



An Introduction to Culture Labs

From conversation to action - shaping culture together in Kirklees

Across Kirklees, a simple question is being asked:

What does culture mean in your everyday life?

Through Conversations about Culture - a film and toolkit being shared across communities - people are coming together to reflect, talk and share what matters to them.

These conversations are the starting point. They are helping to shape the emerging Kirklees Cultural Strategy by listening to people's experiences, ideas and ambitions. Culture Labs are the next step.

QR code to film here:



What is a Culture Lab?

A Culture Lab is a facilitated space to pause, explore and take things further.

It builds on these early conversations, bringing people together to not only share ideas, but to begin shaping what happens next.

This is your Culture Lab.

A place where people who live, work and care about culture come together to:

- Explore what culture means in their area
- Share ideas, experiences and hopes for the future
- Connect with others
- Co-design practical actions

What do we mean by culture?

When we talk about culture, we don't just mean arts venues or festivals.

Culture is part of everyday life:

- Cooking and eating together.
- Gardening and walking.
- Making things.
- Sharing stories.
- Watching films.
- Learning new skills.
- Caring for one another.
- Spending time in our communities.

From conversation to action

The conversations happening across Kirklees are already rich, honest and full of insight. But many people are asking:

What happens next?

Culture Labs create space for that next step.

They help to:

- Turn conversations into ideas for action
- Bring together people who might not usually meet
- Strengthen local connections and partnerships
- Ensure local voices shape real decisions
- Build confidence, pride and shared ownership of culture

Together, participants begin to shape local cultural action plans - practical ideas that can make a difference in their area.

How do they work?

Each Culture Lab takes place in a specific town, neighbourhood or community.

They run over a short period and include:

- Two facilitated sessions
- A mix of local participants - residents, creatives, organisations and partners
- Creative and participatory activities

The aim is simple: move from conversation → to collaboration → to action

Who is it for?

Culture Labs are open to anyone who cares about culture and place.

You might be:

- A resident
- An artist or creative practitioner
- Part of a community group
- Working in health, education, heritage or business
- Or simply curious about your local area

If you care about where you live and/or work, you're welcome.

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Context- where this work comes from

Culture Labs is an emerging model for achieving place-based cultural planning. It has been designed by Local Creative Project, with support from the University of Huddersfield and co-created with Kirklees communities.

The origins of this approach began in 2024, when Local Creative Project, as part of the consultancy team supporting the development of the Kirklees Cultural strategy commissioned by Kirklees Council, developed Culture Labs as a way to enable local communities and businesses to develop their local cultural action plan - connecting strategy with local action.

Building on this initial work, Claire Tymon - Director of Local Creative Project, secured an AHRC-funded Creative Communities Community Innovation Practitioner (CiP) award with the University of Huddersfield's Centre for Cultural Ecologies in Art, Design and Architecture. This has created a collaborative research and delivery partnership to further develop and test the Culture Lab methodology.

The project is exploring how Culture Labs, alongside creative and participatory filmmaking tools, can function as democratic innovation in practice – embedding community voice, lived experience and collaborative decision-making within the development of a place-based Cultural Strategy for Kirklees.

In Kirklees, this work is evolving alongside the new Cultural Strategy, with the aim of generating practical, locally grounded cultural action.

Between April and July 2026, three Culture Labs will take place across the borough, creating live case studies to test and refine this approach.





Why this matters beyond Kirklees

This work is part of a wider conversation. Across West Yorkshire and beyond, there is growing interest in:

- How culture can be shaped more locally through devolution
- The role of universities as civic partners in cultural life
- How local action connects to borough-wide and regional strategies
- New ways of working that are more inclusive, participatory and place-based

Kirklees offers a practical test case - exploring how these ideas can work in real places, with real communities.

How Culture Labs connect to wider plans

Culture Labs don't sit in isolation. They are designed to support and connect with wider work already happening across Kirklees.

This includes:

- **The Cultural Strategy** - helping ensure it is shaped by lived experience and grounded in local action
- **The Heritage Strategy** - connecting people to local stories, histories and identities, and exploring how heritage is experienced and shared today
- **The Tourism Strategy** - strengthening the role of culture in shaping how people experience Kirklees as a place to visit, explore and enjoy
- **Creative Industries development** - supporting local creative talent, skills and enterprise, and recognising creativity as part of the wider economy

Rather than creating something new, Culture Labs bring these areas together at a local level.

They create space for people to ask:

- What does this strategy mean here, in this place?
- Where are the opportunities to connect ideas across sectors?
- How can local people shape and benefit from this work?

In doing so, Culture Labs help turn multiple strategies into shared, practical action - rooted in the everyday lives of communities.

Join a Welcome Session

We're inviting people to join an online Culture Lab Welcome Session - a chance to find out more and get involved.

In the session, you'll:

- Learn more about Culture Labs
- Meet others from your area
- Explore how you can take part
- Help shape what happens next

Spaces are limited, so we recommend booking early.

[Booking Link Here](#)

A shared invitation

Culture Labs are not something being delivered to communities. They are something we build together.

Your experiences, your ideas and your voice matter - and will help shape the future of culture across Kirklees.

Credits

Culture Labs are part of the Kirklees Cultural Strategy and are being developed through a partnership between:

- University of Huddersfield – Centre for Cultural Ecologies in Art, Design and Architecture
- AHRC Creative Communities Programme (led by Northumbria University)
- Kirklees Council Cultural Services
- Local cultural organisations, community partners and residents across Kirklees

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