

Manifesto for Cultural High Streets

WHAT IS THE CULTURAL HIGH STREET?

Businesses, spaces and retailers in the centre of each town, city or neighbourhood – on and around the high street – whose primary business or product is artistic endeavour.

These include record shops and other retailers and creative spaces focused on art, culture, craft and design, from bookshops to recording studios, shops selling instruments and art supplies, independent galleries, venues and cinemas, and other cultural and entertainment businesses.

Many are independent and owner-run, operating in permanent premises, alongside markets and pop-ups.

By being based on or near the high street, these businesses are a very visible and active part of the local community, bringing arts and culture to the local population, who have an accessible entry point to pursue cultural passions – as consumers, workers or creators – and a place to connect with like-minded people.

These businesses are also important local employers, helping make creative careers more accessible.

Many businesses on the cultural high street are multi-layered – for example, a record shop obviously sells vinyl, but it may well also operate as a café and events space, while providing a hub where local music fans, musicians and music creators can connect and share their passions and knowledge.

Cultural high street businesses also share customers, facilities, footfall value and resources with other local businesses.

Each cultural high street provides a vital framework for the local grassroots cultural community and for the local population at large. But many businesses on the cultural high street are also connected with their counterparts around the country – for example through initiatives like Record Store Day – allowing local grassroots communities all over the UK to come together and share their passions and creativity.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Socio-economic growth: The cultural high street consists of ‘catalyst businesses’ that act as drivers for local economic generation, increasing footfall for all businesses, and helping make town and city centres much more attractive locations for consumers, and both local and national retailers. It also provides an impetus and focal point for local entrepreneurs who play a key role in economic growth.

Local employment: The cultural high street provides lots of full and part time jobs. For many people – especially young people – careers in the creative industries can feel remote and cut off. Having visible entry-level job opportunities on the local high street provides a crucial accessible entry point. Whatever any one role may involve, it's a hugely valuable route into a very competitive sector.

Community and cultural value: The cultural high street is not just a functional place to buy supplies, it is a place to pursue passions and build connections in the real world. Each cultural high street reflects the local community – its people, its institutions, its history – while also providing a physical gateway to culture from across the world, and human experts to help consumers navigate what's on offer.

CASE STUDY: RECORD SHOPS

The cultural high street is already a proven UK success story – these businesses are already delivering community and cultural value, socio-economic growth and local employment.

However, that impact could be significantly extended, and could be achieved in many more towns, with the right support. Without that support, the burgeoning offer of growth, employment and sense of place provided by cultural businesses risks losing vital champions.

Looking at record shops, the number of specialist retailers has nearly doubled over the last decade to 500 stores. These record shops are not just retail spaces, they are also community hubs, local employers, hospitality businesses, talent seedbeds and regeneration drivers.

Together record shops host 4000 gigs per year, and they have helped grow the UK's vinyl market from £3 million to £300 million per year, providing a crucial additional revenue stream for artists and record labels, while also ensuring fans can enjoy and experience the music they love in multiple different ways.

High street cultural businesses must be sustained and sustainable, for all communities to thrive. This success story can be boosted, extended and solidified with the right support.

GROWING THE CULTURAL HIGH STREET

There are three key ways the government can grow the cultural high street.

- 1 Expand hospitality business rate breaks to more cultural businesses, particularly those facilitating live events and experiences.**

Recognising that cultural businesses on the high street provide cultural community experiences and grassroots talent support.

- 2 Incentives for small businesses to**

'Hire local' incentives such as grants for local employment and training, and access to local transport.

Costs of employment have soared. Cultural businesses on the high street are local, valuable, accessible and reliable employers, who can also provide crucial entry points for young people seeking to pursue a creative career. Policy must enable these opportunities with creative incentives.

- 3 Encourage whole high street planning, supporting cultural businesses to improve local living value**

Local authority support for cultural enterprise is a structural, practical, holistic endeavour.

Local authorities can facilitate growth and regeneration with thoughtful initiatives, supportive of local and small enterprise.

The **APPG For The Cultural High Street** can kick-start this process by mapping the businesses that make up the cultural high street, documenting current success stories in different local communities, and demonstrating the social, economic and cultural value of these and other support mechanisms.

#protectculturalbusiness
#highstreetculture

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