

# Plymouth

Building a diverse and resilient creative and cultural sector



*The Box from Tavistock Place. Image by Wayne Perry, courtesy of The Box*

## Key Features

- £81.3m total Arts Council England investment in Plymouth since 2010, (of which £4.84m from DCMS and HM Treasury), including £14.94m capital funding
- Co-investment model with Plymouth City Council unlocked £50m investment from outside funders in Plymouth's cultural sector in 5 year period from 2016<sup>1</sup>
- 2x new world-class venues, The Box and Market Hall, opened in 2020-21, building pride in place, supporting local communities and boosting visitor economy
- The Box - Plymouth's award-winning museum, art gallery and archive - beats visitor targets by over 30% within 2 years of opening<sup>2</sup>
- Educational programme at The Box welcomes more than 7,000 participants per year from schools<sup>3</sup>
- Market Hall's Immersive Dome - the first of its kind in Europe - creates a shared, seamless virtual reality experience without the need for a headset and supports the fast-growing digital and immersive sectors
- Theatre Royal Plymouth contributes £36m to the economy of Plymouth, Devon and Cornwall with the third largest economic footprint<sup>4</sup> of any theatre in the UK<sup>5</sup>
- Productivity of Plymouth's cultural sector is £69,000 GVA per full-time employee - well above the £49,770 average for the city<sup>6</sup>

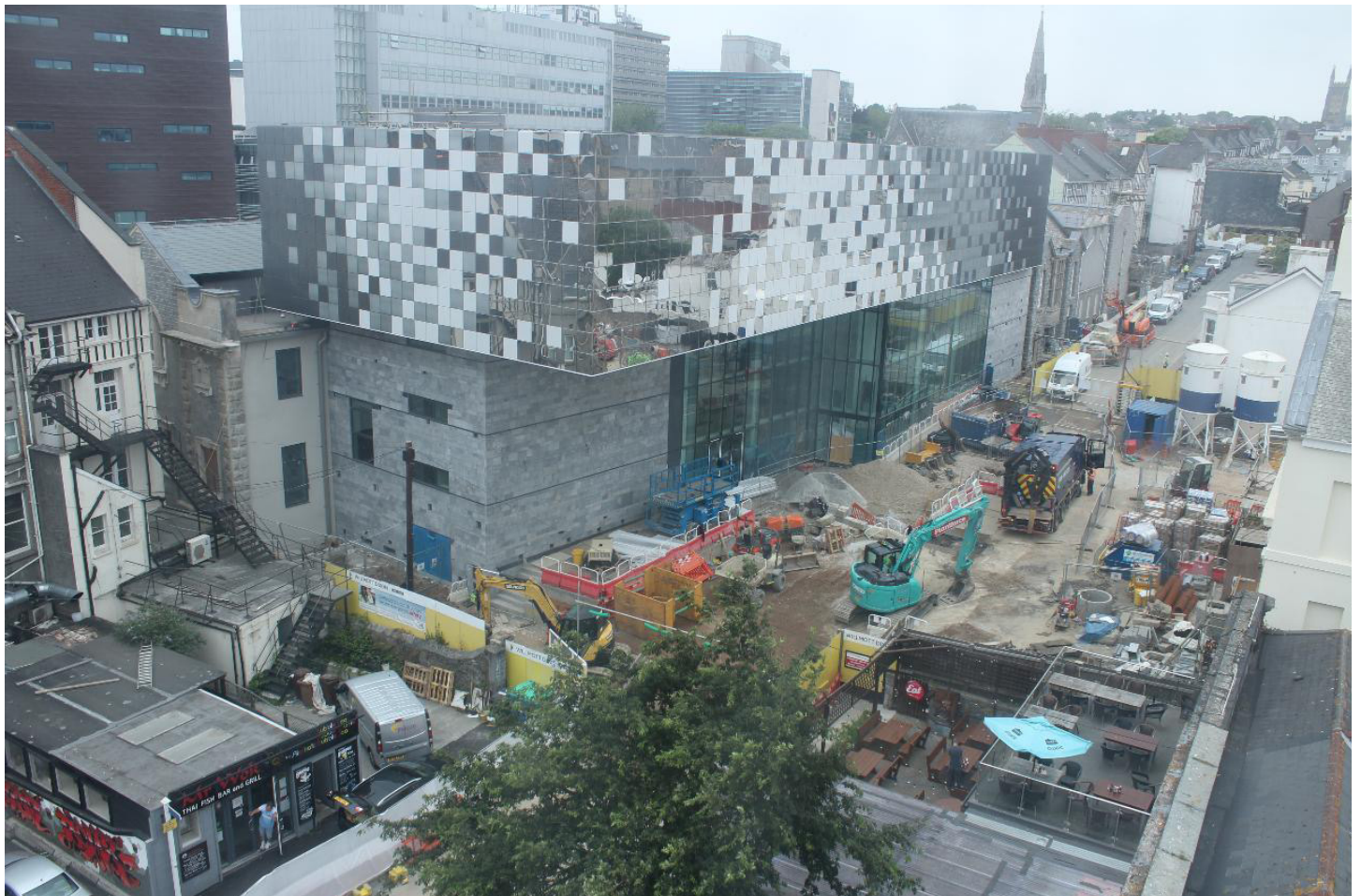


## Building Capacity

Plymouth, Britain's Ocean City, has connections to the sea going back beyond the sailing of the Mayflower in 1620 and now include Western Europe's largest naval base, commercial and ferry port and one of the most important global concentrations of marine research and production. Yet to achieve its ambition to grow the city's population to 300,000 by 2034<sup>7</sup>, (currently 264,700)<sup>8</sup>, Plymouth faces several challenges, with an ageing population, talent drain, comparatively low productivity and a low-wage economy.

With the visitor economy and culture identified as one of six flagships in Plymouth's Plan for Economic Growth (2020-2025)<sup>9</sup>, Plymouth City Council recognises the importance of its cultural strengths to help improve long term prosperity and rebalance its economy, underpinned by a robust cultural strategy.

Ten years after publication of its first Culture Strategy<sup>10</sup>, productivity of Plymouth's creative and cultural sector is now £69,000 GVA per full-time employee - higher than the average across all sectors in Plymouth.



*Construction of The Box, Web Cam 26 June 2019. Image courtesy of The Box*

## **Plymouth** Building a diverse and resilient creative and cultural sector

The local authority's long-term commitment to the sector has given funders the confidence to invest, with Plymouth City Council securing more than £50m investment in the sector by outside funders in the last five years alone. This success has led to a renewal of the Plymouth Culture Plan for 2021-2030<sup>11</sup>, which aims to develop a diverse and resilient creative and cultural sector to position it as "the driving force for economic and social prosperity in Plymouth."

Having twice hosted the British Art Show, Plymouth also now boasts two new world class creative and cultural venues, both opened in the space of ten months between September 2020-July 2021.

The Box - Plymouth's award-winning museum, gallery and archive - and the incredible Market Hall and Immersive Dome mark the culmination of decades of strategic investments, capacity building and partnership between Plymouth City Council, Arts Council England, Plymouth's universities and the city's many pioneering cultural organisations.

Plymouth's emergence as one of the most vibrant and creative waterfront cities in Europe is a story of what can happen when a bold strategy, with culture at its heart, is executed with unwavering commitment by a strong leadership team with fully committed partners.

***“Investing in culture does not sit in competition to funding for social care or the economic development agenda. It provides a solution to those issues.”***

David Draffan MBE, Service Director for Economic Development,  
Plymouth City Council

## City-wide Investments

- **The Box** (see below)

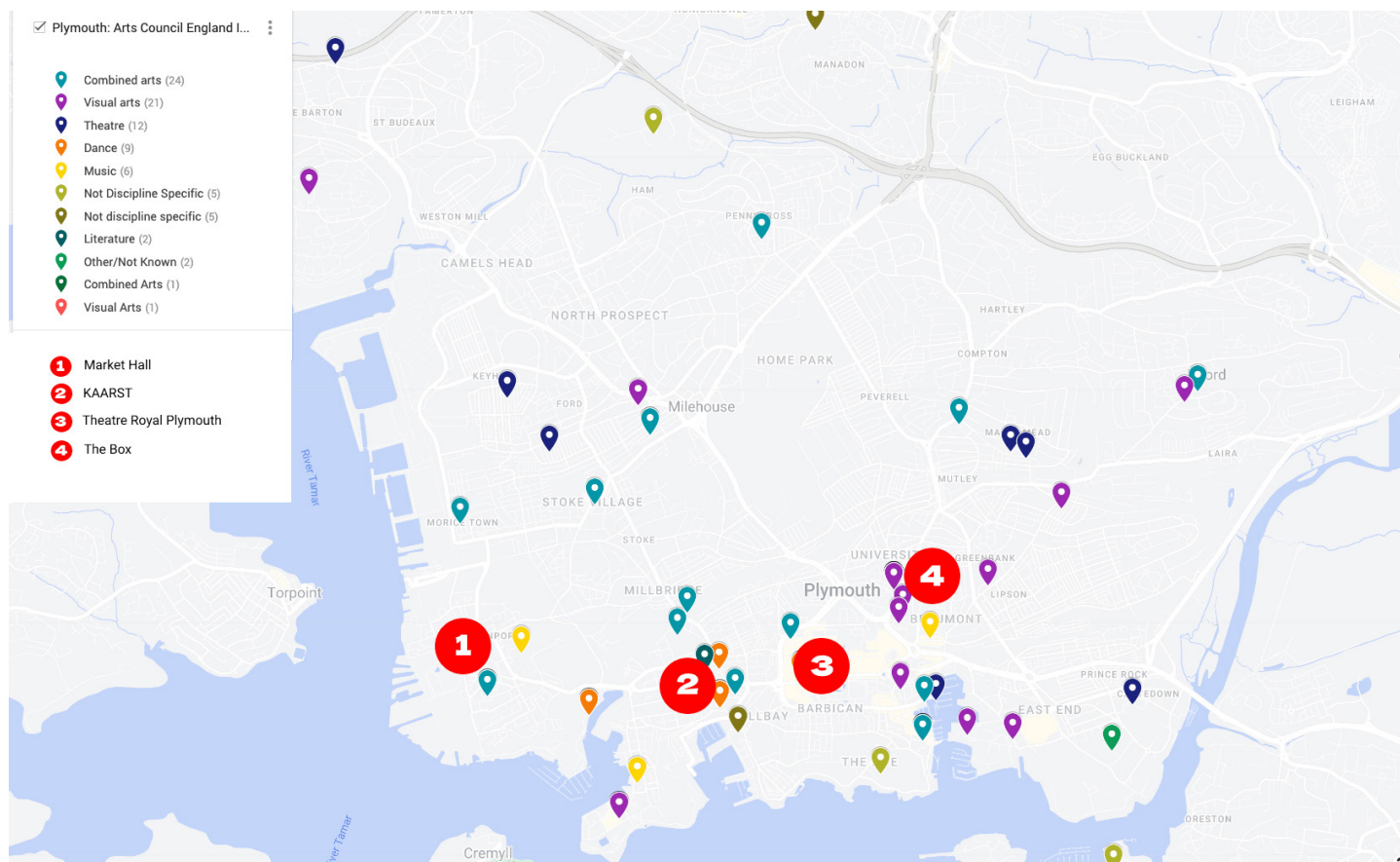
- **KARST**

Founded in 2012 by artists inspired by Plymouth's hosting of British Art Show 7, KARST stands as testament to how a successful cultural programme can catalyse new investment and capital development. KARST is now firmly established as one of the most ambitious contemporary art galleries in the South West, providing gallery space, a creative hub, community outreach programme and 2,000 sq ft of studio space for local contemporary artists to develop their practice.

- **Market Hall and Immersive Dome** (see below)

- **Theatre Royal Plymouth**

Since 1982, Theatre Royal Plymouth has been a large-scale touring and producing venue. An anchor institution in the city centre, Theatre Royal Plymouth encourages greater footfall to the high street, attracting nearly 324,000 trips to the theatre, (pre-Covid), roughly 35% of whom were first-time visitors<sup>12</sup>.



*Arts Council England investments in organisations across Plymouth, 2010-2023*

While investments have been wide and varied across the city, the two most significant recent capital investments - The Box and Market Hall - serve as a perfect illustration of the scale of Plymouth's ambition and how its remarkable cultural heritage meets a bold, innovative future.



## The Box

Following a total investment of £47m, The Box opened in 2020 as one of the UK's biggest new cultural attractions - an 8,000 sq metre venue incorporating a repurposed museum and library as well as an ambitious new-build archive - "the Box in the sky". Bringing together five historic collections previously housed across 12 sites, The Box has 14 exhibition spaces, a new contemporary art gallery in a historic church, a new public square, bistro and shop.

In a little over two years after opening, The Box is already comfortably beating its visitor targets by over 30%, with a projected 230k - 250k visitors by the end of 2022/23. While this ensures financial sustainability and helps support the city's visitor economy, Plymouth's Director of Economic Development, David Draffan is clear that *"through investing in culture, the 'prize' is not the number of visitors. The prize is the whole ecosystem ... a sense of place, ambition, branding. It's about how cities are perceived by their residents"*



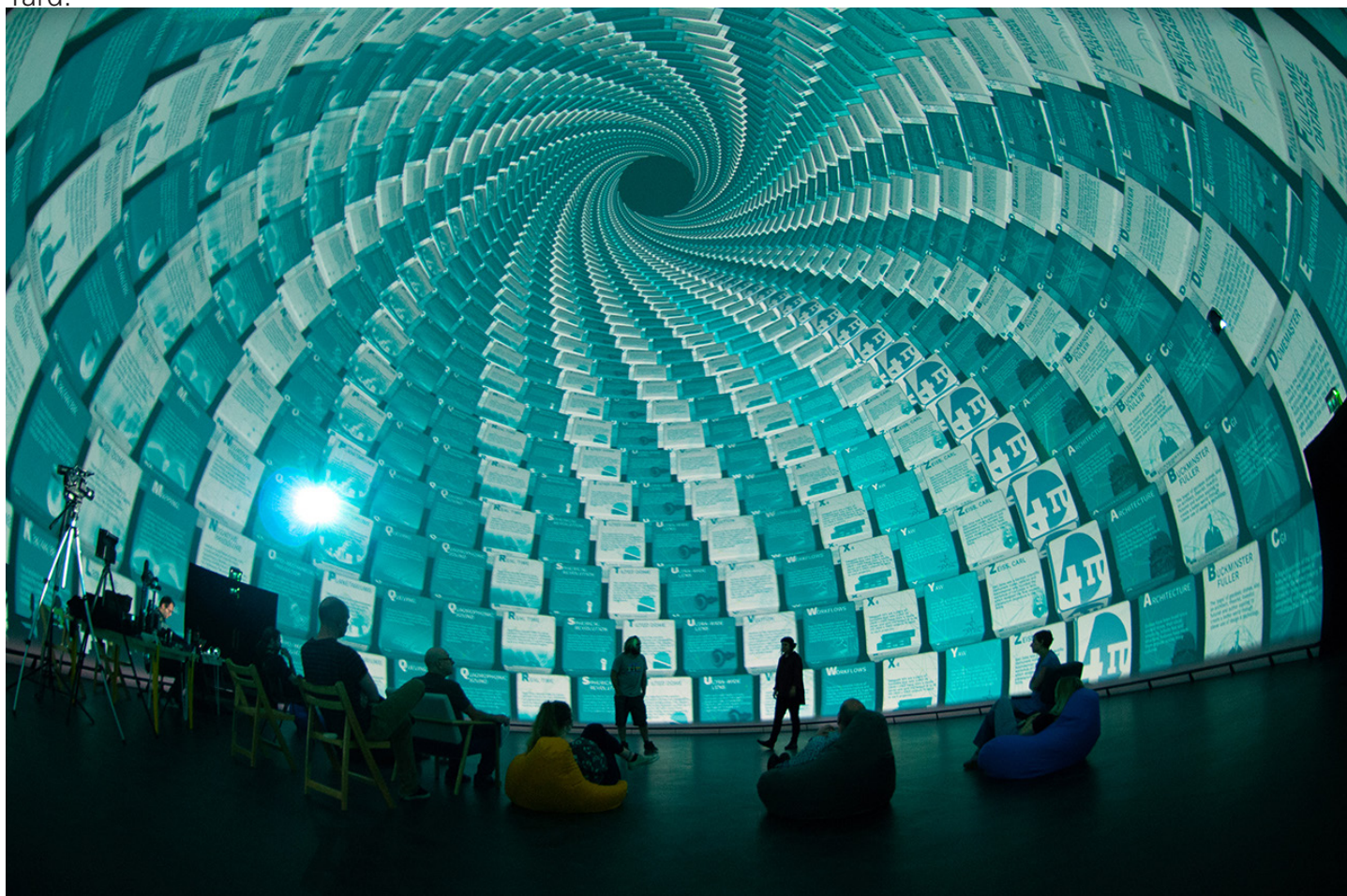
*Port of Plymouth Gallery at The Box. Image by Andrew Meredith, courtesy of The Box*



## Market Hall and Immersive Dome

University of Plymouth's Institute of Digital Art and Technology, (iDAT)<sup>13</sup>, has developed a global reputation in immersive technologies<sup>14</sup>. Since its foundation in 1998, iDAT has provided a home for playful experimentation at the boundaries of creativity and technology. Yet for all its global reach, iDAT was - until recently - almost invisible in its native city.

All that has changed following the opening of Plymouth's £7.6m Market Hall. The surprise inside this 18th century grade II listed building is a world class cutting-edge technology in the shape of a 15m Immersive Dome - the first of its kind in Europe and one of only two such facilities in the world, positioning Market Hall as a key cornerstone of the regeneration of Devonport and Royal William Yard.



*Immersive workshop at Market Hall Immersive Dome, delivered by Janire Najera and Matt Wright / 4Pi Productions - CULTVR*

*“This world-class space will play host to creative enterprises, educational institutes, and local businesses. Local people will be at its heart - encouraging creativity in the region, helping to support the local economy, and contributing to a sense of pride in Plymouth”<sup>15</sup>*

Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair, Arts Council England



**Specialist facilities at Market Hall include:**

- 15m diameter Immersive Dome
- 360 film production suite
- Co-working space and hot desks
- Meeting rooms
- Event spaces
- Café and bar



*Market Hall Interior. Image by Jason Jones-Hall*

The redevelopment of Market Hall as a cutting-edge digital facility was originally proposed back in 2013 and subsequently delivered by Real Ideas Organisation. Real Ideas is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) and Community Interest Company (CIC), with a strong social remit to make real change happen for people, organisations and places.

Working in close partnership with Plymouth City Council, Arts Council England, Plymouth University and many others, Real Ideas developed its organisational capability over a number of years through a growing portfolio of capital projects, including coworking spaces at Devonport Guildhall and Ocean Studios. Combined with the organisation's track record for engaging communities, supporting social enterprise start-ups and exploring new technologies, this ensured that funders had the necessary confidence to invest in the bold, exciting vision of the Market Hall and Immersive Dome.

## Activating Spaces and Leveraging Investment

Complementing and leveraging its capital investments across the city, Arts Council England has supported Market Hall project partners Real Ideas, Plymouth University, iDAT and Arts University Plymouth to help build capacity, partnerships and organisational resilience and to support innovation and development of the fast-growing immersive sector. Recent programmes, including those supported through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Cultural Development Fund (CDF), have included:

- **iMayflower<sup>16</sup>**

Programme of large-scale festivals, creative sector business support, skills and learning programme and creative start-up support to complement Plymouth's Mayflower 400 culture and heritage programme

- **Illuminate Festival<sup>17</sup>**

Light-based festival connecting all of the Mayflower 400 destinations across the UK and internationally

- **IGNITE Festival of Creativity<sup>18</sup>**

Connecting emerging talent with industry and the public to ignite economic growth, productivity and employment

- **Fab Lab Plymouth Smart Citizens Programme<sup>19</sup>**

Delivered by Arts University Plymouth to support citizens in developing skills to design and make their own objects and products using digital fabrication. As the UK's only member of the Fab City Network<sup>20</sup>, this supported Plymouth's aims to become a "locally productive, globally connected self-sufficient city"

- **iMayflower Ideate business support programme<sup>21</sup>**

Bespoke mentoring programme and events, delivered by Creative UK, supporting over 20 companies working in immersive technology across Plymouth

- **Fulldome UK Festival<sup>22</sup>**

Internationally renowned festival capitalising on Plymouth's unique Immersive Dome, including speaker seminars, workshops from immersive industry leaders and premiere screenings



University of the Arts Plymouth, BA (Hons) Interior Design Styling summer show at Ocean Studios, part of IGNITE Festival of Creativity



## Making Plymouth ‘investable’

Like most large-scale capital projects, both The Box and Market Hall have had long gestation periods. Significant capital investments by both Arts Council England and Plymouth City Council have helped leverage additional funding to secure the combined budget of £65m to realise these two world-class facilities, underpinned by the strategic funding framework of Plymouth Culture and its cultural strategy for the city.

Originally established in 2010 via Theatre Royal Plymouth, the Plymouth Culture Board built on significant capital investment and organisational development in Theatre Royal around this time. New cultural focus for the city saw its Heritage and Arts service becoming part of Plymouth City Council’s Economic Development department, with the city being chosen to host British Art Show 7 in 2011 further cementing its growing reputation.

Since then, and over the course of the past ten years, Plymouth Culture has emerged as an independent organisation and an Arts Council England NPO in its own right, working closely with Plymouth City Council to help deliver its wider strategic objective and backed by a bold, and now refreshed, strategic plan. Crucially, Plymouth’s Culture Plan and its importance to the local authority’s wider objectives has benefited from cross-party support throughout its development.

The following table illustrates a twin-track timeline showing the long-term commitment to capacity building, organisational and leadership development, audience-building, market-testing and partnership work to realise these projects and provide a sustainable and inclusive legacy for the city:

**Table 1:** Timeline showing impact of Plymouth’s cultural strategies on the development of the city’s newest capital projects

<b>The Road to The Box</b> Capacity building to develop Plymouth’s cultural sector	<b>The Road to Market Hall</b> Developing Real Ideas and Plymouth’s digital and immersive sector
<b>2009</b> Plymouth City Council publishes “The Vital Spark: A Cultural Strategy for the City of Plymouth (2009-2020)”	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plymouth Culture Board established</li> </ul>	<b>2010</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">i-DAT</a> supported to develop innovation platforms</li> <li>• Plymouth University supported to deliver Innovation for Creative and Cultural Industries (iCCi) <a href="#">360 Festival</a> (ACE)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plymouth’s Heritage and Arts service becomes part of Economic Development department</li> <li>• British Art Show 7 takes place in Plymouth</li> </ul>	<b>2011</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">i-DAT</a> organisational development and skills/funding strategy supported</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theatre Royal secures capital investment to support redevelopment</li> </ul>	<b>2012</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">i-DAT</a> confirmed as NPO</li> <li>• <a href="#">360 Festival</a> Festival supported as part of the Cultural Olympiad</li> </ul>
	<b>2013</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real Ideas announces plans to develop Market Hall as a new space for digital, following asset transfer</li> </ul>

The Road to The Box		The Road to Market Hall
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plymouth Culture appoints new Executive Director</li> </ul>	<b>2014</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plymouth Culture secures 3yrs funding</li> </ul>	<b>2015</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Box secures capital funding for stage I and II development</li> </ul>	<b>2016</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">i-DAT</a> delivers interactive commission for Tate Modern</li> <li>• Real Ideas secures HM Treasury funding to redevelop Market Hall</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development begins on leadership structure for The Box</li> </ul>	<b>2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real Ideas takes on the running of Ocean Studios</li> <li>• Planning permission granted for Market Hall development</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plymouth City Council confirmed as NPO to support development of The Box</li> <li>• Plymouth Culture confirmed as NPO</li> </ul>	<b>2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real Ideas confirmed as NPO</li> <li>• Real Ideas supported to deliver Illuminate Festival, attracting over 28,000 attendees</li> <li>• Hemingway Design appointed to join design team on Market Hall</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plymouth Culture appoints new CEO</li> <li>• Cultural Development Fund (CDF) secured via DCMS for 3yr iMayflower programme</li> <li>• KARST secures capital funding to improve venue accessibility</li> </ul>	<b>2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arts Tech R&amp;D delegation to Montreal</li> <li>• Real Ideas supported to deliver Illuminate Festival, attracting 50,000 attendees</li> <li>• Redevelopment work begins on Market Hall</li> <li>• Plymouth becomes first UK member of the Fab City Network</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Box secures Cultural Capital Kickstart Fund Co-Investment</li> <li>• <b>September 2020: The Box Opens</b></li> </ul>	<b>2020</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real Ideas secures Cultural Capital Kickstart Fund Co-Investment for Market Hall</li> </ul>
<b>2021</b> <b>Plymouth Culture renews cultural strategy with the publication of the Culture Plan 2021-30</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May 2021: The Box appoints new CEO</li> <li>• Plymouth Culture incorporated as an independent charity (CIO)</li> </ul>	<b>2021</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>July 2021: Market Hall and Immersive Dome opens</b></li> <li>• Market Hall hosts FULLDOME UK Festival 2021</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eight NPOs confirmed for 2023-26, including The Box, Theatre Royal, Plymouth Culture and KARST</li> <li>• British Art Show 9 returns to Plymouth<sup>23</sup></li> </ul>	<b>2020</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market Hall hosts Immersive Futures Festival</li> <li>• Real Ideas confirmed as NPO for 2023-26</li> </ul>



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*Plymouth Hoe, aerial view. Image by Jay Stone*



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