

Cultural Strategy

For Dover

2025-2030



Our vision is to transform Dover by using the power of cultural initiatives to revitalise community spirit and civic pride, create vibrant spaces for self expression, make connections and foster wellbeing and economic growth through dynamic cultural activity. Connection is key. Whether it's between organisations and individuals, people and the natural and built environment, heritage sites and new builds, establishing and fostering connections will sow the seeds for this strategy to have a lasting positive impact.

Culture acts as a catalyst for positive change, breathing life into forgotten spaces, attracting investment and building a resilient, thriving and diverse community where every individual feels connected, valued and inspired to contribute to a brighter future.

The groundwork – consultation and engagement

With particular thanks to Charles Holland of Charles Holland Architects, a locally based architect and arts and culture professional. Charles was commissioned by Dover District Council to work with us and to establish the groundwork for this document. We undertook a comprehensive consultation programme with key organisations, individuals and community groups in Dover. All the responses from our stakeholder groups and events have been collated and analysed and the findings from engagement events used to inform the actions in this document. We also took information from existing Council strategies, supporting evidence-based studies and the emerging Local Plan. Please see the appendices for further detail.

Contents

- 4 Forewords
- 6 Making the most of our cultural opportunities
- 8 Dover in 2025 - the challenges
- 9 A cultural vision for Dover
- 10 How will the strategy be used?
- 12 Objective 1 and actions
- 15 Objective 2 and actions
- 17 Objective 3 and actions
- 19 Making it happen – delivering growth
- 22 Appendices



Key definitions for the purposes of this strategy

Culture

Culture means many things to many people. For this strategy we refer to it as 'the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society' which includes:

- The arts, including artforms listed by Arts Council England – collections, combined arts, dance, libraries, literature, museums, music, theatre and visual arts
- Food, including traditional and new foods associated with a place
- Religion
- Heritage, including historic sites and buildings
- Community and way of life.

Creativity

The process of making, producing or participating in culture; how people apply their knowledge, skills and intuition to imagine, conceive, express or make something new.

Creative practitioners

People and organisations whose work creates or reshapes cultural content.



Forewords

A greater place to live, work, visit, learn and invest

We want to create a vibrant town centre that delivers for everyone. To take investment, growth, tourism and development in Dover to a whole new level and harness the huge advantage and potential this town has to grow our district's economy and to drive physical, economic, social and cultural regeneration. We have an incredible opportunity to collaborate and grow, and in doing so to rebuild, reimagine and rebalance Dover sustainably, creating more jobs, more training, more spend, a greater sense of civic pride and, in turn, creating new opportunities for further investment and growth for the benefit of us all.

The key to turning this into reality lies with each of us and the local communities, businesses and organisations at our heart. We want to harness the power of culture as a catalyst to empower Dover and its communities to flourish, develop and take responsibility for their own future. Let's collaborate and see what can be achieved by the Council, our partners and stakeholders working together with shared aspirations, vision and goals.

I am confident that we can, together, think differently, achieve more and build a better and fairer future for Dover.



Cllr Kevin Mills,
Leader of Dover
District Council



The reason for visiting Dover is Dover itself

This strategy is about unlocking Dover's full potential - by reimagining what's possible and energising the opportunities already within our reach. It aims to harness Dover's rich cultural assets as a powerful springboard for placemaking, community pride and inclusive growth.

We're building on strong foundations: A Cultural Survey and Framework for Dover (2009), the 2021 Tourism & Visitor Economy Strategy and the 2021 Economic Growth Strategy. Dover's recognition as a Priority Place by Arts Council England and the focus on areas of the town's incredible heritage by Historic England both signal one thing - the time to act is now.

We want both residents and visitors to discover, enjoy and celebrate everything Dover has to offer. To grow a sustainable economy, we must encourage people to stay longer, explore deeper and invest more in our local experiences. This will spark new opportunities - bringing jobs, investment and prosperity to our communities and businesses.

But real, lasting change takes collaboration. It takes partnership. It takes a shared belief in Dover's unique identity and cultural strength. Let's work together to shape a future that's bold, inclusive and unmistakably Dover.



Cllr Lynne Wright,
Portfolio Holder for
Community & Corporate
Property



Making the most of our cultural opportunities

“Culture does not make people. People make culture.”

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Nothing defines a place and makes it unique like its culture – an evolving entity that shapes how we perceive and interact with the world. Culture is part of the glue that brings and keeps our communities together; it is the lens through which we interpret the past, navigate the present and envision the future and provides a sense of identity, belonging and continuity. It is a reservoir of knowledge and a source of creativity, connecting people across time and space.

Dover boasts a rich and diverse past. A vital port in Roman times, it became one of the original Cinque Ports during the 11th century and has played a pivotal role throughout history. Dover's strategic significance made it a focal point during both World Wars, notably during the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940. During WWII, the town endured devastating bombing raids and shelling from France and suffered extensive damage, with many historic buildings and homes reduced to rubble. Despite this destruction, Dover's resilience helped it recover and today it remains a gateway to mainland Europe, maintaining its historic and cultural importance.

In their *Historic Places Review Paper* 2021, Historic England describes Dover as 'a place of contradictions'. The

2009 Cultural Survey & Framework for Dover characterises the town as both 'purposeful and playful'. Both these descriptions suggest a place made up of contrasting elements and aspects: a historic harbour that is also Britain's busiest port, a seaside town that has a major ferry terminal, a destination for visitors from around the world as well as a place where people live and work.

The town blends its rich history with a modern outlook, proudly showcasing the iconic White Cliffs and the surrounding Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Dover Castle remains a prominent attraction, the ferry port serves as a vital gateway for trade and travel, and the cruise terminals welcome thousands of international travellers each year.

How can 'culture' help Dover?

'Culture and place-making are key to the levelling-up agenda.'

Commission on Culture and Local Government, LGA



The opinions of Dover's residents vary widely, as in any town. Many take pride in their town's rich history and natural landmarks and appreciate its significance as a major port. Others express concerns about economic opportunities, lack of activities for young people, lack of cultural facilities and access to the town's heritage. As in many communities, sentiments towards Dover can be a mix of pride, nostalgia and the desire for continued development and improvement.

Culture and the institutions and services of culture, such as museums, historic buildings, cinemas, music venues, parks

and events, can contribute towards revitalising communities, developing trust, improving health and wellbeing and building a more positive future for local people.

Our identified ambitions will create more opportunities for the town's diverse communities to enjoy the widest possible range of culture. This strategy considers actions that place cultural life, shared heritage and creative activity at the heart of the town, offering a key driver for economic development, jobs and skills, improved health and wellbeing and civic pride.



Copyright Nastia Photography/Dover District Council

Dover in 2025

The town faces many chronic challenges including poverty and deprivation, underfunding, low aspirations, poor health, high unemployment, an empty town centre and low civic pride. To put this into context:

- Dover District has very low employment density (0.6 Dover, GB 0.84). While this indicator has been steadily rising at GB level, since the financial crash it has been persistently low across Dover, with employment currently 11% below its 2008 level.
- The district has a low proportion of residents with higher level skills (NVQ4 - 35% Dover, 44% GB), which is reflected in the resident occupational profile, with low proportions in Standard Occupational Classification Groups 1-3 (40% Dover, GB 50%).
- A lack of educational and employment opportunity leads to many young people leaving the area. For those that remain there are high levels of youth unemployment (6.7% 18–24-year-olds in Dover, 3.8% south east).
- Dover has low rates of business formation (53% of the UK average), and low survival rates limiting opportunities for new businesses to locate and grow in Dover. There has also been a net loss of office stock over the last 5 years with low current vacancy rates of 0.2%. However, low rents also prevent new development coming forward.
- The retail vacancy rate within Dover town centre (19%) is well above the national average (14%) with the gap widening from 2016 to 2021.
- Research found almost 50% of residents found no or very little reason to visit Dover town centre.
- Dover town centre's street scene and visual appearance is a major issue which impacts on civic pride and visitor perception.
- The town centre has a higher-than-average number of empty shops, 33 shops in July 2025, including larger units, which tend to have higher business rates, and some needing major refurbishment.

There is national recognition of Dover's situation

- The town was categorised by the previous Government as a category 1 'Priority' Levelling Up area (76th out of 314 in England).
- Dover has been recognised by Arts Council England as a Priority Place.
- It has been recognised by the Historic England Places Panel as a place of need.

A cultural vision for Dover

Informed by consultation with stakeholders and local people, and building on the foundations of A Cultural Survey & Framework for Dover (2009), we have an ambitious vision to 2030 to align with Arts Council England's Let's Create Strategy 2020-2030.

Dover will become a leading cultural beacon in south-east England where everyone is welcome and able to participate. Cultural activities and places will enhance the lives of local people and bring visitors and investment to the town, boosting the town's economy.

Our shared ambitions are to:

- **boost** Dover's reputation as one of the most creative towns in Kent and maximise all the opportunities that our international location has to offer.
- **honour** and build upon the successes of Dover's past while confronting our challenges and embracing current and future exciting possibilities.
- **value** the creative potential in Dover's diverse communities.
- **create** opportunities for children and young people to reach their creative potential.
- **identify** and extend partnerships with the digital and technology sector, health sector, and wider creative industries, as well as with further and higher education.
- **promote** projects that embrace family, diversity, accessibility, localism, health and wellbeing and environmental sustainability.
- **facilitate** placemaking initiatives, community cohesion and cultural events.
- **recognise** the importance of shared heritage, folklore and cultural buildings.
- **support** cultural enterprise, training, health and employment initiatives and encourage economic growth, further inward investment, funding and partnerships.
- **collaborate** and connect with key cultural stakeholders across the South East and The Short Straits (including Northern France, Belgium and Netherlands) to magnify reach and to increase the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of cultural activity and industry.
- **regenerate** Dover town centre through the reawakening and connection of key sites, putting the heart and soul back into the town centre.



To achieve this vision and the ambitions, we have three objectives:

1. To enhance, create, connect and bring key cultural assets to life.
2. To animate a collaborative town and cultural network with a first-class event and creative initiatives programme.
3. To create an environment where culture, creativity and related activity reduces the number of empty shops and buildings within Dover and creates a thriving town centre.

Credit: Kent Downs AONB



How will the strategy be used?

This document will support, guide and inform Council activities until 2030 and will provide evidence to underpin funding proposals. It builds on previous strategies and achievements, alongside evidence from the new consultation, to identify priorities. It will establish culture and cultural thinking as a golden thread through the policies that guide and shape not only the Council's strategic development but everyone's efforts in placemaking in Dover, acting as a catalyst for positive change.

'Placemaking refers to the role of arts, culture and heritage in helping to shape the places where we live and create a renewed social value. Placemaking can help shape renewed affection, passion and pride for their 'place'. It draws on the combined assets of heritage, people, buildings and landscape to create places that people want to live in, work in, do business in and visit.'

Culture and place-making, Local Government Association

Measuring success

We are committed to open and transparent progress monitoring against set objectives. We will keep our cultural strategy under review, particularly in the light of new challenges or opportunities, whether national, regional or local. The aims, objectives and actions laid out in this document will be reassessed after five years. We will work with local organisations who connect with the town's diverse communities to promote, keep this strategy alive and guide it through its lifespan.

We will also use various well-known methods to measure progress such as footfall data for places and events, Economic Impact of Tourism and visitor surveys and marketing analytics.

Action stations

Following consultation and engagement sessions and assessment of the existing cultural landscape in Dover, we believe the following three objectives will help us to move towards our vision of Dover becoming a leading cultural beacon and the best version of itself for everyone. The following pages set out our plan to be reviewed and recalibrated yearly.

The District Council has a role as a leader, influencer, facilitator and supporter. There is much to do and we will need to manage resources effectively.

How can 'culture' help Dover?

'There is strong evidence that participation in the arts can contribute to community cohesion, reduce social exclusion and isolation, and/or make communities feel safer and stronger.'

Let's Create Strategy 2020-2030,
Arts Council England



Objective 1

To enhance, create, connect and bring key cultural assets to life.

To recognise culture and heritage as 'one', opening and linking key historic places in the town and using them to host cultural activities and encourage creative practitioners to showcase their work.

Key aims:

- Deliver and open **The Bench** building (Dover Beacon Project) in 2026 in a prominent and highly visible Dover Town Centre brownfield location. This is a cultural catalyst 'Levelling Up' project that directly delivers against local market failure and strategic need (jobs, skills, education, showcase), through a flexible and future-proofed building that includes:
 - a new creative and digital further education campus for 133 additional local learners
 - a business centre for start-ups and SMEs to support over 50 new jobs
 - a creative centre with creative practitioner space, gallery and active frontage
 - improved public realm, accessibility (underpass and signage) and active travel.
- Diversify the cultural offer and increase accessibility to cultural venues:
 - Reopen the 80-seat former Silver Screen Cinema in 2025. The cinema will be used as a multipurpose space for education, community, cinema and live streaming of national performances.
- Reopen the Grade I listed **Maison Dieu** in 2025 for creative and community use.
- Work with the Dover Roman Painted House Trust to reopen the current **Roman Painted House** to the public and progress the preparation of a business plan and application for major grant funding to deliver a transformed Roman Painted House, Roman Bath House and Roman Lawn as a leading, cultural-based visitor attraction. If the funding application is successful, this project will begin in 2026.
- Support Kent County Council with their redevelopment of Dover's Discovery Centre and open a new **Dover Discovery Community Hub**, library and walk-in archive to the public.
- Champion Dover College in their delivery of a new high quality and purpose-built, 170 seat, **College & Community Performing Arts Centre**. The centre aims to provide a wealth of cultural opportunity for current and future creative generations across East Kent and beyond.

- Continue to open, free of charge, **Dover Museum** - home to the world's oldest known surviving seagoing boat - and its permanent and temporary exhibitions to the public and in doing so keep Dover's local heritage and social history alive, interpreted and accessible to all. To refresh and reinterpret The Boat Gallery in 2026 and the whole Museum in 2028.
- Work with Dover Town Council, Dover Society and the St Edmund of Abingdon Memorial Trust to support and promote the regular opening of **St Edmund's Chapel** (the Miracle Chapel), restored and reconsecrated in the 1960s as a small venue and place of worship.
- Develop and increase the use of Dover's outdoor spaces for cultural events and activities, including:
 - **Market Square** (refurbished in 2022)
 - **Pencester Gardens**
 - **Waterfront and Western Docks** (supporting the Port of Dover with their ongoing revival programme)
 - **Dover's Western Heights**
 - **Fort Burgoyne**
- Introduce a new Ambassador Programme with up to 50 members of the community that have a voice and passion for the area and are eager to promote the wonderful cultural attractions and events in Dover and spread positive messages.
- Continue to improve signage and interpretation across Dover to reduce street clutter, provide clarity, enhance understanding and connect assets and spaces.





Picture credit: Sue Jones

Existing cultural venues in and around the town centre*

Dover Museum	Charlton Centre and Biggin Hall (Future Foundry)
Maison Dieu	Dover Technical College
Roman Painted House	Roman Lawn
Market Square	St Mary's Parish Church and Parish Centre
Pencester Gardens and Bandstand	Salem Baptist Church
St Edmund's Chapel	Discovery Centre and Library
North Downs Way National Trail/Via Francigena	

* see Appendix Two on page 26 for details

Dover Museum & Bronze Age Boat Gallery

- Welcomed 22,200 visitors in 2024
- Hosted 20 events in 2024
- Curated 9 exhibitions in 2024
- Open 7 days a week.

How can 'culture' help Dover?

'Culture and the experiences it offers can have a deep and lasting effect on places and the people who live in them. Investment in cultural activities and in arts organisations, museums and libraries helps improve lives, regenerate neighbourhoods, support local economies, attract visitors and bring people together.'

Let's Create Strategy 2023-2023, Cultural Communities (Outcome 2)
Arts Council England

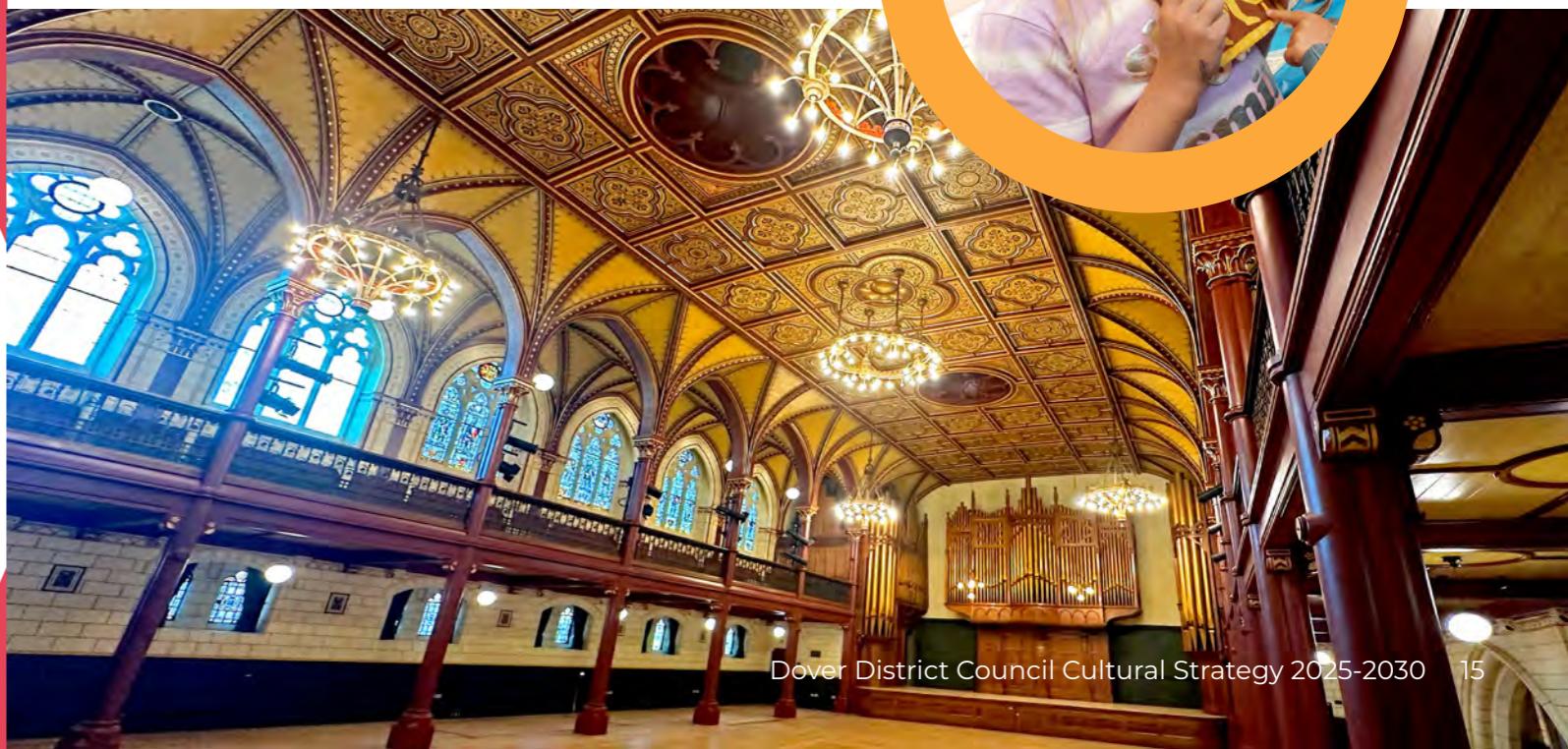
Objective 2

To animate a collaborative town and cultural network with a first-class events and creative initiatives programme.

To bring to life a vibrant collaboration of arts and culture organisations, involving local businesses and residents, to sustain and grow the level and quality of funded cultural events and initiatives in Dover and across its venues and attractions, such as the Maison Dieu and the Western Heights.

Key aims:

- Set up a Dover Cultural & Creativity Steering Group bringing key people, partners and stakeholders together to support the delivery of this strategy and its related initiatives. A representative of Arts Council England and KCC's Creative Kent Forum would be members of the group.
- Seek funding to employ a Cultural Officer to bring together Dover's creative practitioners and support existing creative and cultural networks, activities and events. This officer would facilitate meetings and projects set by the Dover Cultural & Creativity Steering Group.
- Bring a high-quality event and festival programme to Dover with a focus on public wellbeing, family-friendly, tradition, inclusivity and multi-culturalism to build civic pride and community cohesion.
- Encourage local businesses to collaborate and help host town centre events, activities and entertainment.



Some of Dover's cultural and arts groups and organisations*

Dover Arts Development	Soundwaves Choir
Future Foundry	CJ's Dance & Fitness
Dover smART Project	Dover Talespinners
Dover Operatic & Dramatic Society	Dover Tales
Dover Choral Society	Vista Twisters
Dover Youth Theatre	White Cliffs Countryside Partnership
Ceramic Art Dover	Dover Wombles
The Anxious Pickle Club	Dover Greeters
Dover Community Radio	The Dover Society
Dover Creative Network	Dover Big Local
Pharos Chamber Choir	Dover Rotary Club

* see Appendix Three on page 31 for details

Current programme of regular events in Dover*

The Dover Film	Dover's Winter Light Up
Dover Multicultural Festival	Dover Regatta
Dover Urban Fete	Armed Forces Day
DAD Festival	Market Square Saturday Sessions
Dover Carnival	Marina Curve Sunday Sessions
Dover Pride	Dover Market
Meet the Reindeers	Dover at Night

* Appendix Three on page 30 for details

DAD festival 2023 - you can reach the world from Dover

- Took place June to October 2023 Curated by Dover Arts Development (DAD)
- 42 events at over 12 sites
- 970 people took part
- 72 creatives and contributors were involved
- Funded by Arts Council England, Kent Downs National Landscape and the North Downs Way National Trail.
- Support from over 30 organisations

How can 'culture' help Dover?

'We need a professional cultural sector that generates new ideas, works easily and effectively with others, and is adept at developing diverse talent from every community. It should aspire to be world-leading – in the way it makes art, in the imagination and expertise with which it makes exciting use of collections and develops libraries, and in the culture it creates and shares.'

Let's Create Strategy 2023-2023,
A Creative & Cultural Country
(Outcome 3)



How can 'culture' help Dover?

'Cultural industries, along with the visitor economy, account for over £200 billion of economic activity.'

*Cultural strategy in a box,
Local Government
Association*

Objective 3

To create an environment where culture, creativity and related activity reduces the number of empty shops and buildings within Dover and creates a thriving town centre.

To reimagine and breathe new life into Dover's high street, reduce the number of empty buildings and create a family-friendly, inclusive and welcoming town centre and vibrant and safe evening economy, involving local food and drink producers and vendors, local makers and creatives, businesses and landlords.

We empower young people to lead change through creativity, for themselves, their communities and the world.

artwork.org.uk

Key aims:

- Investigate options for cultural/creative uses of empty shops.
- Encourage creative businesses to trial pop-ups in empty shops.
- Create and maintain a database of empty properties and work with property owners to match properties to potential tenants.
- Use enforcement powers to improve the condition of neglected properties.
- Seek funding to commission murals through the town, following the example set by Joseph Black and Mike Tedder with 'Look to the future, Dover'

How can 'culture' help Dover?

'Everyone can be creative, and each of us has the potential to develop our creativity further. Taking part in creative acts such as singing, photography or writing delights and fulfils us, and helps us to think, experiment, and better understand the world.'

Let's Create Strategy 2023-2023, Creative People (Outcome 1), Arts Council England.



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Dover District Council



Making it happen - delivering growth

Dover District Council champions working collaboratively, drawing on amazing local talent, and has a strong track record of delivering outstanding cultural work and sowing the seeds for cultural initiatives to grow.

Major projects in progress and delivered in recent years

- £4.27 million grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to reawaken Dover's Grade I Listed Maison Dieu. The £10.5 million project was completed in early 2025 and the building reopened in May. It is now permanently open to the public for the first time in its 800-year history.
- £3.2 million grant from the Government's Future High Streets Fund to develop a Dover Creative Centre in Bench Street and reimagine the town's underpass.
- £18.1 million grant from the Government's Levelling Up Fund to develop a Dover Creative & Digital Educational Campus, Business Centre, improved public realm and expanded cycle scheme in Bench Street.
- £3.6 million (including a £2.44 million bid to the Government's Coastal

Communities Fund) programme of public realm improvements to Dover's Market Square which was completed in August 2022. The new events space has hosted outdoor theatre, live music, an artisan market and large events including including Dover at Night, Dover's Winter Light Up and Meet the Reindeers.

● £3.1 million grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the Kearsney Parks Project. Restored gardens, a cafe and playground were opened in 2020/21. Initiatives such as Art in the Park – Kearsney Interpreted helped to create a cultural space here and attract new audiences.

● Delivered Dover Fastrack (with Kent County Council) - a zero-emission bus service connecting a large housing estate in Whitfield with the town - in 2024.



Dover District Council Cultural Strategy 2025-2030 19

Other initiatives delivered and supported by Dover District Council

- Commonwealth Games: Birmingham 2022 – delivered the Queen's Baton Relay Dover leg and host event which included a local band, singer and the band of the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, plus Vista Twisters (a Dover based cheerleading club).
- Supported and part-funded the inaugural Dover Lantern Parade led by Future Foundry working with Dover Town Council, which is now an established and well-attended annual event, Dover's Winter Light Up.
- Created the White Cliffs Country website, with dedicated Dover pages, including an online business hub, supported by social media across key channels.
- Promoting What's On in Dover and White Cliffs Country to residents and visitors via digital screens, posters, flyers, social media, e-newsletters and the website.
- Award-winning visitor information service located at Dover Museum.
- Delivered free family events including Dover Dinosaur Day, Meet the Reindeers and Easter Egg Hunt.
- Supported local arts groups in successful funding bids, including Dover Arts Development, Future Foundry and others.
- Footfall counters to measure visitors to the town centre.
- Destination Dover, the tourism partnership supported by Dover Town Council and Dover District Council, project managed the fundraising needed to improve the St Edmund's Chapel and open it more often as a venue for cultural activities.
- Delivered Circo Rum Ba Ba shows in Dover, Deal and Sandwich (funded by Arts Council England).
- Match funded the Interreg Experience Project working with Kent Downs National Landscape.
- Supported the North Downs Way Arts Trail Project led by Dover Arts Development. Sculptures include 'Monumenta Romana' by Charles Holland Architects, 'After The Black Gold' by Channel and 'We are all winners' by Alma Tischlerwood.



How can 'culture' help Dover?

'The creative industries sector contributed £109 billion to the UK economy in 2021 (5.6% of the UK economy).'

Department of Culture, Media and Sport



Culture can be made by anyone and can be found anywhere. It exists in the activities of groups such as Dover Sea Anglers Club and in the skate park in Pencester Gardens as much as in Dover Museum and at a creative event.

Supporting and investing in culture at all levels is vital, as is learning from all ages and having an open mind towards cultural activity. Culture and strategic cultural planning can improve the health and wellbeing of existing residents, helping Dovorians to reconnect with each other and explore the landscape and amenities of their town.

This in turn can unlock the potential for forgotten spaces and empty buildings, leading to further economic activity and investment enabling the town to become the best version of itself for everyone.



APPENDIX ONE

Strategic fit

Dover's Cultural Strategy is aligned with national, regional and local strategies – the cultural aims outlined in this strategy fit within a wider jigsaw, all building a picture of the town's potential.



National

Let's Create, Arts Council England

"By 2030, we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish. A country where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences.

Recognition of the part that creativity and culture can play in supporting local economies and talent, health and wellbeing, and children and young people, has flourished over recent years, strengthening our partnerships with local and national government, opening up new avenues for all who work in museums, libraries and arts organisations, and improving the lives of people everywhere.

Understanding of the role of culture in building and sustaining communities has come into clear focus and will sit at the heart of our work over the decade to come."

Regional

Inspirational Creativity: Transforming Lives Everyday – our cultural ambition for Kent, Kent County Council

KCC's vision is that by 2027 Kent will be a confident, vibrant county where extraordinary cultural activity is available that enriches and transforms the lives of everyone.

Their ambition is to create a place where:

- Investment in creativity and innovation ensures that entrepreneurs and extraordinary cultural practitioners choose to invest, live and work in Kent.
- Enchanting, surprising and innovative things happen.
- Diversity is celebrated and thrives.
- The transformative cultural product, achieved through collaboration and ambitious, resourceful cultural planning, is recognised nationally and internationally.

Local

This Cultural Strategy for Dover draws on Dover District Council's various other strategies to form a cohesive framework where culture is embedded.

○ The Corporate Plan (2023)

- Strategic Priority Two - Growing our economy

Dover District to be a leading destination to live, work, visit, learn, and invest. We are passionate about growing an inclusive, sustainable economy that works for all, leaving no one behind. Placing economic opportunity at the centre of the district's renewal and prosperity, we will nurture diverse, distinctive, and vibrant places – especially within our town centres - which widen opportunity and unlock talent.

○ Dover District Heritage Strategy (updated in 2020)

- Historic environment and heritage assets play a proactive role in enabling and informing regeneration activities to secure better outcomes from sustainable growth.
- Realise the tourism, visitor potential and economic benefits of historic environment and heritage assets.



- Heritage assets are sustained and enhanced to best meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to appreciate their significance.

- Public understanding of, engagement with, access to and enjoyment of the historic environment are increased.

○ Economic Growth Strategy (2021)

- Revitalising town centres – a commitment to promote town centres as hubs for the visitor economy with an expanded cultural and social offer for residents and visitors.

○ Tourism and Visitor Economy Strategy (2020)

- Objective 1 – to build an innovative economy with tourism, the visitor economy and sustainability at its heart by capitalising on opportunities offered by our unique heritage, environment, culture and gateway location.
- Objective 2 – to generate good jobs and greater earning power for people living in the district with tourism and hospitality and service at its heart.
- Objective 3 – to develop prosperous communities throughout the district with sustainability, place-making and the visitor economy at its heart. Great placemaking ... draws on the wide range of combined assets from culture, arts, history and heritage.
- Objective 4 – to be 'open for business' and the best place to start and grow a business, social enterprise or organisation...
- Objective 5 – to see an upgrade in infrastructure... We aim to connect our towns, attractions, accommodation providers and assets for the benefit of all.



Credit: John Doughty

- This strategy also builds on the foundations of the **A Cultural Survey and Framework for Dover (2009)** which was underpinned by three principles:
 - Promote existing assets
 - Enrich and celebrate existing assets
 - 'Purposeful and playful' Dover. The DCSF led to several projects including ChalkUp21 (an architecture trail) and Tonkin Liu's Three Waves on Dover esplanade. Some of the projects are ongoing. See Appendix Three for the 10-point action plan and outcomes.
- The **Local Plan** for the district sets out the vision, strategic objectives and overarching development strategy for growth to 2040.
- We have also considered the cultural ambitions of key partners in Dover including Port of Dover, National Trust and English Heritage:
 - **Port of Dover's** purpose is 'to empower exchange through better connections' (including cultural). Its vision is 'a world where exchange is seamless, smart and sustainable for

all' and its mission is 'to close the gap every day' via collaborating with local and international partners to create world-class travel, trading and visitor experiences.

[Corporate - Purpose, Vision and Mission \(portofdover.com\)](http://portofdover.com)

● **The National Trust** is committed to promoting and preserving those places of natural beauty and historic interest for which it has the privilege to be responsible for the benefit of the nation, for everyone, forever.

[Our strategy to 2025 | National Trust](#)

● **English Heritage's** priorities are inspiration, conservation, involvement and financial sustainability. They want to create inspiring visitor experiences that bring the story of England to life. They will make sure their historic sites and artefacts are expertly cared for, so that they can be enjoyed by future generations and find new ways to involve more people in their work.

[Our Priorities | English Heritage \(english-heritage.org.uk\)](http://english-heritage.org.uk)

In developing the Cultural Strategy, we have learned and drawn insights and advice from the following sources:

- Tourism and Visitor Economy Strategy, Dover District Council
- Historic Places Panel Review Paper: Dover July 2021, Historic England
- Kent Residents Research Wave
- Cultural Strategy 2023 – 2028, Hastings Borough Council
- What We Saw: The Architecture of a Port Town, Philip Hutton and Christopher Lumgair
- A Cultural Survey and Framework for Dover (2009), muf architecture/art
- Cultural Planning Toolkit, Creative Estuary and Kent County Council
- Cultural Strategy in a Box, Local Government Association
- Let's Create, Arts Council England Delivery Plan
- Placemaking: What if We Built Our Cities Around Places, Project for Public Places
- Waking the Giant: Scoping Document for a large-scale event in Dover, Albion Inc.
- Corporate Plan, Dover District Council
- Dover District Heritage Strategy, Dover District Council
- Dover District Economic Growth Strategy, Dover District Council



APPENDIX TWO

Key spaces and places

Although culture cannot be constrained by geography, this strategy concentrates on the broad Dover town area where there are many nationally and internationally significant cultural assets.

Built environment

Dover Museum – a three-storey museum in the Market Square, free to enter and home to internationally significant artefacts including the oldest known seagoing boat in the world (the 3500-year-old Bronze Age Boat) and a rich archive of local history including cross-Channel swimming and other culturally important exhibits. Museums play an essential role in helping us understand and shape culture; they connect us to the past and encourage us to think about the future. This important and well-loved asset requires investment to maintain the fabric of the building, protect the exhibits and develop the collection for future generations.

The museum is also home to a single-screen cinema, a valuable community asset that requires investment to improve the facilities.

The Maison Dieu – a significant building comprising a medieval pilgrim's hospital and a Victorian town hall designed by the architect and designer William Burges. The building, listed Grade I, underwent a £10.5 million restoration, including refurbishment of the Burges interior, new street-level access and a holiday let managed by The Landmark Trust, and reopened in May 2025.

Roman Painted House and Roman Bath House – a recent change of management means there is now a golden opportunity for these internationally significant assets to play a full role in the town's heritage. With major investment, the Bath House could be excavated and the sites could become world-renowned attractions and have a major impact on the economy of Dover, transforming the fortunes of the town and its people.

Market Square – Dover's Market Square recently had a £3.1m refurbishment supported by a £2.44m grant from the Coastal Communities Fund. The square now includes a misting water feature that acts as a wayfinder. It has created a focus for children to play and families to congregate and a venue for outdoor events.

Dover Beacon – a major regeneration project on Bench Street. Dover District Council was awarded grants of £18.1m from the Levelling Up Fund and £3.2m from the Future High Streets Fund to deliver a new creative and digital college, a business startup centre, a riverside parklet and a refurbished underpass in a neglected but prominent area of the town (adjacent to the A20, visible to 12 million people travelling to the port each year). These key projects will deliver improved public realm, jobs, skills and business opportunities.

Pencester Gardens – an important green space in the centre of Dover. The River Dour runs along one side. The gardens include a bandstand, playground and skate park and are used extensively for events such as Dover's annual Multicultural Festival as well as open-air theatre, music concerts and fairgrounds.



Biggin Street, Cannon Street, Bench Street – these three streets run through the town centre to the underpass and act as Dover's main high street.

Dover Castle – the area's most iconic building located on the eastern clifftop overlooking the town. Showcasing over 2000 years of history, from its Iron-Age hillfort origins, Roman lighthouse and Anglo-Saxon church to the great medieval castle established by Henry II in the 1180s, in regular use until the mid-1600s, its Georgian revival and later importance during the two world wars. The castle received over 220,000 visitors in 2022 and remains one of English Heritage's most popular destinations. A joint project with Kent Wildlife Trust and Wildwood Trust has led to the recent reintroduction of choughs at the castle where they are thriving on a stronghold of internationally rare chalk grassland habitat. (50% of the world's remaining chalk grassland can be found in England, and 2.5% of this within Dover.) Choughs appear in tales and legends from Thomas Becket to Shakespeare's King Lear and on coats of arms. The castle is also home to the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment and Queen's Regiment Museum.

The Western Heights – on the opposite side of Dover from the castle are two spectacular fortifications, Drop Redoubt and The Citadel, which form the largest and most elaborate complex of Napoleonic and Victorian fortifications in the country. Known as the Western Heights, they are currently on Historic England's 'At Risk Register'. Historic England is working with Dover District Council and landowners to enhance and protect this significant area for the future.

The Citadel has the potential to be developed into a cultural hub with a hotel, a film location and events space. The Drop Redoubt, owned by English Heritage, is managed by the Western Heights Preservation Society (a volunteer organisation) who hold regular open days and historic re-enactments. An area once occupied by barracks is still connected to Snargate Street below by a remarkable triple helix staircase, The Grand Shaft.

Dover College – an independent school within the grounds of the former St Martin's Priory in the heart of town. The college campus includes the priory remains and the 12th-century hall, now used as the school refectory. The college plans to build a new performing arts centre which will be available for community use.



St Edmund's Chapel – the Grade II* listed chapel in Priory Road is a tiny building with a mighty history. The only church still in existence that was dedicated to one English saint by another, it is an important site on the ancient pilgrimage trail, the Via Francigena. The building was completed in 1262 as a wayside chapel for pilgrims setting off for Thomas Becket's shrine at Canterbury Cathedral. It is open for mass on Saturday mornings, to visitors on days when cruise ships visit the town (by volunteer group, Dover Greeters) and on Heritage Open Days.

Dover Harbour – defined by Waterloo Crescent (an early 19th-century curved terrace), the Gateway flats and a swathe of shingle beach. In 2009, the main esplanade was redesigned by the architects Tonkin Liu whose 'Three Waves' includes a beach path, a curving wall of white concrete and lighting.

Western Docks – currently undergoing redevelopment by the Port of Dover creating a new marina (which opened in 2023) and Marina Curve development around Clocktower Square. Parts of the former Marine Station are used as a terminal for cruise ships; the former Lord Warden Hotel remains largely unoccupied. Planning permission for a 50-bed hotel has been granted. Cultural activities here include the Dover Waterfront parkrun and the annual Dover Regatta.

The Booking Hall – an independent venue in the Old Harbour Station (a former train station in the port), hosting live music from local and national artists, comedy, theatre and community events, with a standing capacity of 280.

Natural environment

The White Cliffs – the world-famous landmark and landscape, including rare chalk grassland, protected by The National Trust. The King Charles III England Coast Path runs along the top of the cliffs, as do other walking and cycling routes including Sustrans Cycle Route 1, the Saxon Shore Way and ChalkUp21.

River Dour – this internationally significant chalk stream rises in the North Downs in the Alkham Valley and runs for approximately 4.5 miles through Dover (much of it culverted and underground). The river is an important habitat for brown trout, eels, kingfishers, egrets and other river life. A walking route, the River Dour Greenway, follows the river intermittently from Temple Ewell to the seafront.

Kearsney Parks – Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens are two parks on the western edge of Dover. The River Dour runs through both parks. Kearsney Abbey is a landscaped garden where the remains of the former house have been restored as a tearoom; Russell Gardens is an ornamental landscaped garden, originally designed by the Edwardian landscape designer Thomas Mawson and is the only example of his work open to public in the southeast. The Parks for People project 2017-2021 at Kearsney (funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Lottery Community Fund) ensured that the heritage of the parks is protected, and people have more opportunities to visit, be involved and learn about the park's history.

The Local Nature Reserves of Whinless Down, Old Park Hill, Bushy Ruff and Nemo Down, Barton Path Riverside Walk and Lydden Temple Ewell National Nature Reserve – protecting rare chalk grassland, downland, woodland and scrub, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest. These are habitats for key species such as Adonis blue butterfly, adders, slow worms and others.

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the North Downs Way National Trail/Via Francigena

Way National Trail/Via Francigena – the countryside around Dover is part of the wider chalk North Downs which stretch across Surrey and Kent. The North Downs Way National Trail routes through Dover on both the eastern and western sides, forming part of the 'Canterbury Loop'. Dover seafront is also the start and finish point of the English section of the Via Francigena, the international pilgrim route from Canterbury to Rome, where there is a sculpture ('We are all winners') to mark the site.

Other relevant sites in Dover

Maison Dieu House – is the Grade II* listed former residence of the Agent Victualler dating from 1665. It is currently home to Dover Town Council offices.

Biggin Hall – built in 1881, this building has had many uses including a bath house, a lecture hall, a library and public meeting hall. It is now used by Future Foundry CIC for workshops and events.

The Discovery Centre – built in the late 1980s as an interactive museum, then a KCC community and adult education and archive facility which included a public library and theatre space.

Connaught Park – set on the hillside below Dover Castle and dating back to Victorian times. Facilities include tennis courts, a children's play area and football goals.

Dover Technical College – part of the East Kent College network providing 16+ education, including T Levels.

St Mary's Parish Church and Parish Centre – the church dates from the 11th century and its present form from a significant restoration in 1843. It is the town's parish church with stained glass windows commemorating various historic events. The nearby parish centre is a multi-functional community space.

Salem Baptist Church – Dover's Baptist church with a community hall for hire.

Historic cemeteries (St James Cemetery, St Mary's Cemetery, Charlton Cemetery, Jewish Cemetery, Cowgate Cemetery) – the town is home to five historic cemeteries documenting social and military history. There are Commonwealth War Graves in Charlton and St James's cemeteries.

Crabble Corn Mill – built in 1812 to supply flour to troops defending the nation from a possible invasion from France, the mill has been restored and open to the public since 1990. It is one of the most complete and working examples of a Georgian watermill in Europe.

Crabble Stadium and Crabble Athletic Ground – home to Dover Athletic FC and Dover Sharks RC, these grounds are an important part of Dover's cultural history.

The Goat Escape Rooms – a popular escape rooms based in an old paper mill on Crabble Hill, offering immersive games.

Gamebase – an indoor digital gaming arena in the heart of the town with a play area above for younger children.

Small live music venues – Dover has a growing number of vibrant small live music venues including The Booking Hall, Vinoteq, Blakes, The Art Club, The Admiral Harvey, Elephant & Hind and Breakwater Brewery.

St Radigund's Community Centre – run by a charity providing support at the heart of its community.

Bluebirds Function Rooms – a long-established venue on Snargate Street.

APPENDIX THREE

Events and people

There are several annual events held in the town and a wide range of diverse organisations.

Current cultural events

Dover District Council events – free family events in Dover town centre (summer, Christmas and Easter), occasional ad-hoc events, plus live music and entertainment at Saturday Sessions throughout summer.

Dover Town Council/Destination Dover events – events for the community such as outdoor theatre and dance performances and Christmas lights.

Port of Dover events – Dover Regatta, Music on the Curve, Dover Marina Showcase

Future Foundry initiatives – including a student makers' market, pop-up workshops, youth arts club, kite-making, the town's annual Winter Light Up parade, Claydate and Dover Youth Festival.

Multicultural Festival – a family event in Pencester Gardens organised by the Samphire Project to increase awareness of different cultures and promote inclusion.

Dover Big Local Urban Fete – a family event in Pencester Gardens featuring entertainers, duck racing, cooking demonstrations and circus skills. It has over 30 stalls/activities.

'You can reach the world from Dover' (funded by Arts Council England, North Downs Way National Trail and Kent Downs AONB) – art festival led by Dover Arts Development running from July to October with a programme of walks, talks, music, screenings and exhibitions.

Western Heights Preservation Society events – Grand Shaft open days, Drop Redoubt tours and re-enactment days.

Dover Carnival – an annual parade in summer through the town centre with community groups, clubs, individuals and other organisations.

Dover Pride – an annual event held in August to celebrate and support the LGBTQ+ community. Dover Pride features a parade and party for the whole community to enjoy.

The Dover Film – an annual film of all things Dover made by a local amateur filmmaker, shown at the cinema at Dover Museum during one week each March.

White Cliffs Countryside Partnership events – throughout the year from guided walks in nature reserves to family events educating and inspiring people to protect Dover's natural landscapes.



Arts and creative organisations

● **Future Foundry** – an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation; a social enterprise that encourages excitement, diversity, innovation and talent by removing barriers to progression for young people in the creative industries.

● **Dover Arts Development (DAD)** – an artist-led, not for profit, limited company. Its artist directors conceive, manage and deliver ambitious projects of artistic excellence.

● **Dover SmART Project** – a local charity that provides opportunities for disadvantaged children, mainly young carers, older people and those living with dementia in Dover to take part in a wide range of creative activities.

● **Dover Operatic & Dramatic Society** – founded in 1911; pantomimes, operatic and dramatic performances and youth theatre.

● **Dover Choral Society** – founded in 1892, presenting two major concerts a year and Dover Festival Prom Concert in the summer.

● **Dover Youth Theatre** – theatre skills and performances.

● **Ceramic Art Dover** – a collective of East Kent ceramicists who run community workshops and skills sharing to aid professional practices.





Nature and environmental organisations

- **White Cliffs Countryside Partnership** – a partnership between Dover and Folkestone and Hythe District Councils working with partners, volunteers and local communities to protect and improve the local area for wildlife and people. They manage wild spaces and inspire local communities. They run Our Finest Dour to raise awareness of the River Dour in Dover.
- **Dover Wombles** – volunteers who plant, litter-pick and generally care for the town.

Community and other organisations

- **Dover Greeters** – volunteer guides to the town, part of the worldwide Greeters Association.
- **The Dover Society** – aims to promote high standards of planning and architecture, publicise the geography, history, archaeology, natural history and architecture of the area, secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest.
- **Western Heights Preservation Society** – a volunteer run organisation established to conserve, preserve, provide interpretation of and publicise the Western Heights fortifications and clear, tidy and protect the built heritage of Dover's Western Heights.
- **Dover Big Local** – a CIC running a programme of events and groups at their hub (cooking, jobs advice, knitting, digital support, crafts and holiday events for children).
- **Dover Rotary Club** – a membership and humanitarian service organisation that promotes service to the community as well as to the wider world.
- **Dover Athletic FC** – 'one town, one team, one Dover'.
- **Dover Sharks RC** – the club plays in London SE1 at 1st Fifteen level and provides facilities for over 250 players at all levels to play each week.
- **Royal Cinque Ports Yacht Club** – one of England's oldest yacht clubs established in 1872 based on the seafront.
- **Dover Sea Angling Association** – one of the country's largest sea-fishing clubs.
- **Dover Gymnastics Club** – established in 1976 and one of the most successful and longest-running gym clubs in Kent.

APPENDIX FOUR Consultation and engagement

Consultation on this strategy was undertaken between February and June 2023 with a number of key stakeholders as well as members of the public in individual and group consultation sessions including:

- **Cultural Organisations** – representatives from Albion Inc, Anxious Pickles, Ceramic Art Dover, Dover Arts Development, Dover Cultural Network, Dover Society, Dover SmART, Dover Tales, Dover Talespinners, Dover Youth Theatre and Future Foundry
- **Community and Civic Organisations** – representatives from Destination Dover, Dover Big Local, Dover Chamber of Commerce, Dover Community Radio, Dover Pride, Dover Society, Dover Town Council, Dover Town Team Ministry, Dover Wombles, English Heritage, National Trust, Port of Dover, Stay and Play Group, Burgoyne Heights, The Land Trust, Walkers are Welcome, Wanstone Battery National Trust Volunteers, White Cliffs Ramblers
- **Parish Councils** – River, St Margaret's at Cliffe, Temple Ewell, Whitfield
- **Youth Groups** – 180 young carers through Dover SmART, Astor College, Dover Youth Theatre (11- to 16-year-old group)
- **Other organisations** – Arts Council England, Kent Downs AONB, Kent County Council, Produced In Kent, ShivaNova/Equator Festival, Visit Kent
- **Dover town centre businesses** – Aly Young Law, Biggin BizR, Café Melange, Elephant and Hind, Evergreen Funeral Directors, Five A Day, La Salle Verte, Oriental mini-mart, Vinoteq
- **Colleges** – Dover College, East Kent College
- **Members of the public** – interviews with 34 Dover and district residents and visitors in Kearsney Abbey, Langdon Cliffs, Dover seafront and Marina Curve, Market Square and Cannon Street, and St Margaret's Bay
- **Dover District Council** – Head of Museums and Tourism, Principal Community Development Officer, Events and Catering Manager - Kearsney Abbey, Natural Environments Manager, Engagement Officer - Maison Dieu, Planning Policy and Projects Manager, Principal Heritage Officer



All the engaged stakeholders were asked what they thought was good about Dover now and what could be improved. Key stakeholders were also asked how we can build on our strengths and what should be the next steps.

The general public and youth groups were also asked:

'What does culture mean to you?' They said: tradition, diversity, food, society, heritage, history, beliefs, music, language.

'What do you like to do?' They said: music, nature-outside, friends-family, painting, art-drawing, parks, walking, theatre, seafront, sport.

The answers and feedback we received have informed this strategy.

This strategy is for culture, including heritage and the arts, to generate greater economic benefits and opportunities for all – recognising the crucial balance between placemaking, residents, visitors, commerce and investment.

The growth and success of culture in Dover, and the wider District, is dependent on everyone working together to achieve more.

Culture is everyone's business.



www.dover.gov.uk

www.whitecliffscounty.org.uk