an environment conducive of satisfaction, community cohesion, and pride of place.

One, somewhat prosaic, way of looking at the functioning of Local Government is to take the view that, if it is performing its duties efficiently and well, you will not even know it exists. This is a view not worthy of a borough as brimming with talent, diversity and creative energy as Barnet.

A more ambitious, perhaps even poetic, conception of Local Government is to view it as a potential force for good in the lives of local people. That it is possible to harness the impact Local Government already has on the local area, and local people, in a way that positively improves the quality of outlook of both.

Consequently, the question that presented itself to Barnet's new Labour administration, when Barnet residents gave us the chance to lead in 2022, was not whether Local Government has a mission, we passionately believe it does, but rather: what must we do to achieve the stated outcomes of that mission?

This was the question that led to the desire to develop a five-year Culture Strategy, a long-term commitment by the London Borough of Barnet to reimagine the basic cultural offer made available to, and for the benefit of, local people across the length and breadth of the borough.

This document is a vision statement that outlines the ways in which we can utilise the work of Local Government service areas to enhance the arts and culture landscape in Barnet.

It was co-produced with organisations and individuals intimately familiar with Barnet's cultural capital, the aspirations of its residents, and its astonishingly rich history.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all those who worked to put the Culture Strategy together.

Councillor Ammar Naqvi

Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Arts and Sport
London Borough of Barnet

I understand culture to be at once ordinary and special, local and global. Culture connects people and communities; it nurtures our attachment to places, near and far; it comforts and challenges us; and it makes new things possible.

As a knowledge economy migrant, researcher, and educator of artists and culture industry workers, my investment in culture is both professional and personal, social and political. Women's movements from across the world and British postcolonial and cultural studies have shaped my understanding of culture as a site of social action, where power relations are both established and unsettled. This is why culture matters.

Barnet culture is subject to London's population churn: it is enormously diverse and in flux, which is where it draws its strength and dynamism. I feel right at home in Barnet: it is a good place to live and could be even better. I would like to see this green borough become the exciting cultural destination it deserves to be, where people are drawn to rest, play, be challenged, and feel connected.

Middlesex University, where I work, will continue to perform a vital role in the cultural, social and economic life of the borough. Our London campus in Hendon, which includes a registered warm space for the community, regularly welcomes visitors from the borough and beyond at public lectures, events, screenings, and festivals, including notably our degree show festival, showcasing our student's creative practices from across the Faculty of Arts and Cultural Industries. We share the benefits of our research, learn from others, and strive to make life better for the borough's residents.

My hope for this strategy is that it puts our shared commitment to inclusivity to work through its implementation. Measures of success should foreground participation and purchase. Any truly inclusive definition of culture has to be and remain representative, porous, and open to change through diverse perspectives and ideas. It has been a pleasure and an honour to work with the Culture Steering Group members and the council on this strategy. I hope to continue our collaboration, in different configurations, towards a culturally thriving Barnet.



Dr Alexandra Kokoli (she/her/)

Associate Professor in Visual Culture, Middlesex University
VIAD Senior Research Associate, University of Johannesburg

Introduction

Our vision

Barnet's five-year culture strategy is dedicated to celebrating, supporting, and enhancing our borough's creative and cultural sector. Developed in collaboration with our local community, this strategy seeks to build on the cultural assets, opportunities and activities in the borough. It will create a step change in what is offered, strengthening the borough's identity as a cultural destination. Our aim is to further develop Barnet as a place with a diverse, accessible, and enriching cultural offer for residents and visitors to enjoy for many years to come.

The strategy has six key priorities:

Involvement	Increasing participation in Barnet's cultural sector
Infrastructure	Developing placemaking and supporting Barnet's cultural infrastructure
Interconnection	Promoting culture as a connector of people and places
Identity	Accelerating Barnet's identity as a cultural destination
Inspiration	Stimulating cultural education and engagement with young people
Influence	Harnessing the power of culture to enrich other services and industries

These priorities were shaped by an independent Culture Strategy Steering group comprising representatives from a range of arts and culture organisations across the borough. They have also been informed by the results of a widespread public engagement, conducted over the summer of 2023. Further input has been received from council officers and the Cabinet portfolio holder. For more information about how we developed the strategy please see [Appendix 1](#).

To deliver this strategy, the Council will work in partnership with creative professionals, residents, community groups and businesses. Just as this strategy has been created through co-production, the journey to implement it will also be one we take together.

Togetherness is something that culture in all its forms can create. It enables communities to celebrate their identities, share their stories and see themselves reflected in our collective narrative. It can inspire learning through understanding, and foster tolerance through shared experiences of joy.

Engaging with culture also has the power to increase personal wellbeing and create benefits for our communities that will support Barnet's social, health and economic objectives. Our cultural offer will be open and accessible to everyone.

At the heart of Barnet's culture are the people who make it. This strategy will empower local creatives and grow an environment where they can thrive. We want to embed creativity into our public spaces, helping to shape an ambitious cultural identity for our borough that will make it not just a great place to live, but a destination.

Our principles

The six key Culture Strategy priorities featured in this document, the long-term objectives and goals they set for the Council, as well as the way they will shape the Council's vision for the future of Barnet, were informed by a core set of principles that guide our approach to forward planning. These principles are a design philosophy that flows through the core of what this strategy is about and what it wants to achieve, ensuring consistency with the broader aims of the Corporate Plan, and generating a strategy whose outcomes are impactful and deliverable.

Ambition	We will be ambitious in our plans, unafraid to push the boundaries of what we can achieve. We want to ensure our creatives and professionals believe they can achieve their ambitions in Barnet.
Creativity	We will harness the power of creativity to bring positive change and to enhance our environments. We will take a design approach to problem solving and be innovative in our actions.
Joy	We will cultivate joy amongst our residents and visitors. Both through enabling people to do the things they love and creating opportunities to discover new passions, interests and experiences.
Access	Inclusivity will drive our decisions when implementing the priorities of this strategy to ensure that individuals and communities from all backgrounds and circumstances can access Barnet's culture.
Connection	Just as culture brings people together, our strategy will foster networks of artists and makers. It will connect people with the heritage and identity of Barnet and create a sense of belonging across our communities.

Our borough

Sitting on the outer edge of northwest London, Barnet is London's second most populous borough, home to over 389,000 people, 26,000 businesses, and 1,000 charities.

We are a borough for all. We are known for having the largest Jewish population in the UK, but are also home to significant Iranian, Romanian, and Japanese communities, this cultural diversity is a vital part of Barnet's distinct identity. A proud borough of sanctuary, Barnet has welcomed the highest number of Ukrainian refugees in London and the second highest nationally.

Barnet is a green and leafy borough boasting approximately two hundred open spaces and more tree cover than anywhere else in London. The area's rich history and heritage includes the Battle of Barnet in the Wars of the Roses, the Barnet Fair and RAF Hendon's unique place in aviation history. Britain's first ever motion picture was filmed in the borough and the first ever televised football match took place here.

More recently, Barnet has given the world two legends of popular music in George Michael and Amy Winehouse. Its cultural assets include two Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations (NPO): the artsdepot - a multi-purpose arts centre offering a busy programme of performances, participation classes and exhibitions, and High Rise Theatre – an award winning multi-arts collective representing the voices of unheard communities. The Phoenix

Cinema in East Finchley is one of the country's oldest purpose-built cinemas, and the RAF Museum in Colindale is a National Museum holding over a million unique objects in trust for the nation and drawing around 500 thousand visitors a year. Premiership rugby team Saracens have made Barnet their home since 2013 and welcome up to 10,000 fans to the StoneX stadium every weekend.

While Barnet already has much to offer, this strategy recognises the potential to develop culture in the borough much further. In 2023, the Council commissioned [The Audience Agency](#) to undertake mapping of Barnet's cultural assets. Some of the results are summarised in Appendix 2, but key findings were:

- A lack of dedicated venues for creative activities
- Uneven distribution of cultural spaces across the borough, and gaps in certain types of facilities

In 2023 we undertook a widespread community engagement on culture. Titled *Our Barnet Canvas* and conducted in partnership with Hemingway Design, over 1500 residents were surveyed. Results are included in Appendix 1, but key things residents reported were:

- A lack of opportunities to experience and participate in culture in Barnet.
- Insufficient information about what's on in the borough.
- A desire to learn more about our history and heritage.

Progress so far

In the lead up to developing this strategy, the Council and its partners have already begun to develop Barnet's cultural offer.

- A new culture team has been established in the Council.
- In 2023 Barnet was one of the first outer London Boroughs to take part in the London Festival of Architecture. This generated many community-led events celebrating architecture, heritage and public art around the borough as well as awarding microgrants to several organisations.
- A Culture Strategy Steering Group was formed through an open call recruitment process. Independently chaired by the Associate Professor in Visual Culture at Middlesex University, it comprised 15 representatives of diverse cultural and community organisations in the borough. The group has collectively developed this strategy in partnership with the Council.
- Barnet submitted a bid to be London Borough of Culture and were awarded a Cultural Impact Award.
- A community events programme was launched that provides grants to community groups to enable them to hold events. Over 80 took place in 2023.
- Public art has continued to grow in the borough, through Related Argent's art commissioning in the Brent Cross Town development to new town centre public art initiatives in Edgware and other locations.

Planning to deliver

Following the publication of this strategy, an action plan will be developed. This will map out short-, medium- and longer-term actions to deliver the strategic priorities that are described in the following section.

This strategy also serves as a driver in realising some of the ambitions outlined in Our Plan for Barnet 2023 – 2026. As an expression, or means of realising, our broader Transformation Agenda for Barnet, this strategy will play a key role in delivering output within three key transformation projects:

Destination Barnet

This seeks to make the borough an attractive location for creative industries, a hub for creative activity, and a renowned locale for culturally relevant or significant venues.

Discover Barnet

This workstream showcases existing cultural capital, all the events and opportunities to experience culture in Barnet, as well as broadcasts the rich heritage of our borough.

Barnet Dreams

This is a commitment to ensure that we have the tools, opportunities, and advice services available locally to ensure every resident unlocks their potential.

Strategic Priorities

1. Involvement

Objectives	
1.1	Create more opportunities for residents to get involved in cultural activities in Barnet
1.2	Strengthen pathways to employment in the creative industries
1.3	Streamline council support for organisations planning to hold events
1.4	Support our cultural institutions and enable arts and cultural organisations to access funding opportunities
1.5	Strengthen networking and cultural partnerships

1.1 Create more opportunities for residents to get involved in cultural activities in Barnet

Encouraging cultural participation is a core objective of this strategy, encompassing activities in areas such as dance, art, music, sport, and food, among many others. Our local community told us they want more opportunities to be involved in cultural activities, with 83% of respondents agreeing. Many residents also told us they leave the borough to go to the theatre, see an exhibition or a concert.

We will:

- Work with cultural partners to explore options for making cultural activities accessible to all;
- Promote progressive approaches and innovative arts and cultural practices that go beyond traditional methods;
- Explore the potential for digital engagement through greater use of technology;
- Encourage networks to share information about existing activities more widely.

Instant impact		
Hosting London Festival of Architecture 2024	1-30 June 2024	Our LFA programme is packed full of exciting activities for all ages to get involved.
Community Events Programme 2024	Throughout the year	Funding has been secured to continue our small grants to community groups to hold events and cultural celebrations.

Case study

A creative hub: artsdepot

The artsdepot is a creative home for all. Located in North Finchley their accessible building houses activities and shows for everyone. Reaching over 162,000 people a year, they are a destination for our communities in Barnet and beyond. From lunch clubs for older adults, to shows for babies, their offer reaches everyone from infants to centenarians. They are a dementia friendly venue and participate in the Sunflower scheme. Their access fund ensures that those who can't afford to see a show or join a workshop can still take part. artsdepot also offer an annual programme of work experience for learning disabled young people aged 16 – 24, The programme focuses on skills development and introducing participants to working in the arts and culture sector where participants work towards an Arts Award qualification.

They have held events like the Big Beat Playground, the rave for kids grew from a small free festival at artsdepot in 2019 for 200 people to an outdoor event for 500 people in 2023 – giving away over half its tickets to low-income families, they also have a broad programme of performances which brings some of the biggest names in dance, circus and comedy to Barnet. The artist residency programme supports 8 artists/companies a year with a wide-ranging package from a small bursary, space and tailored mentoring. It continues to be unique in its approach.

1.2 Strengthen pathways to employment in the creative industries

We want to create an environment where the substantial creative talent grown in Barnet stays here. The benefits of a thriving creative community can inspire and mentor emerging talents, creating a positive cycle of growth and innovation. We want to support skill development in Barnet's cultural sector by growing an ecosystem that graduates and start-ups can develop within.

1.3 Streamline council support for organisations planning to hold events

Our community events programme enabled 82 events to take place in 2023, but it also highlighted the difficulties some smaller organisations experience in organising and staging events. Events occur in various settings and have different features which may require different licences and approaches. We aim to simplify the process and consolidate all necessary information and procedures into a single, accessible resource guide. Progress towards this goal has already begun with the development of our [Events in Parks Policy and Organisational Arrangements for 2023-2027](#), providing guidelines for planning park events.

Instant impact		
Council events resource pack	Summer 2024	Work is already underway to collate streamlined guidance and resources for events organisers

1.4. Support our cultural institutions and enable arts and cultural organisations to access funding opportunities

Our cultural organisations have faced unprecedented challenges in recent years. The far-reaching impacts of Covid-19, the escalating cost of living, and reduced support and funding have all played a part. The need for support is evident in our Audience Agency research, where nearly 50% of surveyed organisations reported a need for assistance with fundraising, advocacy, and organisational development.

1.5 Strengthen networking and cultural partnerships

Currently, we have partnerships and networks that support cultural outcomes in the borough. These include:

- Barnet Arts and Culture Network
- Barnet & Culture for Youth, our cultural education partnership
- Barnet Together Alliance, our infrastructure partnership for the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector
- Barnet Green Spaces Network
- Barnet Borough Arts Council
- The Barnet Society
- Barnet Multi Faith Forum

We can grow the number of organisations and individuals connecting in the borough. Our Audience Agency research revealed that only 55% of cultural organisations were linked to a cultural network, and we want this number to increase. The research also identified several challenges, such as organisations being unaware of available networks, their aims and purposes, and how to join them.

Instant impact		
Repurpose the Culture Strategy Steering Group to guide the delivery of the strategy	From May 2024	Following Cabinet approval of the Culture Strategy, regular reporting to the Arts and Culture Network on the delivery of the priorities will take place.

2. Infrastructure

Objectives	
2.1	Facilitate the creation and promotion of high-quality public art
2.2	Continue to promote the development of creative placemaking projects in our town centres
2.3	Establish new spaces for creative activities and industries
2.4	Enhance the cultural use of green spaces in the borough
2.5	Ensure cultural facilities are utilised to the maximum of their potential
2.6	Ensure our cultural venues are accessible to all
2.7	Promote the use of Barnet's libraries as cultural spaces

2.1 Facilitate the creation and promotion of high-quality public art

We will integrate more public art into our town centres and green spaces, enhancing the public realm. Public art can elevate ordinary spaces and change how people perceive and interact with their surroundings. Positive examples of public art already exist in Barnet, such as the installations by Related Argent at Brent Cross Town, murals on the Grahame Park Estate, and [three artist-led projects in Edgware](#).

Instant impact		
Barnet Legends: a public art commission exploring Barnet's hidden heritage through a series of artworks and public art trail	Autumn 2024	Barnet Legends will celebrate our cultural heritage highlighting notable people from the borough's past and providing hidden gems to discover.
Public art in Brent Cross Town	Autumn 2024 onwards	Continuing to work with Related Argent supporting their commissioning of permanent public artwork and community engagement work in Brent Cross. This gives local artists opportunities to get involved and help shape new public space.

Case study
<p>Public Art at Brent Cross Town</p> <p>One of the UK's largest public artworks has been produced at Brent Cross Town, a new 180-acre, net zero town development being delivered in partnership by Related Argent and Barnet Council. The visually striking artwork has been created by celebrated London-based artist Lakwena and architects IF_DO and is formed of a 52 metre-long and 21-metre high 'wrap' around the new electrical substation for Brent Cross Town.</p> <p>Lighting plays a key part in the design which attracts attention to the artwork during the day and at night. The lighting creates a halo around the façade's wrap which is made from reclaimed steel from the oil industry and Earth-Friendly Concrete in its</p>

foundations. The artwork, titled “Here we come, here we rise”, sits next to London’s North Circular at the junction with the M1 motorway. It is estimated that some six million people each year will see it from the road and rail alone.

To date, five new public artworks have been commissioned at Brent Cross Town from contemporary artists, with further artworks to be unveiled in the coming year.

2.2 Continue to promote the development of creative placemaking projects in our town centres.

The Council is committed to the ongoing promotion of creative placemaking projects. These projects play a role in building community engagement and contributing to instilling pride among residents in their town centres. These kinds of projects can also revitalise underutilised spaces, drawing in both residents and visitors and stimulating economic activity.

Creative placemaking consultations have already taken place in Golders Green and North Finchley, allowing us to understand what residents want to see in their town centres.

Instant impact

Culture in town centres	Autumn 2024 onwards	Town teams and residents continue to be involved in cultural and arts projects.
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Case study

Telling the stories of our residents: Animated tour of the people and buildings of Grahame Park

On June 24, 2023 Notting Hill Genesis and Colindale Communities Trust collaborated on a LFA project that animated stories from local residents, and demonstrated the area’s built heritage.

Dramatic monologues were created to bring to life the stories of 10 residents, including current and former residents as well as representatives from diverse communities like the Somali community, who are a vital part of Grahame Park life. The project also included an animated tour highlighting the wider history of the area.

2.3 Establish new spaces for creative activities and industries

Residents responding to our survey told us they wanted more spaces to experience and participate in creative activities. While The Audience Agency’s research showed a significant

number of the 3,500 arts professionals living in Barnet work outside of the borough. Increasing the availability of space for creative activities will help to keep our creative professionals in Barnet.

We will:

- Improve the equitable distribution of cultural activities and events throughout the borough.
- Explore opportunities for establishing new spaces dedicated to creative activities.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to identify alternative venues for creative activities, allowing artists and other creatives to showcase their work, perhaps in spaces not traditionally used for such purposes.

Instant impact		
The Council will work with Creative Land Trust and Middlesex University to develop a creative incubator and artist studio space.	July 2024	Initial planning and feasibility development work will begin the process of identifying opportunities for permanent cultural provision.

2.4 Enhance the cultural use of green spaces in the borough

Barnet is renowned for its wealth of green spaces, many of which feature integrated cultural, sports and playground facilities. Approximately 80 events took place in our green spaces in 2022, ranging from community festivals, to theatre, fun-fairs and music festivals. In 2023 Victoria Park in North Finchley hosted Barnet’s first ever Pride event.

We want to host more activities and events in our green spaces and be creative with what we use our greenspaces for, whilst maintaining our commitment to biodiversity and nature.

Instant impact		
The Council’s Culture and Green Spaces teams will work together to revitalise park buildings as part of the London Festival of Architecture	July 2024	Currently disused, Copthall Pavilion will be reimagined and used by local groups for creative and cultural uses.
Work with the emerging Parks and Open Spaces Strategy to ensure consideration of the cultural potential of our open spaces for events and public arts	Ongoing through to 2025	Barnet’s open spaces are utilised as a key cultural asset.

2.5 Ensure cultural facilities and venues are utilised to the maximum of their potential.

We will work with our organisations in the cultural sector to generate new ideas and initiatives on how to ensure venues and facilities are fully utilised. Our steering group highlighted that while some venues are being used to capacity, others are not. With a shortage of spaces overall, it is important that existing venues are providing as much as they can.

2.6 Ensure our cultural venues are accessible to all

Barnet's cultural offer must be inclusive of all people and communities, regardless of their social, cultural, economic or physical characteristics. Barnet Council recognises and tackles the structural inequalities in society and will work with partners to ensure equitable access in our cultural sector.

2.7 Promote Barnet's libraries as cultural spaces.

Barnet's libraries are a key part of the borough's cultural fabric, where residents learn, connect, and have fun, as well as providing spaces to gain new digital skills.

Libraries are therefore a vital part of our five-year strategy for culture – both as spaces to experiences activities but also to help create them.

Case study

Mill Hill Music Complex

Established in 1979, and a key part of Barnet's creative sector, Mill Hill Music Complex offers first-class facilities and spaces for artists and creatives to record, rehearse and fine-tune their craft. They also offer music lessons, helping individuals develop their musical skills.

There are multiple studios including specialist music rehearsal, recording, dance, photography, video, auditioning suites, there is also a fitness space and general workspaces. Up to 2,000 musicians, dancers and other artists a week pass through the complex. Which has been used by musicians such as Morrissey, Kate Nash, Flo, and Chico to name a few!

3. Interconnection

Objectives	
3.1	Promote inclusive community festivals and events
3.2	Increase intergenerational events
3.3	Ensure Barnet's cultural offer reflects and serves its communities
3.4	Work in partnership with organisations to encourage participation

3.1 Promote inclusive community festivals and events.

Barnet's diversity is one of its defining features and the way that different communities come together to celebrate and support each other is one of the borough's greatest strengths. Interfaith and intercultural understanding has never been more needed, and Barnet has a proud tradition of holding events and activities that bring communities together. Barnet Multi Faith Forum recently hosted a Together for Humanity vigil in response to tensions from the conflict in the Middle East and are one of many partners supporting the Council's year-round community events programme.

Despite this, respondents to our cultural survey found that, while 51% of respondents had attended a cultural festival in the past year, only 22% had attended one in Barnet. We will build on this over the next five years and grow the opportunities for communities to come together in fun and celebration.

Case study

Celebrating our local community: Barnet Pride in the Park 2023

Barnet's inaugural LGBTQ+ celebration, *Pride in the Park* took place in Summer 2023 at Victoria Park, Finchley. This was a collaborative effort led by Barnet's LGBTQ+ community group Inkluder CIC, with the involvement of Barnet Council and Middlesex University. The event attracted nearly 1,000 attendees.

As part of the event, award-winning photographer Chris Jepson created 'The IDENTITY Project – A Portrait of a Community', a digital exhibition capturing stories and portraits of local LGBTQ+ individuals, highlighting the diverse and inclusive nature of the community. The event included performance by dance troupes, drag bingo and live music. There was clear recognition of the diversity of Barnet on the community stage.

3.2 Increase intergenerational events.

Barnet has high proportions of residents in the oldest and youngest age groups, for example people over 65 make up 14% of the population in Barnet. 1 in 10 residents are aged 75 or above. Yet there are few opportunities for the generations to come together and share cultural experiences.

We believe that connecting different generations not only promotes community cohesion but also creates a supportive and vibrant community who can learn from each other's lived experience and grow resilient in the face of challenges.

Instant impact

Continue to seek funding for projects such as the Memory Mosaic project that develops an archive of youth culture through the decades.

From June 2024

Residents of different age groups can share their cultural memories and learn from each other.

3.3 Ensure Barnet's cultural offer reflects and serves its communities

Culture belongs to everyone, and it is for people to make and support the culture that they want to experience. We will ensure our cultural sector is inclusive and equitable so all can take part and enjoy something that has meaning and relevance to them.

We will foster a community-led culture of co-production and use evidence-based insight to guide our decisions.

Instant impact

Set up diverse resident panels and advisory groups to support with selection and commissioning of art projects

From June 2024

Young people, communities and artists will have agency and be empowered to play a role in the development of arts projects. This is already in place for LFA and Barnet Legends.

3.4 Work in partnership with organisations to encourage participation

Our Community Participation Strategy aims to increase opportunities for residents to be involved in the life of their communities. Cultural events and activities provide numerous opportunities for people to get involved, as we have seen from the hundreds of people who took on volunteering roles at events including our Coronation celebration and Pride in the Park festival. Working with our partners at Volunteering Barnet we will ensure that cultural organisations are supported to recruit and deploy volunteers responsibly and productively.

We want more opportunities for residents to be able to take part, create and perform. There are numerous other ways that people can give their time and develop new skills in the cultural sector. This can often lead to paid opportunities and career development.

4. Identity

Objectives	
4.1	Raise awareness of cultural events and activities taking place in Barnet
4.2	Increase understanding of our history and heritage
4.3	Strengthen Barnet's 'place brand' and destination appeal

4.1 Raise awareness of cultural events and activities taking place in Barnet.

54% of respondents to our survey felt they didn't have enough information about activities in Barnet. We will develop tools, methods and channels to ensure information is disseminated effectively to the people who need it.

4.2 Increase understanding of our history and heritage.

Barnet boasts a rich heritage. It has 19 Archaeological Priority Areas (to be updated by the Greater London Archaeological Advisory service in 2026) which cover its prehistoric, Roman and Mediaeval past. From more well-known features such as its association with the history of flight, to the more obscure (Barnet is home to London's oldest tree) there is a lot to discover in Barnet. Our survey indicated however that awareness of Barnet's history is low among residents. 45% of respondents told us they had limited knowledge about the heritage of the borough.

Our archives service holds collections dating back to 1600, but with just one archivist and no council-run museum, much of our heritage activity and access relies on volunteers.

Awareness of local history can inspire greater connection with place and encourage residents to preserve and contribute to the cultural legacy of their local area.

Our residents play an important role in shaping and influencing Barnet's story. We want to listen to our residents and learn from their experiences in Barnet. Capturing their stories for current and future generations to learn from, as exemplified in an oral history project with Middlesex University and Barnet African Caribbean Association (BACA) launched in 2023 to document stories from the Windrush generation. We will do more to capture direct accounts of the lived experience of all our residents.

Instant impact		
Develop projects that celebrate Barnet's hidden heritage such as Barnet Legends and the Light and Flight festival.	Ongoing	Barnet's hidden heritage is celebrated across the borough and London-wide.

Case study

Connecting us to our past: Recognising local Windrush stories

In 2023, the RAF Museum and London Borough of Barnet collaborated on a story collection event to mark the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush. The event brought together local people with a connection to the Empire Windrush and those who are part of the Windrush generation.

Recordings were transcribed and turned into a display showcased at the Museum's Wings and Waves: Windrush 75 Family Day in June 2023. The event featured a steel band, storytelling, carnival headdress making, and highlighted the RAF connection, with one third of Windrush passengers being RAF personnel.

4.3 Strengthen Barnet's 'place brand' and destination appeal

While many of Barnet's town centres and districts are well known, the borough's overall place brand is not well-developed. Residents identify with their local areas rather than the borough, and Barnet as a borough is not well known as a cultural destination. This is something that was consistently highlighted in our community engagement. To change these perceptions, we will work to establish a clear cultural identity for Barnet.

Continuing to participate in high profile initiatives like London Festival of Architecture and The Mayor of London's New Year's Day Parade will help raise Barnet's profile regionally and nationally. A strong identity as a cultural borough will make Barnet more appealing to residents, businesses and tourists. We will give a greater focus to telling the story of our cultural events and activities, and ensure we market our cultural sector effectively.

5. Inspiration

Objectives	
5.1	Increase the diversity of the cultural activities being offered at schools
5.2	Increase the number of young people taking part in cultural activities in Barnet
5.3	Increase the number of young people leading cultural and creative sessions for their peers and empower them to get involved in co-producing the sessions
5.4	Evaluate how to reach young people with communications
5.5	Ensure culture strategies for children and young people are aligned and partners work together to achieve shared objectives

Only 48% of young people we surveyed currently feel they have enough chances to engage in culture locally. Encouraging youth involvement in cultural and creative activities can support their personal development, creativity, critical thinking and emotional intelligence. We are committed to providing access to culture for our young people.

5.1 Increase the diversity of cultural activities being offered at schools.

The Council will work with our partners, such as Barnet and Culture for Youth, to encourage schools to offer a broader range of arts- and culture-based activities for students. Our school survey revealed that certain cultural activities were consistently offered, but others were not. For instance, 50% felt dance activities were offered to a small extent or not at all. For archaeology (66%) and film and cinema (67%), the figures were even higher.

We also want to reduce the barriers that prevent schools, colleges and universities from being able to engage with certain cultural activities.

Instant impact		
Contribute match funding to Barnet and Culture for Youth to support their work over the next three years	June 2024	The partnership plans to deliver a broad range of activities, including creative learning events for home-schooled children, touring shows for faith schools, and artist residencies in special schools. They also provide a rolling creative learning programme for young people at the Pavilion Study Centre and microgrants for schools.

5.2 Increase the number of young people taking part in cultural activities in Barnet

One clear finding from our research was the significant number of young people leaving Barnet to access culture. Our aim is to collaborate with cultural partners to create conditions that encourage young people to choose Barnet for their cultural experiences. This is vital for establishing a sustainable cultural sector, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship where young people contribute to and benefit from the cultural vibrancy of their own borough.

Instant impact

Support partnership working with Barnet & Culture for Youth and artsdepot with their artist residency programme and continue development work with Creative Land Trust and Middlesex University on creative incubator and studio spaces.	July 2024	Key partnership work putting pathways in place for young creative talent to be retained in the borough.
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Case study

Inspiring the next generation: Barnet's Cultural Education Partnership: Barnet & Culture for Youth

Barnet and Culture for Youth is Barnet's Cultural Education Partnership. Administered by artsdepot, the partnership is led by a steering group formed of representatives from arts organisations, local authority services and primary, secondary and higher education providers from across the borough.

The membership comprises nearly 150 education providers, arts and cultural organisations and artists working with young people in Barnet. The principal aim of the partnership is to identify ways in which every child and young person in Barnet can experience a rich cultural education to provide them with tools to enable them to navigate the world and feel it is theirs to enjoy and impact as well.

Barnet and Culture for Youth have recently secured £500,000 to support the cultural education of young people in Barnet. The funding will be used to support:

- Creative learning events for home-schooled children
- Touring shows for Faith Schools
- Artist Residencies in SEN Schools
- A rolling creative learning programme for young people at the Pavilion Study Centre enabling those removed from mainstream education to access enriched learning opportunities, motivating attendance, and building self-belief.
- Microgrants to support schools to bring in artists, fostering collaborations between students and professionals to ignite creativity within educational settings
- Networking, training and professional development for artists and educators

5.3 Increase the number of young people leading cultural and creative sessions

We believe in empowering young people to plan and lead cultural and creative sessions for their peers. This not only develops leadership skills but also boosts confidence, providing valuable skills for their professional lives. Additionally, this peer-led approach enhances relatability, as young leaders can better understand and connect with the interests and preferences of their peers.

Instant impact

Understand the barriers which prevent young people from accessing cultural activities in the borough	Early 2025	A research project undertaken with young people to greater understand the challenges to accessing culture.
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5.4 Evaluate how we reach young people with communications.

Currently, only 56% of young people surveyed believe they have enough information about local activities, while 67% felt they lacked sufficient knowledge about the borough's history. Our ambition is to change these numbers, ensuring that young people are aware of the cultural opportunities available in the borough. Collaborating with partners, we seek to support peer led programming that reaches more young audiences and captures their interest and encourages participation.

5.5 Ensure culture strategies for children and young people are aligned and partners work together to achieve shared objectives.

Both the Barnet & Culture for Youth partnership, and the Council's own education and learning service have produced strategies for cultural education. When developing the action plan for this strategy we will ensure that it aligns with and complements both of these. Wherever objectives are shared we will seek to work together on delivering them, so as to avoid duplication.

Case study

Creating opportunities: Middlesex University's National Art and Design Saturday Club & North London Story Festival

For many years, Middlesex University have created a number of opportunities for individuals to get involved in creative activities. For example, running since 1996, the iconic North London Story Festival is freely open to all – local schools, students, university staff, artists, writers, business people and those who are just interested in celebrating storytelling.

StoryFest is student-led, and hosts a range of guest speakers, panel debates and practical workshops, both online (so you can attend from anywhere in the world) and at the Hendon campus of Middlesex University.

Middlesex University also offer the Saturday Club programme, which adopts the style of a mini foundation in Art & Design, offering an exciting mix of studio-based projects and workshops covering a wide variety of specialisms. The aim is to introduce Club members to the university experience, share the fantastic facilities, and offer the freedom and opportunity to explore creativity without the pressures of assessment and have fun!

Highlights include photography sessions in both the studios and darkrooms, printmaking, life drawing and ceramic workshops, plus a selection of illustration, graphics, and 3D projects. Club members also take part in national events including Masterclasses with leading industry professionals and the Summer Show, where Saturday Clubs nationwide exhibit their work in a public exhibition – all for free!

6. Influence

Objectives	
6.1	Work with our cultural and voluntary sectors to help attain our goal of achieving net zero in Barnet by 2042.
6.2	Maximise opportunities for attracting inward investment in the borough by strategically utilising cultural events and activities.
6.3	Increase public awareness of local government functions and encourage more civic participation from residents of all backgrounds and cultures
6.4	Connect with the NHS in Barnet through the Barnet Borough Partnership and use the expertise of our Public Health Team to ensure this Culture Strategy plays a role in contributing to the health and wellbeing of our residents.
6.5	Ensure culture and creativity are embedded into the Council's planning and delivery, and the cultural sector is an active partner in achieving local objectives

6.1 Work with our cultural and voluntary sectors to attain our goal of achieving net zero in Barnet by 2042.

Climate change requires us all to think creatively. The Council's corporate plan - *Our Plan for Barnet 2023-26* sets out a bold ambition to achieve a carbon net zero borough by 2042. The Council expects all of its partners to work together in achieving this, and this includes the cultural sector. This will involve helping the cultural and community sectors to understand sustainable practices and how to achieve their own net zero status. We will showcase the best examples.

Instant impact		
Share practice from the 2023 Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change and work with the Barnet Green Spaces network and VCFSE Environment Group to seek funding to develop initiatives that bring arts and culture closer to strategic ideas, such as the regional park	Summer 2024	Galvanise thinking and codesign to lead innovative initiatives that bring arts, culture, green spaces and the net zero agenda together.

6.2 Use our cultural strengths to attract inward investment

Cultural events and assets not only generate income for organisers but also benefit the surrounding businesses and the local economy. These events also offer sponsorship opportunities, with private businesses often investing as part of their corporate social responsibility, providing additional revenue.

Instant impact		
Work with the Events Manager in the Council's Green Spaces and Leisure team on the events strategy and its aims to attract major festivals and commercial investment to the borough.	Ongoing	Barnet's open spaces continue to host major events, further establishing the borough as a cultural destination.

6.3 Increase public awareness of local government functions and encourage more civic participation from residents of all backgrounds and cultures.

Some people feel disconnected from the work of public institutions and are often uncertain why local government matters to them. By working with our creative sector to enable culture and fun for residents we hope to raise awareness of the valuable role local government can play in the life of the borough.

Stronger democratic engagement is good for everybody. It ensures residents are engaged and involved in the decisions that shape their lives. Greater awareness of the processes of local government helps ensure they receive proper scrutiny from residents, leading to more robust and transparent democracy. This is particularly vital for residents who often feel less represented or seldom heard. It allows for a broader range of perspectives and concerns to be considered in the decision-making process.

6.4 Connect with the NHS in Barnet through the Barnet Borough Partnership and use the expertise of our Public Health Team to ensure this Culture Strategy plays a role in contributing to the health and wellbeing of our residents.

Experiencing and participating in culture has benefits for health and wellbeing. It is vital therefore that NHS and Public Health partners are involved in the design and delivery of the culture strategy action plan.

Culture and Public Health partners in Barnet have already worked together in recent years. Examples of this include Art Against Knives work with young black men facing mental health challenges, funded by the Barnet Borough Partnership; the Council's Art in Care Homes competition, and Age UK Barnet's singing club for people with dementia. Participating in cultural activities can make keeping fit and active more fun. For example, dance classes can increase physical resilience in older residents, leading to fall prevention.

6.5 Ensure culture and creativity are embedded into the Council's planning and delivery, and the cultural sector is an active partner in achieving local objectives

This strategy marks a step change in the way Barnet Council engages with culture. It has been coproduced with creative professionals and cultural organisations, and its action plan will be devised in the same way. It remains however a council strategy and requires the local authority to use its powers and levers wherever necessary to ensure its objectives are met.

While this work will be led by the Culture team in the Council's Place directorate, delivering the Culture Strategy will involve service areas across the Council. Schools and Libraries are already active cultural assets and providers, but culture has a vital role to play in urban planning, public health and social care.

An internal council culture network will be formed that unites various council service areas, fostering collaboration and coproducing actions. The strategy will also be showcased internally to ensure staff understand how it could impact their roles and work practices.

Instant impact

Champion the Culture Strategy across the Council and better connect work across key services

Autumn 2024

Culture is better understood across the Council and actively supported with key services

Appendix 1. How we developed the strategy

Timeline for developing the strategy

October – November 2022	Original concept and draft plan on how we co-produce the strategy with the local community
November – December 2022	Initial background desktop research started
December 2022 – January 2023	Call for individuals to apply to become a member of the Culture Strategy Steering Group
January – March 2023	The Audience Agency research conducted
February 2023	Assessment of applications to be part of Culture Strategy Steering Group
March 2023 – March 2024	Steering group meetings start to take place
May – June 2023	Development of consultation and engagement programme
August – November 2023	Start of consultation and engagement programme
November 2023	London Borough of Culture bid submitted
November 2023	Sourcing of case studies to feature in the strategy
December 2023	Analysis of findings from all forms of engagement
January – March 2024	Write up of strategy
April 2024	Strategy submitted for approval to Cabinet

Our commitment to coproduction

An important part of crafting this strategy was making sure we centred residents in every stage of its development. We wanted to work in partnership with residents on the key choices that influenced this strategy. Our Community Participation Strategy (CPS), released in 2022, gave us the roadmap to make this happen. The key principles of the CPS are:

- 1- We go where people are.
- 2- We learn through doing.
- 3- We listen.
- 4- We are transparent, accessible and open.
- 5- We value community power.

To ensure a collaborative approach in shaping this strategy, we established an independent steering group. This group comprises individuals from the arts and cultural sectors as well as representatives from the broader local community. It is a diverse assembly of voices, coming together to co-produce this strategy and ensure it resonates with our local community.

In the selection of steering group members, we implemented a fair and transparent process. The evaluation of applications was carried out by two council employees and an independent representative not affiliated with the Council.

15 individuals were selected to be a member of the Culture Strategy Steering Group. Some of the organisations/backgrounds represented in the independent steering group include:

- artsdepot
- Barnet Society and Medieval Festival
- Middlesex University
- New Citizens Gateway
- The Phoenix Cinema
- Inkluder CIC
- Royal Airforce Museum
- Barnet Green Spaces Network
- NW7HUB Charity
- East Finchley Open Artists Group
- Barnet and Southgate College
- Notting Hill Genesis
- Barnet Borough Arts Council
- Fresh Arts
- Art Against Knives

Gathering insights to inform the strategy

The three key strands of engagement and research that have shaped the strategy are:

The Audience Agency research

One aspect that helped shape this strategy, was the research conducted by the Audience Agency. Their job was to gather key information and insights about how people in our borough engage with culture and creativity. They focused on cultural groups in Barnet, studying the hurdles they encounter and how they connect with residents.

The Culture Strategy Independent Steering Group Workshop

We conducted two distinct workshops in collaboration with our independent steering group. They took on the role of pinpointing what they believed were all the major issues facing Barnet's cultural sector. This steering group is made up of cultural experts who are closely connected to Barnet's local community and understand the cultural challenges facing the borough.

Hemingway Design Consultation and Engagement Programme

Hemingway Design conducted a consultation and engagement programme to provide input for both the Cultural Strategy and Barnet's London Borough of Culture bid. At the core of this engagement was a survey designed to understand the community's perspective on culture in Barnet. Additionally, a series of workshops were conducted to ensure we had fair representation from across the borough.

It was conducted in two strands:

- 1- Adults survey

This survey was responded to by 694 people.

2- Schools survey

This survey was responded to by 732 people.

Meaning overall our surveys reached 1,426 people. This is without taking into account the individual workshops held that also contributed to the strategy.

Measures of success

- More people take part in cultural activities in the borough.
- More spaces are available for creative activities and industries
- Increase the number of cultural institutions supported to achieve their goals.
- Increase awareness of cultural activity in Barnet and understanding of Barnet's history
- Increase the impact and relevance of Barnet's cultural offer on the lives of young people.
- People visit to experience our cultural offer

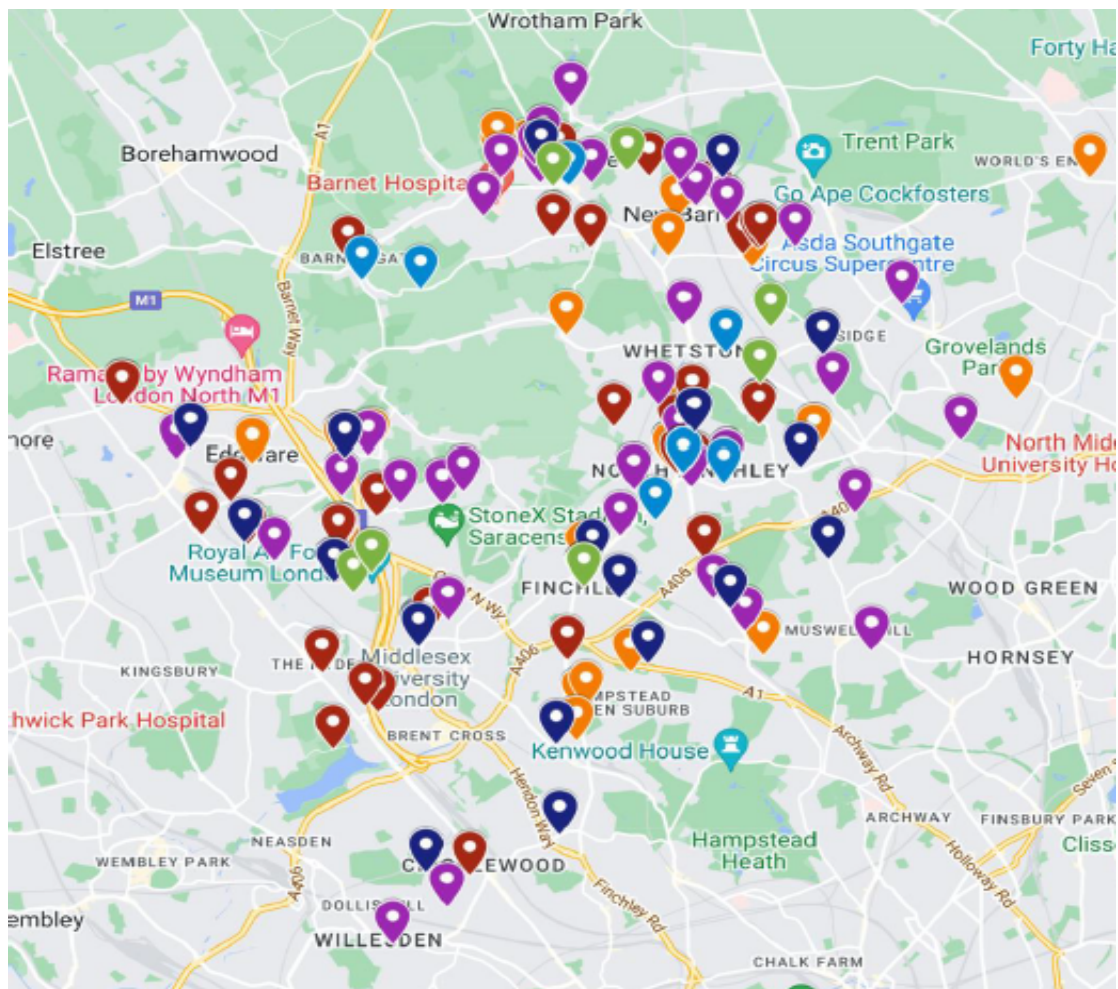
Appendix 2. Information about Barnet's cultural landscape In 2024

Our Cultural assets

This map by no means captures every cultural asset we have in the borough, but it does show the variation of cultural assets we have in the borough.

Key to the Google map:

- **Maroon** are community arts organisations
- **Orange** are community organisations
- **Purple** are organisations offering some sort of cultural education/training/classes/studios
- **Green** are the museums and heritage
- **Blue** are cultural organisations



Credit: Google Images 2023

The asset mapping reveals an absence of creative and art spaces in Barnet, evident in the identification of only one space designated as a creative studio in the borough. Additionally, the research highlights an uneven distribution of cultural assets throughout the borough, with more cultural organisations and facilities concentrated in North Finchley, Chipping Barnet, and New Barnet, and fewer in Edgware, Colindale and West Hendon. Improving the equitable distribution of cultural spaces within the borough is essential to ensure all residents have access to them. We have also seen that we have more of certain types of cultural assets, and less of others (specifically assets focused on creative output).

Some of our Cultural Venues and spaces

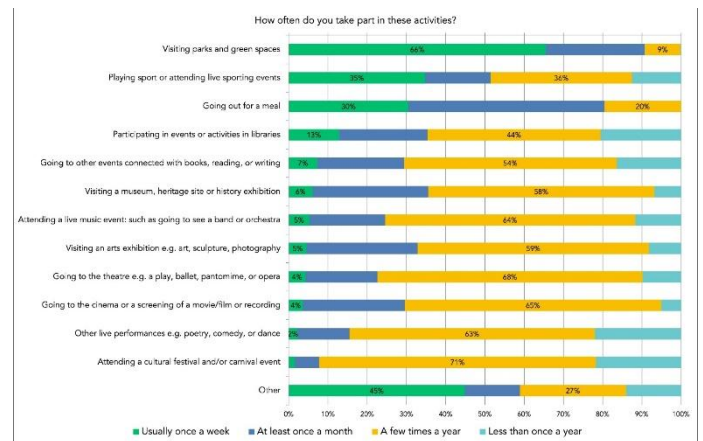
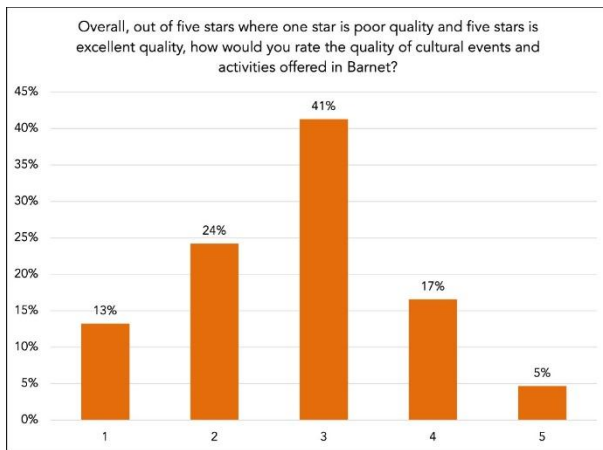
- Two Arts Council England NPOs
- Three Museums
- 19 conservation areas
- 16 libraries
- 18 schools on an Artsmark Journey
- 3 cinemas
- 3 TV production/studios
- 11 Arts Award centres
- 3 indoor theatre venues

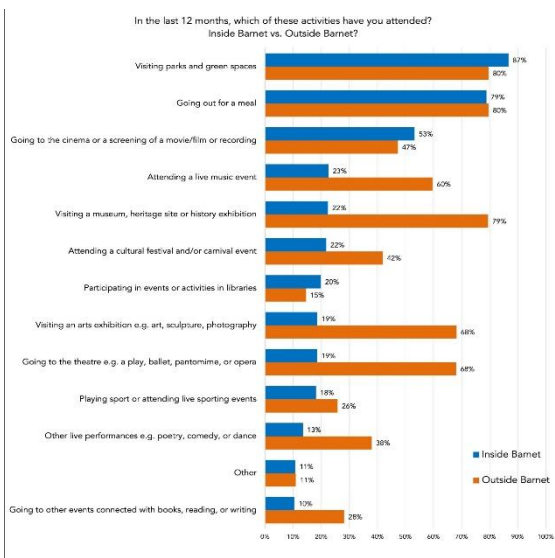
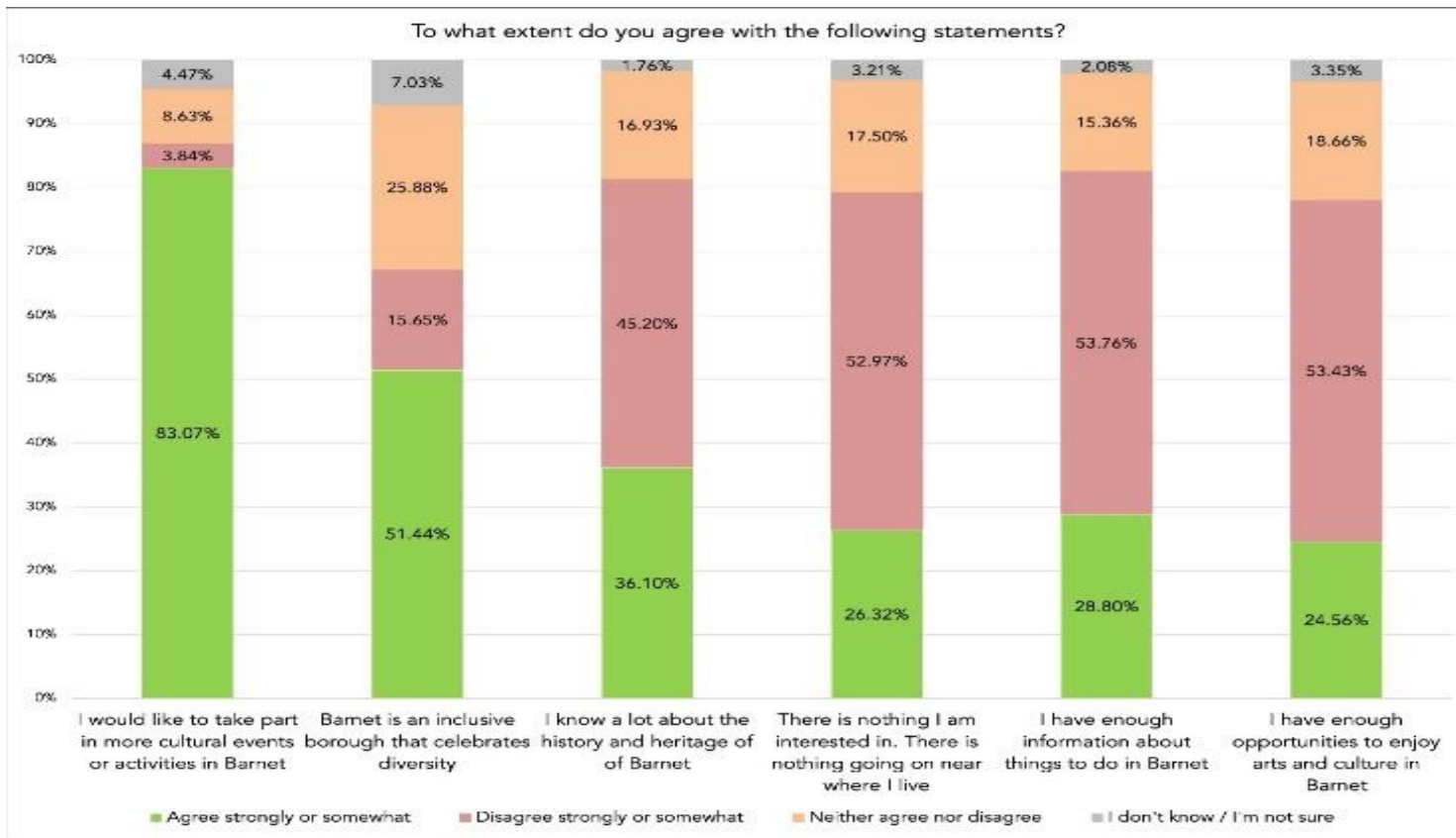
- 1 Art Gallery
- 1 Bandstand
- 1 Outdoor Theatre

When we look at the breakdown of our cultural spaces in the borough, what is evident is that we lack creative infrastructure within the borough, for example art galleries and musical theatres. Despite being the second most populous borough in London, we have fewer creative facilities compared to others.

Baseline of engagement with cultural activities

We conducted an adult survey to understand the levels of engagement that residents and visitors have with our cultural landscape in Barnet.





Cultural Diversity in our borough

Barnet is synonymous with cultural diversity. Residents from different backgrounds get on well together. The graphics below demonstrate the uniqueness of our diversity. We want to ensure this strategy benefits all of our communities in the borough.

Ethnicity, Language and Religion

- 57.7% of our population have a white background, followed by 19.3% an Asian background, 7.9% an Afro-Caribbean background, 5.4% a mixed background and 9.8% belonging to other ethnic groups.

- 44% of residents were born in another country – up from 39% in 2011
- 90 different languages are spoken including Romanian by 3.0% of residents, Persian or Farsi (2.3%), Polish (1.5%), Gujarati (1.4%), Portuguese (1.0%) and Arabic (1.0%).
- The most common religion is Christianity. 36.6% of the population self-identified as Christian, 20.2% of residents described themselves as having no religion, 14.5% as Jewish and 12.2% as Muslim.

There are large differences in the population of ethnic groups between neighbourhoods in Barnet:

- 74% of the population in High Barnet identified as white compared to 36% in Colindale North and South.

Gender, Age, Sexuality

- 49,679 (12.8%) residents self-identified as having a disability that either limited their day-to-day activities a little (7.1%) or a lot (5.7%)
- One in four of Barnet's population are children and young people
- 1 in 10 residents are aged 75+
- 8,633 residents (2.8%) identified with an LGBTQ+ orientation (gay or lesbian, bisexual or other sexual orientation).