



Wakefield

Putting culture at the heart of inclusive and sustainable growth strategies



XPLOR Research and Innovation Centre, Wakefield

Key Features

- £41.3m total Arts Council England investment in Wakefield since 2010, including £13.6m capital funding, of which £8.13m from Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and HM Treasury
- Cultural Compact with Wakefield Council puts culture at the heart of education, skills community wellbeing, regeneration and planning policy
- World class venues - The Hepworth Gallery and Yorkshire Sculpture Park - support visitor economy, with a combined 700,000 visitors per year
- The Hepworth Gallery catalyses £42m regeneration of Wakefield's waterfront, including 134,000 sq ft private Tileyard North development supported by UK Government Levelling up Fund
- City Centre revitalised through redevelopment and re-opening of disused Market Hall as a £7.7m creative and cultural centre, Wakefield Exchange (WX), opening 2024
- XPLOR - the world's first R&D centre for the £40bn live events industry - opened in 2023
- Creative Wakefield leadership programme, delivered by University of Leeds, aligns with cluster development to support transition to high wage, high-skilled jobs
- 32% annual increase in local authority capital investment in culture since £7.74m DCMS investment through Cultural Development Fund in 2019

Changing the Narrative

Once home to more coal mines than any other district in the country, Wakefield suffered some of the highest unemployment rates in England throughout the 1980's and 1990's.

In recent years, excellent transport links have given rise to steadily growing employment in the logistics sector. While this has helped improve economic outcomes in the short term, these jobs are both typically low-skilled and at high risk of automation, with 18.5% of people in employment within the district working in elementary occupations, (compared with 10.5% across the region as a whole)¹.

With a total investment of £41.3m since 2010, Arts Council England has helped support the emergence of a new narrative for Wakefield, drawing inspiration from its proud history of creativity and innovation. Once the birthplace of Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore and John Harrison, Wakefield now boasts rich cultural assets, including Yorkshire Sculpture Park and The Hepworth Gallery, and vibrant growth in the creative sector, including Production Park - Europe's largest live events creative cluster.

Wakefield Council now fully acknowledges the significant role of the creative and cultural sectors through both the district's Creative Wakefield framework² and in a Blueprint for Heritage and Culture in its 2022 Masterplan³.

Cultural Compact

Arts Council England has been a long-term co-investor in Wakefield. It has supported the district's world-class cultural destinations, backed initiatives to connect communities and grow the creative economy, and worked in close partnership with the local authority to enable cultural organisations to become central to the development of Wakefield City Centre and the wider district.

This partnership was formalised and given new impetus in 2019, with Wakefield one of the first 20 local authorities to form a Cultural Compact⁴ with Arts Council England. Established following the recommendations of the UK Cultural Cities Enquiry⁵, the Cultural Compact initiative has four key objectives:

- Increase the connectivity between the arts and cultural sector and broader local aspirations and priorities;
- Facilitate the development of a shared ambition among project partners for culture's contribution to local development, including a coordinated approach to deployment of cultural assets in support of joint priorities;
- Increase capacity and strategic planning for the development and delivery of joint initiatives that strengthen the local ecosystem and leverage resources, (human, financial and property);
- Secure commitment from Compact members to continue working in partnership and support sector recovery efforts.

In practice, this puts culture at the heart of local strategies, supporting positive outcomes across different local authority agendas, from planning to regeneration, education, skills development and wellbeing and inclusion.

“We’ve got gravitas all of a sudden. There’s a real sense that the district needs to grow and drive high-skilled jobs, and that this can be wrapped around the cultural narrative.”

Julie Russell, Service Director, Arts Culture & Leisure, Wakefield Council

Creative Wakefield

Published in 2020, the Creative Wakefield Framework sets out the vision for the district's Cultural Compact, based around five key priorities:

- **Placemaking**
- **Visitor Economy**
- **Wellbeing and Inclusion**
- **Creative Skills** - including a flagship creative education offer and careers advice
- **Spaces and Support** - connecting creative spaces, people and businesses



Creative Wakefield Framework, 2020-2025. Image courtesy of Wakefield Council



*Captive by Motion at Earth Spectacular, Wakefield, summer 2021.
Photo: © Ash Scott.*



*Cali and Mari by Artemis Productions at Earth Rise, Wakefield, summer 2021.
Photo: © Ash Scott*

Creative Wakefield Network

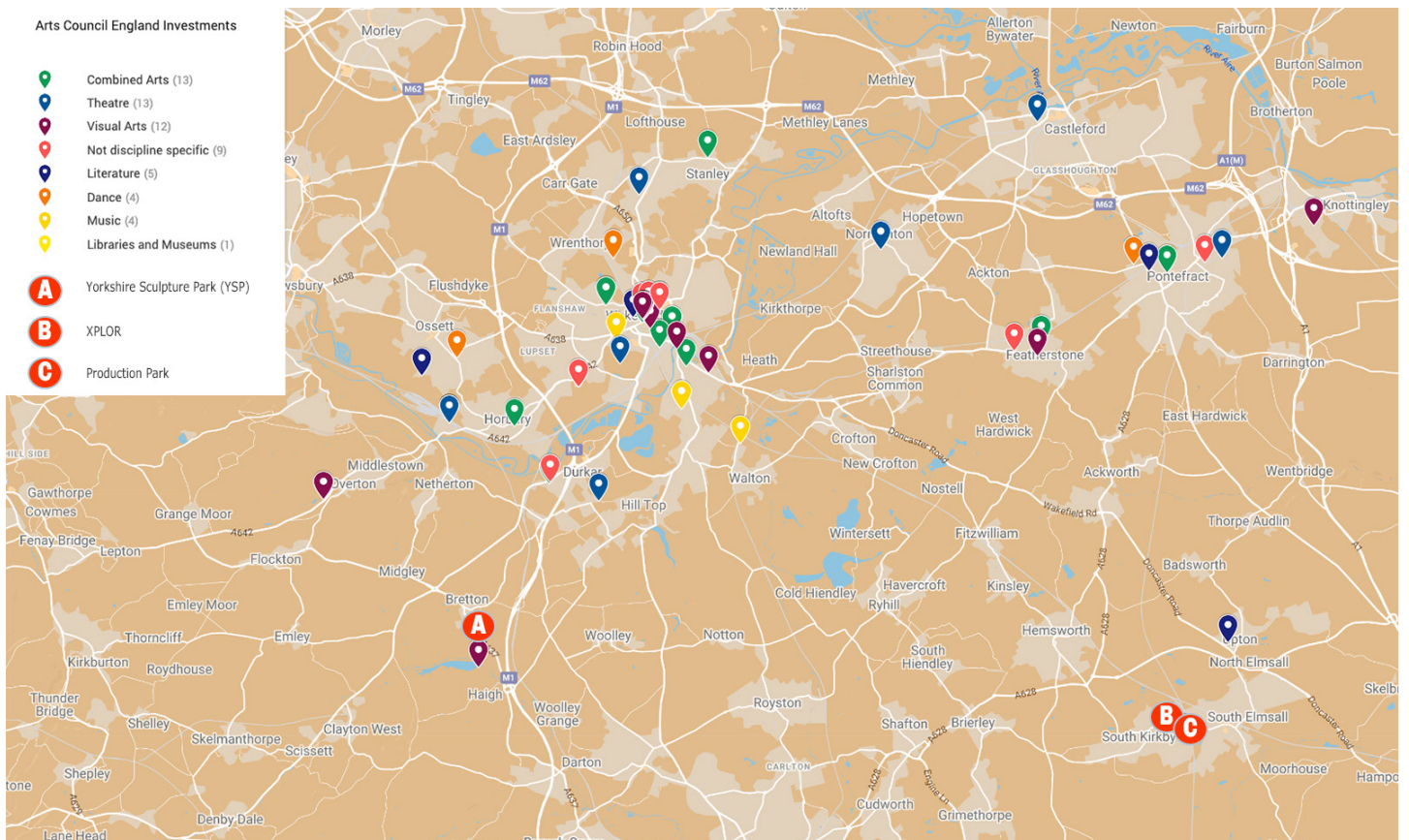
Established through the Cultural Compact and Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Cultural Development Fund, the Creative Wakefield network⁶ supports further growth in the sector by bringing together arts, culture, heritage, creative and digital industries with business, community, health, education and planning departments. The network is supported through both live events and activities and online via a feature-rich website, sharing jobs, opportunities, resources and connections across the sector and district.

Arts Council England has directly funded over 100 individuals and organisations across Wakefield district, including capital investments in:

- Wakefield Exchange (WX)*
- Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP)
- The Hepworth Wakefield
- Public Art Framework**
- The Art House
- Production Park, Backstage Academy and XPLOR*

* DCMS funding via Cultural Development Fund

** Via DCMS/HM Treasury



Arts Council England investments in organisations across Wakefield district, 2010-2023

Map data © 2023 Google

Explore the interactive maps at:
<https://culturalplacemaking.com/wakefieldmap>

Placemaking

Reconnecting communities with our city centres

Faced with the double-impact of the decline of retail footfall and a decentralised city driven by out-of-town employment, Wakefield's city centre has struggled like many other similar high streets. Nowhere is this more evident than in its Market Hall building, originally opened in 2008, the retail offer here failed to attract sufficient customers to make the business model work⁷. Less than a decade later, Wakefield Council has now decided to repurpose the site.

Today, this impressive 4,000 sq ft site is being given a new lease of life, revitalised and rebranded as Wakefield Exchange (WX) as part of a £7.7m capital investment in Wakefield, including DCMS support through the Cultural Development Fund⁸.



Wakefield Exchange (WX) artist's impression. Image courtesy Wakefield Council

“At the start of our Cultural Development Fund journey we had a programme without a home. Through Wakefield Exchange, we now have a permanent home from which we can continue to deliver a year-round programme of events”

Monika Wilcox, Programme Manager, Wakefield Council

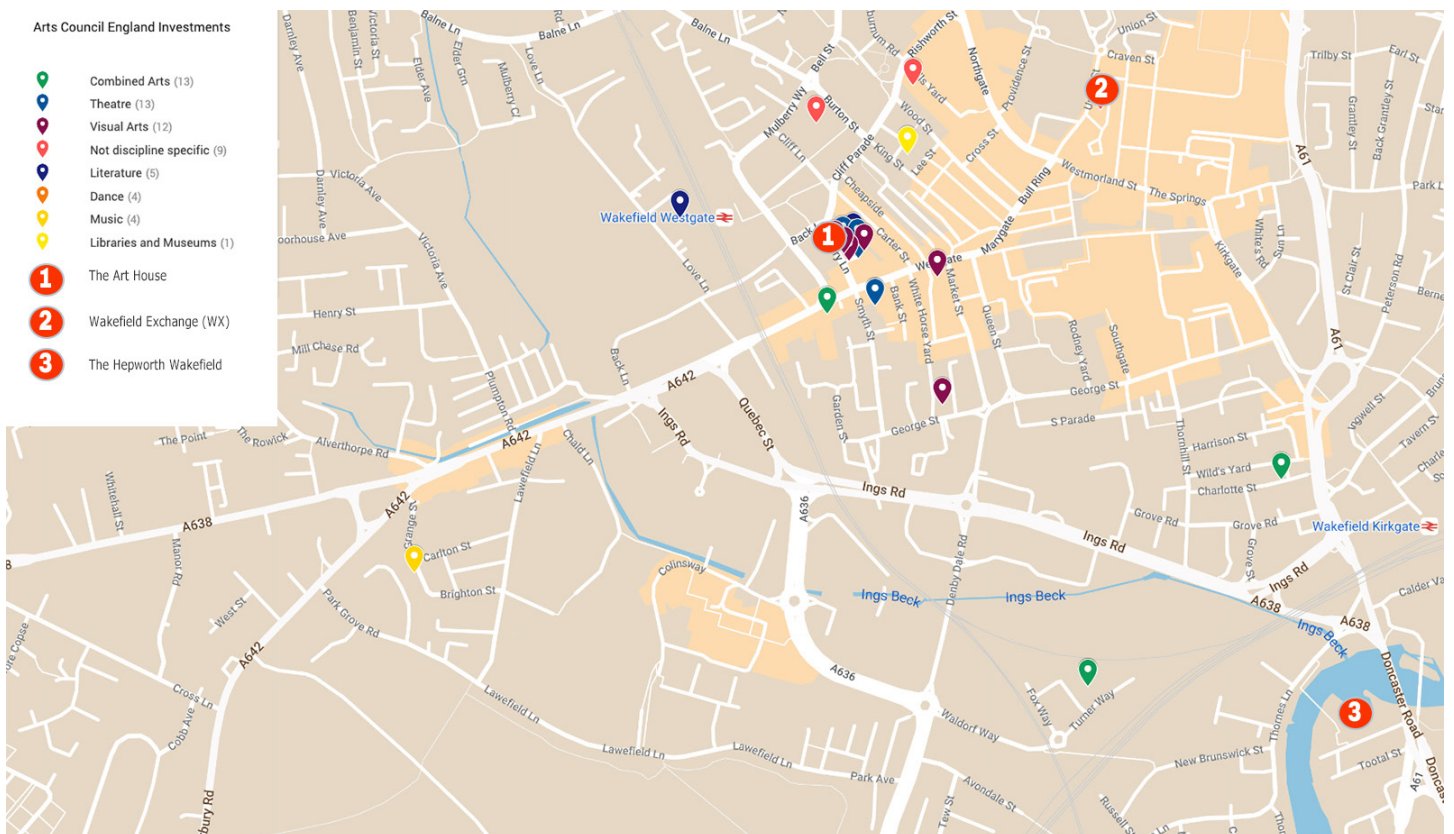
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Set to open fully in 2024, Wakefield Exchange will be a landmark building in a reimagined city centre as the 'multi-functional place of cultural, social and economic exchange' proposed in Wakefield's Masterplan and as a future-proofed, post-retail high street centre.

Combining both a capital and revenue funding element, Wakefield's CDF programme of events and activities during the funded period helped serve as a proof-of-concept to demonstrate the benefits of a strong, year-round cultural programme to activate spaces and engage communities. This, coupled with the opening of Wakefield Exchange, has helped unlock further UK Government support through the Shared Prosperity Fund⁹ to continue developing and delivering the programme.

Wakefield Exchange supports Creative Wakefield's wellbeing and inclusion priorities by providing a city centre Arts space where everyone can enjoy making, attending or taking part in great creative and cultural experiences across its range of different spaces:

- Flexible co-working, office and artist's studio space
- City centre community garden and outdoor events space for music, open air cinema and festivals
- Multi-use performance space and curated food market for festivals and events
- Covered outdoor space for pop-up shops, performances, eating and drinking
- Flexible learning space for skills development and business support



Arts Council England investments in organisations across Wakefield city centre, 2010-2023
Map data © 2023 Google

Explore the interactive maps at:
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Visitor Economy

Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) is the leading international centre for modern and contemporary sculpture.

Set across the 500 acres Bretton Hall estate, YSP enables open access to art, situations and ideas. Supporting 45,000 people each year through YSP's learning programme¹⁰, this innovative work develops ability, confidence and life aspiration in participants whilst welcoming almost half a million visitors per year.

- £7.79m total Arts Council England investment since 2017
- £11.5m annual contribution to local economy¹¹
- 480k visitors per year (pre-pandemic)



Yorkshire Sculpture Park



The Hepworth Wakefield © Hufton + Crow

The Hepworth Gallery

Originally designed to house a major new gift of works from the Hepworth Estate, to be shown in the city where Barbara Hepworth - one of the most important artists of the 20th Century - was born and raised. The Hepworth Gallery has added a further £42 million worth of works of art to Wakefield's art collection since it opened in 2011¹².

The Hepworth's impact - like YSP's - goes far beyond the visitor economy, with its award-winning learning programme engaging more 41,800 participants in 2019/20 as well as offering skills-based opportunities and clear pathways for young people into creative careers.

- £12.4m total Arts Council England investment since 2010 (following initial £6.67m capital investment since 2005)
- £13m annual impact on local economy
- £2.23m annual spend by The Hepworth in the local community
- 220,000 - 250,000 visitors per year (pre-pandemic)

“Along with the Hepworth Wakefield Art Gallery, funding will cement this area as a distinctive cultural quarter for residents and visitors to be proud of”

Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)

Spaces and Support

Unlocking development opportunities through cultural connections

Arts Council England's continued investment in The Hepworth, alongside the sustained investment by Wakefield Council, has re-invigorated Wakefield's Waterfront, acting as a catalyst for the transformation of the long-abandoned complex of Victorian buildings at Rutland Mills¹³. This development, first outlined in 2015, is now finally coming to fruition, driven by almost £15m investment through Wakefield District Council and West Yorkshire Combined Authority¹⁴, and unlocking over 10 acres of Wakefield's historic riverside.

An additional £6.39m of private investment has been unlocked through partners, City & Provincial Properties (CPP), committed to developing the site as Tileyard North¹⁵ - a flagship creative quarter for the north of England, expanding on its hugely successful Tileyard London development in Kings Cross. More recently, an additional £8m has been secured as part of the UK Government's £20m Levelling Up Fund round one investment in Wakefield.

Arts Council England, alongside the Council and other funders, has continued its support to enhance the public realm surrounding The Hepworth Riverside Gallery Garden and Wakefield's Waterfront. This includes £500,000 in 2018 to develop The Hepworth Riverside Gallery Garden¹⁶ and connect The Hepworth to Rutland Mills and Tileyard North, complementing a £1m DCMS capital investment in 2022 to help create a public art trail linking local communities and Wakefield City Centre to the waterfront development, (see below).



Rutland Mills development (Tileyard North)



*Tileyard North, CGI render.
Images: Hawkins Brown architects*

“this new sculpture trail will give a real sense of pride in our fascinating history and heritage and connect key points of the city together”

Cllr Michael Graham, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport,
Wakefield Council



Rachel List, Mural Artist, Pontefract 2020. Image: Tim Hill

Wellbeing and Inclusion

The Creative Wakefield Framework recognises the contribution made by existing cultural organisations and good practice in participative and community-focused cultural activity. This includes organisations such as The Art House¹⁷, which places equality of access and higher diversity in contemporary visual arts practice at the core of all its programmes. Now managing more than 50 accessible artist's studios, The Art House hosts a wide variety of artists, makers and creative businesses and a year-round programme of exhibitions, workshops and professional development opportunities.

Creative Wakefield also identifies the need to ensure the voice of the community is heard when developing and delivering work at different scales and widening access to public art. Launched in 2021 and drawing from Wakefield's world class connections to sculpture, the Public Art Framework¹⁸ has been developed collaboratively with Wakefield Council and the communities and cultural organisations across the district.

Wakefield's independent Public Art Steering Group¹⁹ provides guidance to help develop the wider ambition of using creativity and culture as key drivers to improving the local economy, community wellbeing, skills development and ultimately strengthening community resilience and placemaking.

Supported by a £1m capital investment in 2022 to develop public spaces, a creative wayfinding programme and public art commissions will address public realm and spatial planning priorities. This includes those identified through Wakefield's 2022 Masterplan, connecting the Wakefield City Centre to The Hepworth and Rutland Mills waterfront development through a sculpture trail, ensuring that Wakefield's culture-led regeneration is community-focused, growing in scale and not confined to any specific 'cultural quarter'.

Creative Skills

Production Park and Backstage Academy

Production Park is Europe's largest live music and performance production facility, founded in 2015 and providing 6 studios, stage rental and warehouse provision for more than 10 events businesses under one roof²⁰. Its arena-sized, on-site rehearsal and high-tech creative stage facilities have provided solutions for some of the world's biggest acts and event production companies, including Beyoncé, Coldplay and Cirque Du Soleil.

With the live events industry severely impacted during the pandemic, Production Park secured a £12m loan through Arts Council England as part of the Government's Cultural Recovery Fund. This has allowed the organisation to restructure its finances, invest in expansion and emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever, with its studio busier in 2021 than pre-Covid and this trend continuing into 2022 and beyond²¹.

Following a £500,000 investment through the Cultural Development Fund, unlocking £1.8m of private investment, managed workspace is now available to support freelancers, start-ups and SMEs. While Production Park's Backstage Academy²² provides students with the training necessary to enter the backstage entertainment industry, from short courses to accredited postgraduate degrees the new managed workspaces now offer more opportunities to retain the best and brightest graduates.

- 200 student cohort across 6 studios
- 10 high-tech degree courses offered, including 6 postgraduate
- 22 industry-focused short courses
- £34,147 average salary across Production Park employees
(Wakefield average salary across all sectors = £24,825, UK average = £27,756)²³



Production Park, Wakefield

XPLOR: R&D, skills and business support

Opened in January 2023, XPLOR²⁴ is a new research and innovation hub and partnership project between Backstage Academy and Wakefield Council. Recognising that R&D investment in the creative and cultural industries is too low, XPLOR is the world's first R&D centre, supporting disruptive growth and innovation for the £40bn live events and entertainment industry.

Early investment through the Cultural Development Fund played a crucial part in bridging a funding gap prior to securing £2.78m in the final UK round of the European Regional Development Fund²⁵. Follow-on funding through Cultural Capital Kickstart²⁶ enabled XPLOR to invest in state-of-the-art virtual production facilities, expanding its offer to clients including ITV Studios and adapting its business model during the pandemic.

Collaborating with organisations locally, nationally and internationally across live events, music, TV, film and the creative arts, XPLOR supports development of proof-of-concept projects to reach broader audiences through cost-effective design, engineering and virtual production.

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