

Gold & Green

Child centred creativity at
the heart of Ellesmere Port



A vision and strategy for transforming Ellesmere Port through the creativity of its children, young people, and families.



POWERED BY
**LEVELLING
UP**





Welcome

Ellesmere Port is our home.

Ellesmere Port is home to creative children, young people and schools and families hungry for transformation, culture and community.

Ellesmere Port is home to some amazing Arts and Heritage venues, community arts organisations and creative enterprises. We see so much potential.

What would happen if we all got behind one vision and worked collaboratively to establish a place-based partnership that uses arts, culture and children's creativity to transform the town?

We commissioned Flying Geese to help us answer this question

Ellesmere Port Cultural Learning Exchange (2025)

Introduction from Flying Geese, consultants



On behalf of Ellesmere Port Cultural Learning Exchange (EPCLE), we have consulted with 795 people to research and develop a new vision and ambition for culture in Ellesmere Port.

This work was supported by Cheshire West & Chester Council and funded by the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund.

Between July and November 2024, we undertook widespread public research to inform an ambitious vision that amplifies Ellesmere Port's unique identity, leverages its strengths, and responds to residents' aspirations.

Detailed results from this research are available in a separate Research Report.

Key parameters set out in the brief were that the mission and vision should:

- Place work for children, young people and families as a top priority.
- Drive new investment into the town and support the development of funding applications, particularly an application to Arts Council England's Place Partnership programme (funded through National Lottery Project Grants).
- Cover the two towns of Ellesmere Port and Neston. Stakeholder engagement in Neston revealed the need for a distinct approach to inform a separate vision there. The research for Neston is available to read as part of the research report.

Flying Geese community consultation in Whitby Park, Ellesmere Port



Residents' comments

This is a small selection of comments from the 795 residents we spoke to across all the wards in Ellesmere Port.

“

My eldest son is a budding artist and would love to see more opportunities for him locally.

”

“

Inclusive activities with SEND-informed staff with plenty of pre-event information (social stories etc) would be hugely appreciated

”

“

We like the houses on our street because we know the whole community. My family likes it here and my friends all play out on the street.

”

“

The area has changed a lot over the years but if more was done for families and youths then things could be a lot different again.

”

“

More outdoor and indoor events for communities to come together that are bright and cheerful.

”

“

Community projects which can bring every person out into the daylight, regardless of circumstance, age or disability, making improvements to the aesthetics of the town

”

About Ellesmere Port Cultural Learning Exchange



Ellesmere Port Cultural Learning Exchange (EPCLE) was established in 2021 as a partnership between:

- **Theatre Porto (EPCLE hosts)** – a company dedicated to creating theatre for children and young people. The only Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation in Ellesmere Port, Theatre Porto operates from a unique theatre space designed specifically ‘for, by, and with’ children and young people.
- **C-Change** – the North West region’s Arts Council England Creativity Collaborative, which explores and champions creative teaching practices in schools. C-Change includes four schools in Ellesmere Port, including St Bernard’s RC Primary School, which is represented on the EPCLE steering group.
- **Curious Minds** – A specialist charity ensuring all children and young people access the transformative benefits of creativity and culture.

Other organisations that have contributed to the EPCLE steering group since its inception include:

- **Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC)**
- **Edsential**
- **Ellesmere Port Libraries**
- **National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port**
- **The Oaks Primary School**

To date, EPCLE has worked principally with schools and teachers in Ellesmere Port, facilitating professional development, networking, work experience, subsidised theatre trips and creativity-focused projects in schools. Through the research and creation of this mission and vision we want to establish EPCLE as a focal point for arts, culture and heritage organisations in Ellesmere Port.

EPCLE operates as a network with a terms of reference, rather than as a formalised partnership or organisations.





Who owns this vision and mission?

This mission and vision is a rallying call for arts, cultural, and heritage organisations in Ellesmere Port, independent artists, schools, community groups, charities and business to unite under a community owned vision and ambition for the town – championed by the EPCLE network. EPCLE will spearhead initial funding bids to bring this vision to life.

Here's how you can help:

1 › Endorse this vision › Sign up and advocate for change

2 › Collaborate as partners › Work together on events, funding bids, or programming as part of a shared effort

3 › Align resources › Pool funding or provide match funding/sponsorship to support transformative initiatives

4 › Support young people and emerging enterprises ›
Provide spaces, mentoring, or funding to enable creative enterprises and volunteer-led arts organisations to thrive.

Together, we can make Ellesmere Port a vibrant town of creativity and opportunity for all.

The Vision

Our vision is to transform Ellesmere Port into a vibrant, playful, and energetic town. We will achieve this by embracing the energy and creativity of children and young people.

In Ellesmere Port we have a unique history and heritage that is reflected in the towns' landscape, shaped by waves of industrial development. We have tight knit communities and boundlessly creative people, who collectively want to make a difference.

Starting with children and young people and then building outwards, we aim to connect residents to their environment and place arts and culture at the heart of the town's regeneration.

We want to:

- Place arts and culture at the heart of the town's regeneration.
- Connect residents to their urban and natural environments.
- Create a town where children, young people and families thrive, and every resident has opportunities to play, create, explore and express themselves.

If this happens, we think Ellesmere Port will become a place where:

- Children, young people and families have more opportunities to play, create, explore and express themselves.
- Local communities are empowered to create places where people can experience arts, culture and creativity across the whole town.
- Many of the town's under utilised spaces are revitalised and become places where people want to spend their time.
- More high profile artists and investors are attracted to work in Ellesmere Port and collaborate with local organisations.
- More young people have opportunities to develop their skills in creative careers.
- Artists and organisations are attracted to work in Ellesmere Port, and more artists and organisations thrive in the town.

5 key themes

Our vision has five key themes:

1 > Public spaces revitalised > From parks to market halls and waterways to industry, Ellesmere Port's public spaces are vital for creativity, connection and community pride. By reimagining these spaces and supporting their regeneration, we can help them become more accessible and appealing for children, young people and families.

2 > Events for the whole town to celebrate > We want residents of Ellesmere Port to become excited by arts and culture, and for it to help bring communities together. We will host or support performances, outdoor events and festivals or community art that brings generations together and gets people talking.

3 > Arts and culture in all communities > Through inclusive arts programmes in schools, libraries and community venues, we want to ensure that residents across Ellesmere Port have more opportunities to enjoy arts and culture.

4 > Supporting young creatives > Addressing a specific gap identified by our research, we will create more opportunities for teenagers and young people aged 14 to 25. This includes connecting with secondary schools, creating age appropriate spaces, providing activities that young people in this age range have told us they want, and supporting pathways to creative careers.

5 > Strengthening the cultural ecosystem > We will strengthen capacity, sustainability and connections between arts and cultural organisations, artists, schools and community groups. By doing this we aim to align around community needs, raise the profile of cultural activity in Ellesmere Port, and support artists and smaller organisations to establish themselves in a thriving cultural ecosystem.

A Gold and a Green thread

Ellesmere Port is uniquely placed to weave two distinct threads through this mission and vision, responding to public needs and aspirations and linking with demographic and economic changes in the town.

- **The golden thread:** Children, Young People and Families
- **The green thread:** Ellesmere Port's environment



Golden thread: Why children, young people and families?

By centring the vision around children, young people and families we can build on Ellesmere Port's current strengths at the same time as responding to Ellesmere Port's particularly demographic profile.

1. Strategic alignment

This aligns the vision with 'Starting well', the first of CWAC's six missions in its 2024-2028 Borough Plan, including contributing to the success criteria of higher levels of education attainment and progression, more inclusive, sustainable and joined up services that meet the needs of children with SEND (special educational needs and disability); and more children & young people in education, employment and training.

2. Building on existing strengths

For a town of its size, Ellesmere Port has an unusual strength in arts and culture for children, young people and families. These include Theatre Porto, the only specialist children's arts centre in the region (and Ellesmere Port's only NPO), the C-Change Creativity Collaborative, and the fact that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the town's schools have Artsmark. These resources and expertise can be leveraged to impact more of the town and position it as a hub for innovation and excellence in arts for young people.

3. Demographic need

Ellesmere Port has a younger age profile than Cheshire and England, especially in central wards of its urban area. There is both a higher proportion of children aged 0 to 15 and young adults 16 to 34 in Ellesmere Port, and a direct correlation between wards with a higher proportion of young people and those experiencing more poverty. In central Ellesmere Port, 8% of 16-17 year olds are not in employment, education and training – more than double the CWAC figure. Five out of nine Ellesmere Port wards have higher proportions of children with special educational needs, requiring further resources and specialist skills.

4. Consultation responses

Public surveys identified "activities for families to do together" as the top priority for arts and culture in Ellesmere Port. Addressing inequality of opportunity and supporting Special Educational Needs were also important to many respondents. Meanwhile, workshops and interviews highlighted a gap in provision, opportunity and skills development for older children and younger adults in Ellesmere Port.

5. Working with children to reach adults

By working with children and young people through schools, community centres and outdoor events, Ellesmere Port cultural organisations can connect with families and adults who have not previously engaged with their offer.

The green thread: Why the environment?

The environment, in its many facets, emerged during the research as a key motivator for Ellesmere Port stakeholders and residents. By environment we mean both the natural and urban environment, and residents' desire to celebrate, protect and improve them. An example of how arts and culture could play a role in improving Ellesmere Port's environment is through events or street art to reanimate Ellesmere Port town centre.

1. Strategic alignment

A focus on the environment aligns the mission and vision with multiple areas of CWAC's Borough Plan 2024-2028, especially 'Greener Communities.' Improving and animating the urban landscape will also support the 'Neighbourhood Pride' mission and helping residents live healthier, happier lives under 'Resilient people living their best lives.'

2. Ellesmere Port's unique landscape

Ellesmere Port has a unique natural, historic and industrial landscape, including green spaces such as Rivacre Valley, the Shropshire Union Canal and the imposing Stanlow Oil Refinery (inspiration for the Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark song Stanlow). These can provide both inspiration and be places where arts and cultural activity can take place.

3. Current opportunities

The cultural sector needs to tie-in with and, where appropriate, support three key contemporary investments in Ellesmere Port. One of these is the **Transforming the Market project**, part of a wider set of town centre developments supported by **£13.3 million from the Funded by Government grant scheme**. This project will create a new space for cultural events in the heart of the town. Potentially more consequential in the long-term is the ORIGIN project, a plan for Ellesmere Port to become one of the UK's first 'SuperPlaces' supporting the UK Government's 'Green Industrial Revolution'. Chester Zoo is also developing a nature recovery corridor linking Chester with Ellesmere Port that has great potential for connecting young people with the natural environment.

4. Consultation responses

In workshops, young people in Ellesmere Port showed great interest in and concern for both Ellesmere Port's natural and urban environment. Younger children craved access to nature and water, and wanted to make their communities cleaner and healthier through activities such as litter picks. Teenagers and adults also focused on improving the urban environment through street art, repurposing empty buildings and making Ellesmere Port more walkable for those without cars.

What do we mean by 'child-centred'?

'Child-centred' is a broad term that often refers to approaches that prioritise a child's interests, ideas, and ways of expressing themselves creatively.

This mission and vision specifically wants to transform Ellesmere Port through the creativity of children and young people. When we say "child-centred" we mean that:

"We value the child-centred qualities of playfulness, curiosity, imagination, freedom of expression, wonder and fairness. When we approach art or creative work from this perspective it speaks not only to children but to the child within us all".

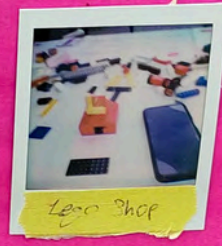
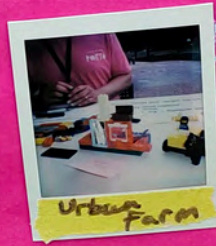
By taking a child-centred approach...

- The majority of the public-facing programme of events and activities is designed with and for children, either to enjoy with their families and communities or others of their own age group.
- Children and young people collaborate with Ellesmere Port organisations to decide what happens as part of a programming and commissioning group.
- We will find ways to enable activity and artistic content to be actively co-created with children and young people.
- The approach to developing spaces for creative activity – both permanent and temporary – is that they can be enjoyed by both young people and their families, rather than exclusively adults. An exception to this is where age-appropriate spaces have been requested by teenagers and young adults.
- Ellesmere Port is transformed into a place that is more welcoming and accessible for children and young people, for example in accessing the waterfront.
- Training and development for artists and organisations is focused on skills for working and collaborating with children and young people.



Make a wish!

What would you like to see in Ellesmere Port?



Insights from our needs analysis

In addition to the findings informing the **Golden** and **Green** threads, key insights informing this mission and vision are that:

- The success of 'test' events at the Market, outdoor festivals in Whitby Park, and music at Theatre Porto has generated belief among stakeholders in public demand for more similar events in Ellesmere Port. However, lack of suitable venues remains a problem.
- Many residents would like to see more landmark events and festivals in Ellesmere Port. Stakeholders agree this would create excitement and be a focal point.
- On a smaller scale, many young people in Ellesmere Port would like to take part in arts and craft and literature events.
- Community spirit was frequently cited as one of Ellesmere Port's strengths. However, many would like more public events to get to know their neighbours, while teenagers craved more understanding and tolerance for their identities.
- For musicians and visual artists, there is a lack of places in Ellesmere Port to perform and display work. There are opportunities to address this in the market and town centre redevelopment but this needs coordination e.g. making sure the market has the right equipment for emerging bands to perform.
- Cost is the most significant barrier to taking in cultural activities in Ellesmere Port. Many residents also feel that they don't know what is going on in Ellesmere Port, or where to go for cultural activities.
- In addition to the lack of activities and opportunities for teenagers and young adults in Ellesmere Port, many young people cited a lack of age appropriate spaces. This has been exacerbated by the closure of youth centres and Boaty Theatre Company's eviction from its town centre space. Parents also cited a lack of age appropriate indoor play spaces for young children.
- There are strong relationships between Theatre Porto and Ellesmere Port's schools, and between the schools involved in EPCLE and the C-Change collaborative. However, relationships between cultural organisations themselves, and between cultural organisations and secondary schools need to be strengthened.
- Many small, voluntary and/ or under-funded groups are doing great work in the town but need more support, for example to help them access funding.



Creative inspirations

“

I would change the pergola in the middle of the estate into a space where everyone could come together and talk about books they like.

”

“

I want to see Llandudno in Ellesmere Port

”

Throughout the consultation, young people provided creative stimuli that can inform creativity in Ellesmere Port. This included things that young people already celebrate about Ellesmere Port, and what they would like to see. Here are some examples:

Beaches – Many young people were frustrated that they live so close to the water but Ellesmere Port doesn't have the usual activities associated with going to the seaside/ beach.

Community activities – Young people often celebrated green spaces near to where they live, and wanted to bring people together for events and activities there.

Litter picks – Primary school children repeatedly said they wanted to organise little picks to organise their neighbourhoods.

Street art – Teenagers and older adults often cited a desire to see street art, particularly in the town centre.

Abandoned spaces – One primary school child talked about the enjoyment their family gets from exploring the disused railway line to the North West of the town.

Plant museum – One child made a Lego model of a living plant museum they would like to see established in Ellesmere Port, with a book detailing varieties of plants.

A notable omission from the public consultation was reference to Stanlow, the imposing industrial landscape on Ellesmere Port's doorstep. Stanlow has inspired artists including *Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark*, and George Powell's podcast series *Black Gold* for the BBC. Exploring Stanlow's relationship to the town should be part of this cultural mission and vision, including why it features so little in the minds of Ellesmere Port's young people.

Our key themes



**1 Public spaces
revitalised**



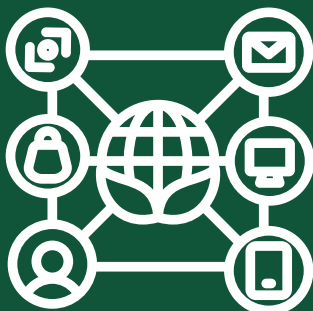
**2 Events for the
whole town to
celebrate**



**3 Arts and culture
in all communities**

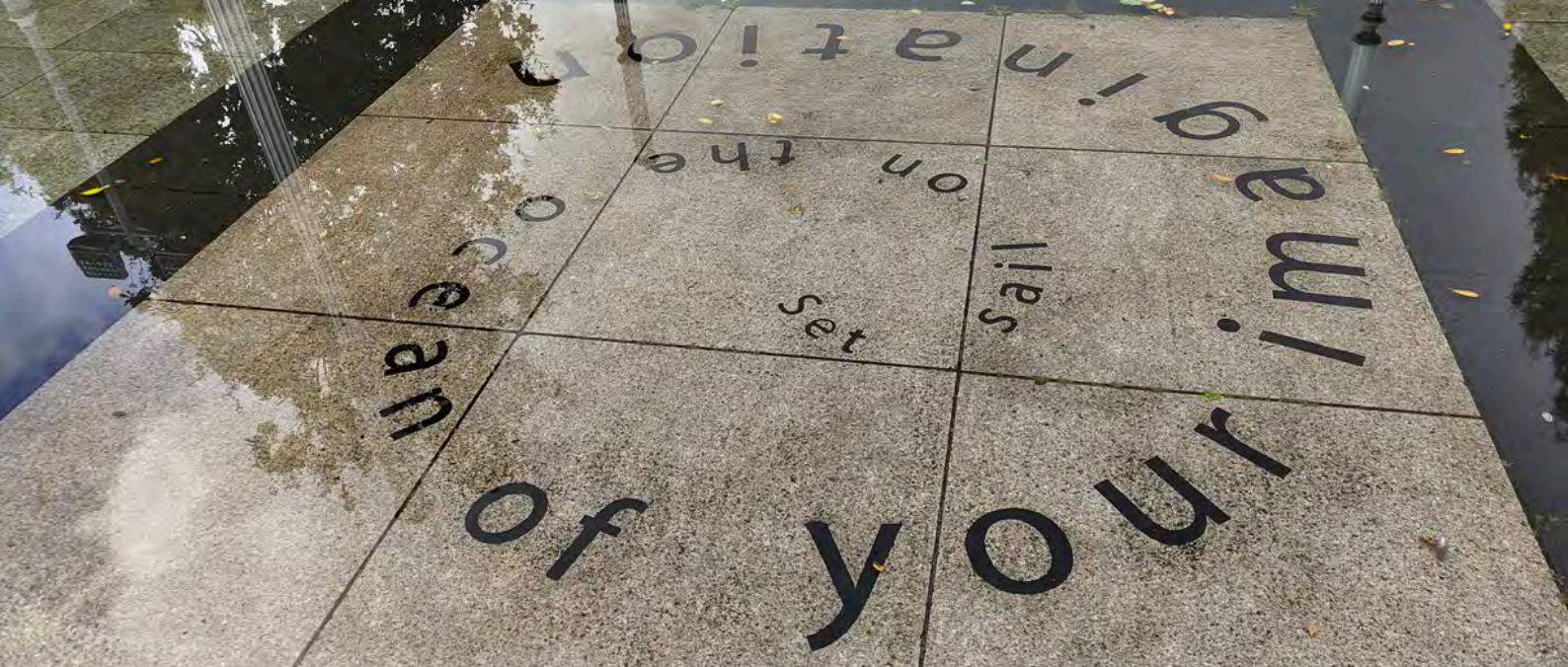


**4 Supporting
young creatives**



**5 Strengthening the
cultural ecosystem**

We explore each of these strategic goals in more detail in the following pages.



1 Public spaces revitalised

From parks to market halls and waterways to industry, Ellesmere Port's public spaces are vital for creativity, connection and community pride. By reimagining these spaces and supporting their regeneration, we can help them become more accessible and appealing.

What do we want to see?

- A colourful, creative and animated town, with residents frequenting the town centre and other public spaces to engage in creative and family activities.
- Residents safely accessing cultural attractions by walking and cycling.
- Residents regularly enjoy time in Ellesmere Port's green spaces and along its waterways, with improvements in physical and mental health seen as a result.
- Creative green spaces emerge across Ellesmere Port.
- Art and creative activities help children and young people understand Ellesmere Port's industrial heritage and new possibilities for the future.
- Residents are proud to be from Ellesmere Port as this transformation happens.

How can we make it happen?

- The successful relaunch of Ellesmere Port's Flea Market as an event space is a great opportunity. Joined up planning should result in local artists and organisations being invited to hold performances and exhibitions there, as well as other key spaces such as the National Waterways Museum and Whitby Park.
- A dedicated post (such as town-wide events producer) and an expanded arts and culture network in Ellesmere Port comes together to make this happen.
- A child and young people-centred approach informs town centre developments such as new street art or youth spaces.
- Stakeholders come together to resolve walkability issues to the waterfront, for example through street art and lighting around the M53 roundabout.
- Cultural organisations programme and host activity in Ellesmere Port's green spaces, and support residents to develop activities in their local area.
- EPCLE (supported by CWAC) develops a relationship between schools, cultural organisations and Chester Zoo Nature Recovery Corridor.



2 Events for the whole town to celebrate

We want residents of Ellesmere Port to become excited by arts and culture, and for it to help bring communities together. We will host or support performances, outdoor festivals or community art that brings generations together and gets people talking.

What do we want to see?

- Residents are excited and energised by landmark arts and cultural events in Ellesmere Port.
- High quality and nationally-renowned artists that people don't expect to come to Ellesmere Port.
- Artists, community organisations, teachers and emerging creative enterprises develop skills and confidence to deliver inclusive, high quality, work or creative experiences for children and young people
- The town comes together with events appealing to different communities and across generations.

How can we make it happen?

- EPCLE, Theatre Porto and the new programming and commissioning group coordinate a town-wide arts programme, using local landmarks and outdoor spaces such as Whitby Park, in the early stages of delivering this vision.
- This programme should have children and young people at its heart, creating activities that families and different generations can enjoy together.
- Innovative, artist-led responses to the community consultation that informed this mission and vision – for example developing an urban beach as an activity space in response to the number of primary school children who requested this.
- Larger commissions by established artists in response to Ellesmere Port's heritage, for example a community film inspired by the Stanlow industrial landscape.



3 Arts and culture in all communities

Through inclusive arts programmes in schools, libraries and community venues, we want to ensure that residents across Ellesmere Port have more opportunities to enjoy arts and culture.

What do we want to see?

- A larger number of children and young people take part in arts, cultural and creative activities across Ellesmere Port.
- Equality of access so that all children and young people in Ellesmere Port can take part in creative activities if they want to.
- Existing spaces across Ellesmere Port are energised by hosting cultural activities.
- New spaces for arts and cultural activities are discovered or created.
- Arts and culture creates more cohesive communities across Ellesmere Port.
- Teachers, freelance artists and community organisations grow in confidence and skill as they explore what 'child-centred' creativity can be.

How can we make it happen?

- Young people work collaboratively with arts, culture, community and civic leaders to shape a programme of activity across Ellesmere Port, supported by EPCLE.
- Support a new teacher and artists development programme that uses creativity to challenge place based inequalities.
- Most activities are free at the point of access.
- Libraries expand their role as cultural hubs, offering free workshops, exhibitions and performances. Responding to community consultation, an increased number of craft activities and literature events take place.
- Inclusive Creativity: develop skills and work based placement opportunities in cultural spaces for young adults with learning disabilities.
- Inclusive Creativity: create innovative artist support opportunities for d/disabled artists and share practice locally and nationally across the town.
- Practice labs - artists are supported to take on commissions that help them grow in skill and confidence at delivering quality, child-centred arts experiences.



4 Supporting young creatives

Addressing a specific gap identified by our research, we will create more opportunities for teenagers and young people aged 14 to 25. This includes connecting with secondary schools, creating age appropriate spaces, providing activities that young people in this age range have told us they want, and supporting pathways to creative careers.

What do we want to see?

- More young people (14 to 25) taking part in creative activities.
- Children who have attended an Artsmark school, or a primary that is part of the C-Change network, are able to continue their arts and cultural journey at secondary level.
- Emerging artists/ young creatives are able to perform or exhibit in Ellesmere Port, rather than having to go to elsewhere. Untapped talent has a place to flourish.
- More age-appropriate spaces for teenagers to take part in arts and creative activities, with music as a key area to develop.
- Young people feel like they have a creative future in Ellesmere Port, with more employment and self-employment opportunities in creative industries.
- Improvements in mental health of Ellesmere Port's teenagers and young adults.

How can we make it happen?

- EPCLE and C-Change make concerted efforts to expand their network to include secondary schools, sixth forms and colleges.
- Creative Pathways: Ellesmere Port's creative organisations further develop the pilot project of a place-based work experience programme for secondary, sixth form and higher education students with a focus on inspiring creative-careers.
- EPCLE visits secondaries and sixth forms to talk about creative careers and roles such as production, marketing and fundraising, as well as specific creative roles.
- Connections are made with expertise in nearby towns e.g. Future Yard, Birkenhead.
- EPCLE and CWAC work together to identify and support new or underutilised town centre spaces that could become arts and cultural hubs.
- Steps are taken to ensure the Flea Market is a viable space for emerging artists in Ellesmere Port, for example ensuring it has appropriate PA equipment, so musicians don't have to hire their own at prohibitive cost.



5 Strengthening the cultural ecosystem

We will deepen connections between arts and cultural organisations, artists, schools and community groups. By doing this we aim to align around community needs, raise the profile of cultural activity in Ellesmere Port, and support artists and smaller organisations to establish and sustain themselves in a thriving cultural ecosystem.

What do we want to see?

- Cultural organisations are thriving, well-governed and funder-ready, and there are more of them.
- Cultural organisations work with children and young people to realise this vision.
- Partnerships are strengthened and we find new ways to collaborate.
- Collaborative programming, commissioning and joined-up communications.
- Entrepreneurial arts and culture start-ups thrive in Ellesmere Port.
- Creative people want to live and work in Ellesmere Port and have opportunities to do so.
- More schools are connected with Ellesmere Port's cultural organisations.
- Ellesmere Port becomes seen as a centre of excellence for arts and culture related to young people.

How can we make it happen?

- EPCLE expands into a wider network of organisations, civic leaders, schools and artists.
- A programming and commissioning board is established to plan activity, involving organisations, young people and CWAC's Community Inspirers.
- Organisations work together on a dedicated, communications campaign to energise Ellesmere Port about arts and culture through an invitation to take part.
- EPCLE and Business Support agencies (e.g. Chamber of Commerce) work together to offer of training, mentoring and support to strengthen the resilience of smaller/unfunded creative organisations and help them be funder-ready.
- Artist Development and Creative Enterprise support: local artists and entrepreneurs are supported through residencies in arts organisations and the market redevelopment, through commissions and training, with an emphasis on work inspired by and for children and young people.

Funding approach

The approach to funding the delivery of this vision is built on a coalition-of-the-willing model among members of the EPCLE network and other organisations that are committed to realising this vision. Working in partnership strengthens the case to funders and will increase the chances we can bring in new money to Ellesmere Port in a very competitive funding landscape.

While some aspects of the work will require external funding, some can be achieved through partnership working and effectively aligning existing resources around the outcomes in this vision. This ensures that progress can be made even with limited additional funding.

Possible sources of funding

- **Arts Council England Place Partnership Funding:** To kickstart the process of funding the vision, EPCLE will apply for Place Partnership funds in 2025 with Theatre Porto as the lead applicant. We hope this can fund the following aspects of the work:
 - Year-round activity including the plans for Creative green spaces and activities in Ellesmere Port Library.
 - Establishment of a programming board including organisations and young people.
 - Artist development and creative enterprise support.
 - Town-wide communications campaign.
 - Staff capacity/ new role to coordinate and support implementation.
- **External Funding Applications:** Several major funders have been identified who could support different aspects of the work. EPCLE and Theatre Porto will coordinate these applications to support:
 - Teacher training and development.
 - Inclusive creativity – creative opportunities and support that prioritise those who experience disability/neurodiversity.
 - Developing new permanent and temporary arts spaces, especially for teenagers and young adults.
 - Creative pathways for young people.

- **Corporate Partnerships:** The various businesses at Stanlow have historically had little engagement with arts and culture in Ellesmere Port. Efforts will be made to secure sponsorship from local businesses and organisations, especially from the new ORIGINS cluster, for events and projects that align with their interests and community engagement goals. Arts and cultural organisations will likely need support from CWAC to understand and approach the new employers moving to Ellesmere Port as part of ORIGINS.
- **Commission-Ready Preparation:** We will work with CWAC to ensure that Ellesmere Port is "commission-ready" should new national funding opportunities or initiatives become available, and work with the Chamber of Commerce or other business support agencies to support emerging or support smaller organisations to be in a better position to make successful funding applications.
- **Community Fund:** In the longer term, we aspire to establish a community fund to support small-scale cultural/ arts projects, enabling grassroots initiatives to flourish and contribute to overall success. We will work with partners who have expertise in grant giving such as Cheshire Community Foundation to support this function.





Links with Neston

Our research has identified that Neston wants its own distinct approach to arts and culture that meet the needs of its community. However, Ellesmere Port and Neston organisations and schools can benefit from collaborating in the following ways:

- **Green Thread:** The 'Green thread' of arts and culture connecting with the natural environment also applies to Neston. EPCLE and CWAC should broker relationships between schools and Neston organisations and the Chester Zoo Nature Recovery Corridor.
- **Transferring events:** Via EPCLE, relevant events and activity that have been successful in Ellesmere Port should be discussed with Neston organisations to explore the possibility of them being repeated or adapted for Neston. This is likely to be most effective for smaller scale events, for example small scale touring shows, arts and crafts activities or the proposed programme in libraries.
- **Training and development for teachers:** Neston schools should be invited to join EPCLE to take part in existing training and networking, and the proposed teacher development programme
- **Creative pathways:** EPCLE should visit Neston schools to discuss creative careers with students. New creative opportunities funded through this programme should, where practical, also be offered to young people in Neston.
- **Special Education Needs:** Any new funding for SEND work in Ellesmere Port should consider Neston's needs for SEND specialisms and attempt to secure funding for both towns.
- **Artist and organisational development:** Neston organisations should be given the opportunity to link with EPCLE for training and networking purposes, for example to help them become 'funding ready'. This should be in addition to a new local network in Neston more focused on voluntary sector arts.

How Will We Make This Happen – Strategic Framework for Delivery

To turn our shared vision into reality, we have developed a clear strategic framework built around four phases. This phased approach sets out high-level priorities and outcomes, building momentum from proven work towards long-term cultural transformation. We have intentionally kept this framework strategic at this stage: more detailed action plans and a full theory of change will be developed collaboratively in the next phase of work.

**1 Edge of wonder
(Years 1–2)**

**2 Everyday wonder
(Years 2–4)**

**3 Wonder–Full towns
(Years 4–5)**

**4 Wonder–Full legacy
(Years 5+)**

1 Edge of wonder (Years 1-2)

Backing excellence, building readiness, planting potential

This foundational phase will secure and expand successful creative work already making a difference in Ellesmere Port, while planting seeds for inclusive new opportunities and stronger networks. Key priorities include:

- **Secure and expand flagship initiatives**
 - Grow the Topsy Turvy outdoor festival, building its reputation as Ellesmere Port's joyful, family-centred annual event.
 - Deepen the teacher development, leadership and work experience programmes led by the Ellesmere Port Cultural Learning Exchange, ensuring more young people benefit from creative opportunities.
- **Establish collaborative programming structures**
 - Begin setting up the [Port Programmers](#), a co-created programming and commissioning group involving young people, artists, and partners. Early groundwork will embed shared decision-making, youth leadership, and readiness for future large-scale delivery.
- **Revisit EPCLE's governance**
 - Review and update the [Terms of Reference for EPCLE](#), ensuring the network's roles, structures, and partnership agreements are fit for purpose to handle funding, commissioning, and expanded activity.
- **Launch universal business support for creative organisations**
 - In partnership with the [Chamber of Commerce](#), deliver workshops covering essential topics such as fundraising, marketing, and project management, helping local arts organisations, freelancers, and creative enterprises build resilience and readiness.
- **Deliver small-scale artist commissions**
 - Commission local artists for small, community-rooted projects in schools and neighbourhoods, responding to early priorities identified through consultation.
- **Seed new relationships and skills**
 - Engage children, young people, families, emerging artists, and community groups who have been least involved in cultural opportunities.
- **Build continual fundraising capacity**
 - Establish coordinated fundraising across partners to secure immediate resources and lay the groundwork for future ambitions.

What will success look like?

- Successful small-scale commissions rooted in community priorities
- Expanded reach of Topsy Turvy and EPCLE's teacher development work
- Port Programmers group active with early shared decision-making
- EPCLE governance updated, with clear roles and agreements in place for effective partnership working and financial management
- Creative organisations more confident, connected, and ready for new opportunities
- Stronger local networks engaging children, young people, and families
- Arts Council Place Partnership funds secured, with associated match funding
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation bid resubmitted to support expanded school-based creative work



2 Everyday wonder (Years 2–4)

Expanding impact, deepening collaboration

Building on Phase 1, this phase will widen creative access and deepen collaboration across Ellesmere Port's communities. Priorities include:

- **Empowering the Programming Board (Port Programmers)**
 - Launch in Year 2 with greater autonomy over small budgets and briefs, supporting them to co-design mid-scale commissions.
 - Grow the board's capacity through Years 3–4 to manage increasingly ambitious projects.
- **Launching practice labs**
 - Begin in Year 2 alongside initial commissions, with artists, teachers, and organisations exploring child-centred practice, quality, and inclusivity.
 - Expand the labs into Years 3–4, embedding continuous learning and high standards.
- **Scaling creative opportunities across communities**
 - Extend arts and cultural activities to every neighbourhood.
- **Deepening bespoke support**
 - Provide tailored support to creative enterprises and organisations, building on Phase 1's universal workshops.
- **Sustaining continual fundraising**
 - Pursue funding opportunities throughout the phase to enable larger commissions and more ambitious programming.

What will success look like?

- Port Programmers confident, co-designing commissions and making democratic decisions
- Practice labs running successfully, embedding quality child-centred practice
- Creative activity visible and accessible town-wide
- Creative organisations receiving tailored support for sustainable growth
- Future funding or investment secured to enable larger scale ambitions in later phases

3 Wonder- Full Town (Years 4–5)

Reimagining spaces, redefining reputation

This phase will make Ellesmere Port's cultural identity tangible through bold new works and transformed spaces. Priorities include:

- **Delivering bold, large-scale artist commissions**
 - Producing ambitious works that celebrate Ellesmere Port's heritage and young people's voices.
- **Animating underused public spaces**
 - Bringing life and creativity to key parks, town centre spaces, and overlooked landmarks.
- **Building cultural infrastructure**
 - Creating permanent and temporary spaces to support long-term cultural activity.
- **Continuing strategic fundraising**
 - Securing larger, multi-year investments through trust, foundation, and corporate partnerships.

What will success look like?

- High-profile, bold commissions transforming perceptions of Ellesmere Port
- Underused spaces reimagined as creative, welcoming environments
- Cultural venues established or renewed to support ongoing activity
- Significant new funding streams secured for transformational work

4 Wonder- Full legacy (Years 5+)

Locking in legacy, influencing others

This final phase will focus on sustaining change, empowering communities, and sharing Ellesmere Port's success. Priorities include:

- Embedding inclusive, youth-powered cultural practices
- Developing long-term partnerships and new commissions
- Positioning Ellesmere Port as an exemplar of creativity-led regeneration
- Maintaining continual fundraising to support a lasting legacy

What will success look like?

- Children, young people, and families leading cultural activity as commissioners and curators
- Cultural practices embedded into everyday town life
- Ellesmere Port recognised nationally as a creative regeneration model
- Sustained funding supporting a thriving cultural ecosystem



Our 'Super Outcome'

At the end of ten years, we want to see...

A thriving, town-wide cultural programme that is playful, inclusive, and child-centred — transforming Ellesmere Port's identity and connecting every resident with opportunities to play, create, and celebrate together.

Children, young people, and families will be recognised as the driving force behind a cultural renaissance that makes Ellesmere Port a creative town of national significance.

Endorsements

The following individuals and organisations have signed up to support and contribute to realising the Green and Gold vision and strategy.

“Informed by the voices, thoughts, and ideas of local residents — especially children and young people — the Gold & Green strategy is a powerful reflection of the town’s identity and ambition. Shaping places where children can learn, play and grow whilst also fostering a culture of creativity, belonging and respect is transformative. The collaborative leadership and expertise of Theatre Porto, and partners through the Ellesmere Port Cultural Learning Exchange, has been central to shaping and developing this inclusive and inspiring strategy.”

Rachel Foster,
Head of Communities, Culture and Libraries
Cheshire West and Chester Council

“I fully support the vision to transform Ellesmere Port into a creative, vibrant, playful, and energetic town, with a child-centred approach at its heart. The Gold and Green Strategy reflects our commitment to nurturing wellbeing and encouraging exploration. This plan celebrates the creativity, ideas, energy, and enthusiasm of people across all of Ellesmere Port’s communities, and sets out a meaningful, clear, collaborative pathway to bring this vision to life. I look forward to working with all partners as it progresses.”

Cllr Lisa Denson,
Cheshire West and Chester Council

“We welcome an initiative that recognises the value of grassroots, volunteer-led creativity. Projects like this help build momentum for local groups like ours — especially in giving young people new ways to explore music. It’s encouraging to see investment that supports what’s already happening on the ground in Ellesmere Port.”

Ellesmere Port Collective

Endorsements



"The Gold & Green Strategy is not just a cultural plan, it's a roadmap for creating a more connected, creative, and confident Ellesmere Port. Built on a shared model owned by the whole community, this strategy is inclusive, sustainable, and genuinely reflective of the aspirations of the people of Ellesmere Port. C Change and St Bernard's RC Primary and Nursery School are excited to be working in partnership with our community to help create a town where children, young people and families thrive."

Emily Reid

**C Change Lead and Assistant Head,
St Bernard's RC Primary and Nursery School.**

"At a time when it's more important than ever to advocate for the value of cultural education in our schools and communities, Curious Minds is proud to be part of this wider partnership in Ellesmere Port. The brilliant work already happening through this hyper-local network is a powerful example of how creativity and culture can drive real change for children, young people, schools and communities. This strategy is bold, ambitious, and shows just how far we can go when people come together with a shared vision. We're excited to see where this leads – and proud to stand alongside it."

Derri Burdon,

**Chair of Ellesmere Port Cultural Learning Exchange
CEO, Curious Minds**

