

HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM ARTS COMMISSION

BRIEFING PAPER 4: CULTURAL
HUBS AND TOWN CENTRES - HOW
HAVE OTHER
BOROUGH/CITIES/COUNTRIES
CREATED RICH CULTURAL HUBS
THAT ARE VIBRANT, RELEVANT AND
SUSTAINABLE, AND WHAT WOULD IT
TAKE TO CREATE MORE OF THESE IN
HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM?

This briefing paper is designed to help enhance your understanding of identified cultural hubs and town centres across Hammersmith and Fulham. The paper draws upon all the best data available (from national, regional and local sources) and supplements this with on-the-ground insight from local and national experts.

In Briefing Paper 1 we outlined the demographic characteristics of Hammersmith and Fulham and offered a modest sketch of the range cultural activity underway in the borough. We identified three clusters of activity, four anchor institutions, and a patchwork of affluence and poverty that shaped how people engaged with culture.

In Briefing Paper 2 we looked at the social impact of arts and cultural activity and the ways in which small specialist and larger more general arts providers might work in partnership to deliver against an agreed set of local authority priorities. We identified the following as over-arching areas where arts and culture might have a positive social impact:

- climate change
- adult social care
- tackling pollution and local environmental issues
- mental health
- affordable housing
- food poverty and homelessness
- children's safety
- local hospital provision
- social integration and tackling racism

In Briefing Paper 3 we looked at the way that inclusion and diversity is conceived in the arts and how that does or doesn't chime with current local authority priorities in Hammersmith and Fulham. We outlined the creative case for diversity that is used by the Arts Council, and presented some of the key statistics in the borough as well as some ideas for best practice.

At the end of each section of this paper we have focused on some **discussion points** that might be a good basis for more in-depth conversation at the meeting. These **discussion points** stem from three over-arching questions:

1. How vibrant, relevant and sustainable are the town centres of Hammersmith, Fulham Broadway and Shepherds Bush currently?
2. What would Commissioners like these town centres to be like?
3. What does Hammersmith and Fulham need to do to achieve this vision?

Town Centres in Hammersmith and Fulham

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham is widely acknowledged to comprise three different town centres:

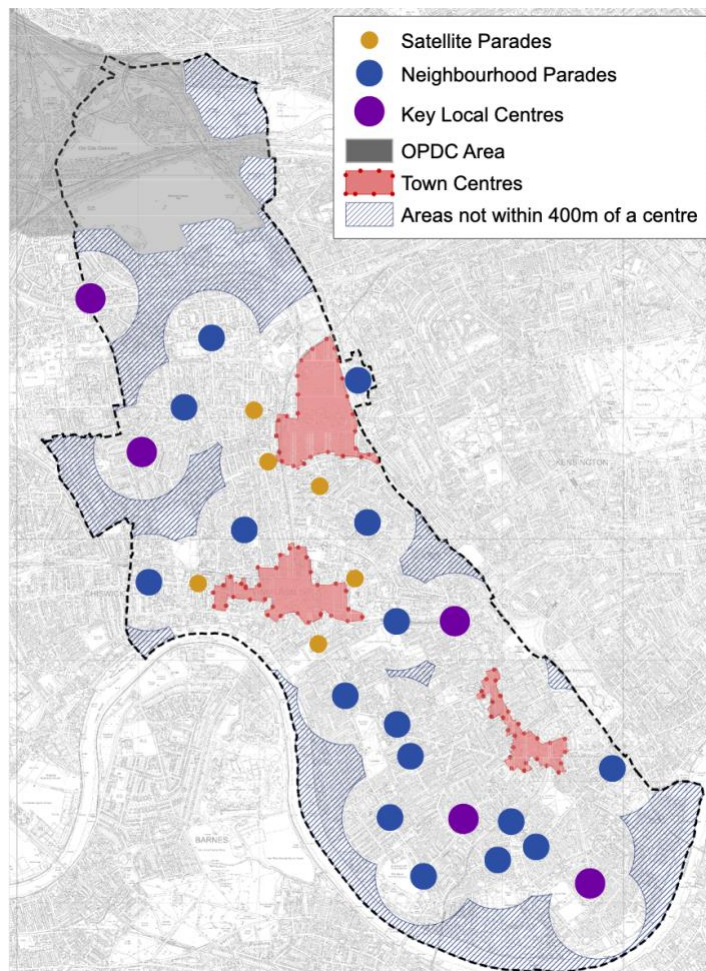
1. Hammersmith
2. Shepherd's Bush
3. Fulham Broadway

There are a few characteristics which each of these neighbourhoods share in common. They have significant transport infrastructure, in the case of Shepherd's Bush and Hammersmith, both are nodes in the Transport for London network.

They are both residential hubs and destinations (not just for people within the borough but also beyond). It would be interesting to consider the extent to which people living in Surrey/Berkshire/Middlesex consider the arts infrastructure of West London to be theirs.

The Westfield Shopping Centre has become an intense centre of gravity in the borough. Should it be regarded as its own self-contained town centre?

The current [Local Plan for LBHF](#) thinks about the borough's retail hubs as follows:



And the plan for arts in the borough is:

POLICY CF3 ENHANCEMENT AND RETENTION OF ARTS, CULTURE, ENTERTAINMENT, LEISURE, RECREATION AND SPORT USES

The council will support the enhancement of arts, culture, entertainment, leisure, recreation and sport uses by:

- a. supporting the continued presence of the borough's arts, culture, entertainment, leisure, recreation and sports venues subject to the local impact of venues being managed without added detriment to local residents;
- b. requiring proposals for new and expanded venues to be accessible and inclusive and to be supported by evidence of how impacts such as noise, traffic, parking and opening hours have been assessed, minimised and mitigated;
- c. seeking retention, replacement or enhancement of existing arts, culture, entertainment, leisure, recreation and sport uses, unless there is clear evidence that there is no longer an identified need for a particular facility or alternative community arts, culture, entertainment, leisure, recreation and sport uses. In these circumstances, a viability report will be required that demonstrates to the Council's satisfaction that the facility or alternative arts, culture, entertainment, leisure, recreation and sport use is not economically viable, including evidence of active and appropriate marketing for a continuous period of at least 12 months; and
- d. Supporting the temporary use of vacant buildings for community uses, including for performance and creative work.

The council's current Industrial Strategy is [Economic Growth for Everyone](#).

In it they talk about priority areas for development like Old Oak Common and King Street in Hammersmith:

“The council is leading on the creation of a new civic heart, with new offices, new affordable and private homes, cinema, retail and restaurants uses. The development will respect the scale and height of the neighbourhood and protect views from the river. This new high-quality development will mean we can demolish the town hall extension and create a public square, and restore the glory of our town hall. We will transform the western end of King Street, bringing more jobs and leisure opportunities to a forgotten part of the borough.”

Elsewhere in the plan the general tone is pretty familiar to readers of local government documentation:

“We’ll also improve the public realm in our town centres to encourage new activity, high-quality retailing, services, arts, cultural and other leisure facilities and decent jobs. We’ll work with developers to create new spaces and to improve existing spaces and places.”

Much of the major arts and cultural infrastructure of the borough is located in the town centres of Hammersmith and Shepherd’s Bush.

Hammersmith is home to The Lyric Theatre (which in turn houses a number of smaller associate companies) – comprising a 591 seat Frank Matcham designed main house, a 110 seat studio and a 54 seat private cinema); and Hammersmith Apollo (currently called the Eventim Apollo and often referred to as the Hammersmith Odeon) – a 3,341 seat capacity venue programmed primarily for rock and pop gigs. Riverside Studios – a once thriving arts centre on the Thames as Hammersmith Bridge – is due to be relaunched as part of a new developer-led initiative but, at the time of writing, plans appear to be on hold.



Eventim Apollo

Shepherd’s Bush is home to The Bush Theatre – a 180 seat new writing theatre based out of a former library; and Bush Hall – a 350 capacity multi-use venue; and The Shepherd’s Bush library housed in the (relatively) new Westfield shopping centre. Nearby White City, occupying the site of the BBC Television Studios, is being developed by an integrated plan from five commercial developers and Imperial College’s business, research and community campus. The White City footprint currently comprises Troubadour Theatre – comprising two temporary commercial theatres (1200 and an 800 seat); Elephant West – a temporary art gallery based out

of an old petrol station; and White City Place – a new ‘creative campus’ for creative industry partners. White City Theatre Group is currently homeless and there are plans to convert the old Dimco building into a new music venue to be run by East London’s Printworks.



Bush Theatre



Dimco Building

Fulham Broadway has a limited cultural infrastructure. Fulham Library is a Grade II listed Victorian library.

1. **Discussion point** – How vibrant, relevant and sustainable are the town centres of Hammersmith, Fulham Broadway and Shepherds Bush currently?

Current thinking about culture in town centres and high streets

Two major trends have shaped the ways that culture operates in town centres and high streets in the UK: austerity and the transformation of retail.

London and the big cities have followed a different trajectory to smaller town centres. This is partly the result of a concentration of affluent and employed people living in or near city centres where the high-value jobs exist, but also the benefits afforded by public transport infrastructure, and the powerful role played by universities and the investment they attract. There is a hint of university pulling power in the way that LBHF are looking to the Imperial College White City campus to drive some of their current economic ambitions through a joint “Growth Partnership”:

“The Council-Imperial Growth Partnership will establish a Business Growth Team, led by a chief enterprise officer. The team will champion the borough as a leading place for science, technology, and the creative industries. It will lead initiatives to create the space, support, and social amenities for enterprise to flourish. And it will forge new connections by promoting opportunities for business interaction and networking. The chief enterprise officer will work with our anchor institutions and firms to help build a tech and creative community, enabling networking, TEDx events, after-work social events and generally build a buzz about working in Hammersmith and Fulham. He or she will also support organisations that want to create a network of tech and creative entrepreneurs.”

Cutbacks to local authorities have meant that the voluntary and private sectors are taking a greater share of the responsibility for keeping town centres alive. Pseudo-public sector governance approaches have begun to play an increasing role in shaping the public realm and animating town centres. Major developments in London like Granary Square in Kings Cross and Cardinal Place in Victoria are illustrations of where streets, squares and plazas may mimic public space like streets and squares but are in fact private property and subject to different regimes of governance and maintenance.

Business Improvement Districts are perhaps the most common vehicle by which urban neighbourhoods are managed outside the classic local authority approaches. [Research](#) by the Arts Council, Mayor of London and King’s College London on BIDs highlights a few case studies where BIDs have come together to support cultural activity in town centres. Their role has usually been to:

- Develop a cultural vision in business plans by consulting with local cultural organisations when creating or renewing BIDs.
- Champion creative solutions to solve local issues by working with cultural organisations at both strategic and delivery levels.

- Invite cultural organisations to bid to BID partnerships and existing forums.
- Establish marketing partnerships with local cultural and tourism agencies to attract new audiences, improve visibility and develop place-branding.
- Put culture at the heart of the night-time offer and set up a forum for culture, police, licensing, environment and transport representatives.
- Offer affordable space to cultural organisations and creative small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- Lead on neighbourhood plans with local stakeholders.

The [Hammersmith BID](#) is currently the only one in the borough. It has a [Cultural Town](#) strand of work, which is perhaps most visible to people when there is activity underway in Lyric Square. The LBHF Industrial Strategy commits to establishing more BIDs “in the three major business and retail centres to work with businesses to improve the quality, variety and appeal of what is on offer. The next one is proposed for Fulham (subject to a ballot of local businesses).”

A Cultural District sometimes mimics a BID but is made up of exclusively or predominantly cultural members. It’s a familiar way for metropolitan culture to be organised in the US where there is less of a role for local politicians, and is becoming increasingly common in the UK. The consultant Adrian Ellis has [written for the Centre for London](#) about how they might work in the UK:

What makes a great cultural district is fairly easy to define. If you think about the city areas you love, they probably have some of the following features, irrespective of whether you are in Siena or walking along New York’s High Line, or strolling between the South Bank and Bankside in London:

- *human scale*
- *a well-maintained public realm that draws people pretty indiscriminately from all walks of life to see and be seen (the agora)*
- *animated street life*
- *light programming, with public performance and appropriate spaces*
- *street fairs, food fairs, periodic festivals, public art that is intelligently curated*
- *mixed use, of a non mono-cultural kind – including restaurants, cafes, retail and residential.*

The places we like are usually neither wholly historic nor wholly contemporary, but with a sense of living, organic development; the buildings are at different scales, with the larger anchors alongside smaller (an obvious point, yet absent from some of the less successful district planning of the past decade). Small-scale production and opportunities for consumption often sit alongside one another.

These favoured places are usually neither totally pedestrianised nor overwhelmed with traffic; neither wholly sanitised nor overly branded. They tend to include careful historic restoration and to be walkable; you can orientate yourself by landmarks or water, rather than by intrusive signage; and there are clear connections to the rest of the city, whether through clear sightlines or proximity to stretches of water. There are probably some thriving anchor organisations with international resonance, heft, scale and an impressive architectural carapace.

The examples in the next chapter are often from cultural districts, or inspired by them, and in some ways mimic some of the plans in the LBHF Industrial Strategy:

“We are developing plans for a new arts incubator hub and expanding our support for the annual, resident-run ArtsFest. We look forward to the exciting move of the Royal College of Art to White City. The council will support, grow and promote its anchor arts organisations and encourage new events and venues through the planning process. This will include supporting street festivals in our local markets such as North End Road and exploring planning flexibilities for pop-up events. This year, we held our first comedy festival across the borough in collaboration with the Bush Theatre”

Capital West London Growth Summit

In October 2019 the Lyric hosted the Capital West London Growth Summit - an annual event that is run on behalf of the West London boroughs – Barnet, Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham, Harrow and Hounslow.

Capital West London is an innovative inward investment and trade partnership that has been commissioned by the West London Alliance. The conference forms part of a programme of activities offering a platform for the private and public sectors and leading business partners to come together to discuss the potential across the sub-region.

“We are trying to work across the private, public and cultural sectors to understand how to flip the conversation from a negotiation into a true partnership. Everybody should be winning in a partnership.”

Sherry Dobbin, Futurecity Partner

- 2. Discussion point –** Against this backdrop, what would Commissioners like the three town centres to be like? What vision do Commissioners have for Shepherd’s Bush, Hammersmith and Fulham Broadway?

Local, national and international examples of high street renewal through culture

Back in 2013 the Mayor of London published [Culture on the High Street](#) which set out the many ways that artists were animating town centres, fuelling the night time economy, taking over empty shops, making the built environment a little more engaging, etc. It was published shortly after the Portas Review into high streets and the year after the London Olympiad had done so much to animate the capital. There are examples in it from the UK and beyond. What's especially useful about the many case studies is the way the budget required for each project is made clear.

In 2016 the Mayor delivered the first London Culture Forum – a conference looking to support the mayor's prioritisation of culture as a driver for the capital. In her introduction to the conference, Deputy Mayor for Culture, Justine Simons says:

“Cultural experts and policy makers need to be advocates and creative thinkers and also civic leaders - comfortable working in tandem with businesses, politicians, transport, education, planning, property and environmental experts to ensure culture at the heart of our future vision for London.”

Across London there are a number of high-profile examples where culture has led the development or regeneration of a high street or town centre.

London's Southbank

Highest profile is arguably the [Southbank](#) which bills itself as London's cultural district, with an integrated offer comprising the National Theatre, Southbank Centre, BFI and, further afield, The Imperial War Museum, The Old Vic, The Florence Nightingale Museum and Oxo Tower Wharf.

The 1951 Festival of Britain provided the catalyst for this development, establishing the basis of today's Southbank Centre and followed in 1976 by the National Theatre, which relocated from its home at the Old Vic to a brutalist building on the river.



Festival of Britain 1951

Today the Southbank Centre comprises the Royal Festival Hall (2,700 seats), the Queen Elizabeth Hall (950 seats), the Purcell Room (293 capacity) and the Hayward Gallery.

The National Theatre has recently completed a £50 refurbishment of its three venues in its iconic home. These comprise the Olivier Theatre (1127 seats), Lyttleton Theatre (894 seats) and Dorfman Studio (450 capacity).



The National Theatre

The BFI (formerly the National Film Theatre) is the national centre for film in the UK and comprises three cinemas, studios and exhibition spaces.

Over time, and with some retrospective coordination, these major cultural institutions provide an apparently coordinated cultural offer (although in reality each operates with little programming or collaborative overlap). Pedestrian access, the food and drink offer, and the programming of the riverside walkways have significantly improved footfall to this part of Lambeth.

Culture Mile

[Culture Mile](#) is an attempt to provide a similar coordination to the cultural offer within the City of London, uniting partners including The Barbican, The Museum of London, Guildhall and the London Symphony Orchestra.

The Barbican, the major anchor tenant in the City of London, was conceived and built on a site that was destroyed in the Blitz. The arts centre at the heart of this utopian and brutalist estate, was opened by The Queen in 1982. It comprises a theatre (capacity 1158), a concert hall (1,943 seats) and various cinemas and exhibition spaces.

Culture Mile was formed in 2017 to coordinate developments in the City of London over the next 10 – 15 years.

Other current London case studies

Kings Cross and **Nine Elms** are two new development areas for London. [Kings Cross](#) is a major new development area comprising Granary Square, Coal Drops Yard and Kings Place (67 acres of land). The developer Argent has pioneered a long-term approach to development placing arts and culture at the heart of its plans for Granary Square and Coal Drops Yard. These developments provide high-end residential accommodation alongside significant and well-designed public realm, a curated shopping experience and a high-profile arts and culture anchor tenants. Granary Square is home to Central St Martins art college, Everyman Cinema and Kings Place comprises a high quality music venue. For 2021 a new [theatre](#), to be lead by the National's Nick Hytner, is to open in the new Facebook headquarters at Kings Cross.



Coal Drops Yard at Kings Cross..

[Nine Elms](#) extends from Lambeth Bridge in the north, to Chelsea Bridge in the south, covering the Albert Embankment, Vauxhall and a large slice of north Battersea. Westminster lies directly opposite on the north bank of the Thames. It is by far the largest regeneration zone in central London and includes the last remaining industrial stretch of the South Bank. At 561 acres it is even larger than the country of Monaco! Arts and culture is at the centre of the plans for this site that includes Battersea Power Station, the new American Embassy and dozens of new venues for residents and visitors to this part of London. [Nine Elms London](#) provides coordination across many developers and local authority interests.



Nine Elms, aerial view

Each of these new developments has adopted its own approach to placemaking. Placemaking describes a relatively new area of activity that is deployed by commercial developers, local authorities and city-wide authorities, to establish community at the heart of new areas. Culture is often seen as a driver for placemaking and is at the heart of several agency approaches, including market-leaders [FutureCity](#) (full disclosure – one of the authors is an associate with FutureCity). Futurecity believes culture is key to unlocking the power and potential of city space. They encourage architects, engineers, landscape designers, developers and city planners to integrate art and culture at the beginning of any project by collaborating with artists to provide a contemporary narrative for our towns, cities and urban centres.

Civic Role Enquiry

The UK branch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation has been running an Enquiry into the Civic Role of the Arts. As writers and researchers both of us have been engaged by the Gulbenkian as part of this work.

The website for the Enquiry is furnished with a whole host of case studies looking at the way that arts have been used to activate town centres. Two case studies that feel especially relevant are [Encounters](#), not as a direct analogue for high street revitalisation, but as an ethic and a kind of practice. The other one is [Ministry of Stories](#) where their partnerships and their business model might be something for the borough to learn from.

Our Town

Due to a variety of factors (including the lack of proper civic infrastructure) the problem of urban decay and de-industrialisation has been a major focus of public policy in the US and their equivalent of the Arts Council has sponsored a programme of activity called [Our Town](#), the results of which are really well documented. Here are some of the most relevant case studies:

[Main Street Creative Corridor](#) (Little Rock, Arkansas): How can an urban corridor be revitalised into a “creative corridor,” centred on affordable housing and arts-based, mixed-use development?

[Art Station](#) (Stone Mountain, Georgia): How did a small town take advantage of abandoned buildings in its downtown area to grow arts opportunities and its local economy?

[Project Storefronts](#) (New Haven, Connecticut): How can artists make empty storefronts become catalysts for economic revitalisation?

[Art Lives Here](#) (Mount Rainier, Maryland): How can a pop-up arts project help reclaim a downtown’s empty spaces and create a new identity for the area?

[Iron Triangle Interactive Art](#) (Richmond, California): How can high-tech art help support downtown revitalisation efforts?

Perhaps the most important report in the last year is the [Cultural Cities Enquiry](#) which looks at more than just neighbourhoods and town centres but at municipal cultural policy in the UK more widely. It was commissioned by the Core Cities Group (that’s the UK’s second-tier cities like Liverpool and Bristol) and its filled with a lot of varied recommendations, mostly aimed at those working in town halls. The “Place” section is most relevant for us. We wonder whether the borough is well placed to establish a Cultural City Compact? It’s the mechanism the report suggests to deliver cultural solutions in a world where power and resources have shifted away from local government and into the private sector and civil society.

The idea is that City Compacts “bring together local partners with a shared interest in maximising the civic role of culture. These partners will work together to create and deliver a plan to drive social and economic benefits from a thriving cultural ecosystem. Compact partners will include business, universities, local authorities,

the cultural sector and LEPs, and will pledge to align focus around key goals, in order to unlock new resources for cultural projects. Compacts will have business plans to drive measurable progress against local priorities such as reanimating city centres, increasing income from tourists or international students, or establishing a creative cluster. Compacts will also take the lead in establishing cultural property portfolios, Corporate Social Venture Funds, improving diversity and relevance of cultural offering, and skills strategies for creative talent – according to local need.”

There are all sorts of issues discussed in the report, from funding to talent, and the most relevant is about space and place, and the way in which that is at a premium in town centres like Shepherds Bush, Hammersmith, and Fulham Broadway:

Many cities experience two key challenges with space

- 1 – **Displacement of cultural activity** following urban regeneration and consequential land value uplift, increased rates and rents
- 2 – **Limited returns on publically owned cultural property assets** due to constraints on asset management capacity, exacerbated by lack of alignment across the public estate or between asset owner and tenant

There are a number models to address these challenges

- **Studio space collectives** – WASPS in Glasgow manages portfolios of studio space for over 900 tenants across Scotland, including publicly owned cultural property assets. Similar models include SPACE in London and Colchester; East Street Arts in Leeds, and Vault Artist Studios in Belfast.
- **London’s Creative Land Trust** – based on San Francisco’s Community Arts Stabilisation Trust, this will deploy public funds, philanthropy and social investment to build a portfolio of affordable creative workspace.
- **Community Heritage Organisations** – Coventry Council had approved the transfer of 22 heritage assets to Historic Coventry Trust in the largest ever transfer of historic buildings from a local authority to a community heritage organisation. The Trust will restore and reuse the buildings, cross-subsidising across the portfolio.
- **Community-owned creative workspace** – Baltic Creative is the fastest growing creative and digital cluster outside London. As a community interest company, profits from commercial rents are returned to the city’s creative sector.
- **Parks Trusts** – Milton Keynes Parks Trust manages a £120m estate, leased on a long term basis from the council and operating as a self-financing charity. As similar model was established last year in Newcastle.

3. Discussion point – What does Hammersmith and Fulham need to do to achieve a new vision for each of its town centres?