

**SOCIETY_{OF}
LONDON
THEATRE**

EST 1908

**UK
THEATRE**

EST 1894

2022 Local Elections Manifesto

The case for support for theatre

Local authorities and theatres have long enjoyed a strong symbiotic relationship, which directly benefits local communities. Local authorities who provide cultural strategies, funding for education and training, and financial support for individual venues support theatres who in turn provide extensive contributions to the economy, health and wellbeing, and civic pride of the local communities that they serve. UK Theatre is the UK's leading performing arts trade association, representing over 240 venues, producers, and theatre companies across the four nations. From the Minack Theatre on the Cornish coast to the Pitlochry Festival Theatre in Perthshire, our members create a thriving sense of place and reflect the unique cultural histories of the towns, cities, and regions of the UK that they operate in.

Theatre benefits local areas in many ways, including:

- Theatre is a **major draw for inbound tourism**. Figures from VisitBritain show that one-in-ten of all visitors to Great Britain visited the theatre at least once during their stay, including 5% of visitors to Wales and 15% of visitors to London – a higher percentage than for any other type of cultural or music event¹
- The programmes of work provided by theatres can **support local education, NHS, and social services** provisions. For example, theatres are estimated to save the NHS £100m per year thanks to the wellbeing culture provides to visitors
- Theatres provide **excellent opportunities for training and skills** in the local community, encouraging people to stay in their local areas, and theatres **help to create and bolster civic pride**

If our industry is to continue to thrive and deliver for local communities over the coming decades, we need continued support from local authorities. Immediate cultural policy priorities for all candidates in this election should therefore be:

1. **A commitment to maintain and strengthen local funding for theatres and the arts in real terms**
2. **Investment in creative skills and recruitment to build a creative workforce that is fit for the future**
3. **The creation and implementation of a comprehensive, long-term local cultural strategy for the local area**

¹ VisitBritain, December 2020. *Activities in Britain's nations and regions*. https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/foresight_165_regional_activities_sep_21.pdf

We call on all candidates to commit to...

1. Maintain and strengthen local funding for theatres and the arts in real terms

Culture is vital to the lifeblood of local communities – both economically and through its positive impact on people’s mental health, wellbeing, and civic pride. Local authorities currently invest about £2 billion per annum in arts and culture, but this has been on the decline year-on-year in the last decade. Without consistent and increased local authority funding, local culture will suffer, and some venues may even have to close.

Local authority funding supports theatres to:

- Produce and host productions which can nurture home-grown talent and reflect and celebrate the local area
- Deliver outreach programmes, education services, and community projects which engage with local residents
- Provide skills training and employment opportunities in the local area
- Undertake maintenance, development, and repairs which keep the theatre open
- Support health, education, and wellbeing services

2. Invest in creative skills and recruitment to build a creative workforce that is fit for the future

Local theatres contribute to the development of their towns, cities, and regions by attracting employees to the area and helping to retain – or attract – graduate talent. The Department for Education’s Working Futures projections, which identifies sectors with the biggest potential growth, predicts that by 2027 the creative industries will increase their share of the economy to 7.6% – exceeding manufacturing (6.7%) and construction (6.5%) - so support for your local theatre is investment in a future growth business.

Having an active local theatre in an area creates numerous opportunities for local people and local businesses and organisations who they can partner up with:

- School children can be inspired and have their aspirations raised from seeing performances and learning about local job opportunities in the cultural sector
- Educational institutions can partner with venues on apprenticeships and other formal training opportunities on a range of transferable skills – from business management and finance to carpentry and electrics

- People looking to reskill during their career can find opportunities on their doorstep rather than having to move out of the area
- Theatre roles provide ample transferable skills, not least of which are the creative thinking skills which are sought-after by employers across the board

3. Lobby for the creation and implementation of a comprehensive, long-term cultural strategy for the local area

Culture and theatre can be an engine that drives local policy, vision and regeneration. When fully incorporated into a local authority's long-term planning, culture can play a vital role in improving the health, wellbeing, and economic prosperity of people and businesses across the community.

A comprehensive, long-term cultural strategy can greatly bolster a local authority area in numerous ways:

- Theatres are a key part of the night-time economy and increase footfall for hotels, restaurants, and pubs. In London, for example, 69% of theatre goers report spending money on eating out as part of their trip and 22% spent money on accommodation²
- Venues and productions bring direct business opportunities for local firms – the global success of *Everyone's Talking About Jamie*, the musical which began life in Sheffield's Crucible Theatre, resulted in 73 different companies in the West End benefitting financially from the show's success, and a further 58 companies benefitting while the show was on tour around the UK
- Research shows that the physical and mental health benefits of visiting the theatre saves the NHS over £100m a year³, and a 2020 report by the Welsh NHS Confederation highlighted numerous studies showing the positive impact that engaging with theatre and culture has on audiences and local communities⁴

² Publica, February 2022. *Securing the future of London's theatres*. <https://solt.co.uk/what-we-do/publica-report/>

³ UK Theatre, May 2021. *UK theatres revealed to save the NHS £102m a year*. <https://uktheatre.org/theatre-industry/news/uk-theatres-revealed-to-save-the-nhs-102m-a-year/>

⁴ Welsh NHS Federation, May 2020. *How the arts are supporting the Welsh health and social care response to COVID-19*. https://www.nhsconfed.org/sites/default/files/media/How-the-arts-are-supporting-Welsh-health-and-social-care-response-to-COVID-19_4.pdf