



**The
Earls Court
Development
Company**



**Earls Court
Cultural Strategy
Executive Summary**



Collaboration / Consideration / Celebration

February 2023

Vision statement

To create an innovative cultural neighbourhood curated for, and with, the local community and London, and shared with the world.



Culture has always been the beating heart of Earls Court, particularly on this site, where cultural experiences formed the history of the place and its many incarnations for over 150 years.

The Earls Court Development Company (ECDC) is seeking to strongly embed culture in its future planning for the site, to provide venues and programmes that are diverse and inclusive, to welcome people of all ages and backgrounds.

With the knowledge gained from listening to the local cultural community, understanding expectations, ambitions and needs, by developing new cultural partnerships and ongoing design and masterplanning discussions, ECDC will create a place where culture is built into everyone's experience of the site.

Whether incidental or spontaneous, formal or informal, making or experiencing culture in all of its many varieties and forms – opportunities will exist for all. Spaces will be inclusive and enable expression and engagement with culture as well as buildings that support making and performing. We will create a cultural ecosystem that nurtures talent and creativity for all to enjoy, curated by those who use it with opportunities for learning, cultural jobs and skills development.

Part of that vision will be to design adaptable, flexible spaces that benefit the mind and body, the environment and the local economy. Spaces that will showcase world-class artists and programmers. It should be a facilitator of talent and organic growth of culture in the wider area. For decades, Earls Court sat at the centre of London's international LGBTQ+ and music scenes and has long been home to actors,

creators, artists and composers - an important and tenacious legacy that we are determined to continue on site.

Our design proposals will strengthen peoples' wellbeing by bringing people together, eliciting memories and creating community through shared cultural experiences. Affordable workspaces, and inclusive, equitable and aspirational employment and training opportunities will create a positive impact and strengthen the sense of place and community. Culture and nature will work in unison at Earls Court with both green and civic public spaces that facilitate cultural activities and interactions and reference the cultural heritage of the site.

Makers will inspire interaction between tenants and visitors, showcasing the finest of Earls Court's cultural offer. Digital facilities will provide equitable platforms for creators, opportunities for residents to connect with culture, and exploration of activities for those outside of Earls Court. World-class, year-round programming will ensure that the place is an important destination for the whole city and beyond - that it attracts the best to contribute and perform.

We believe this ambitious cultural approach will be a key element to enable us to deliver on our vision to bring the wonder back to Earls Court.

**Rob Heasman, Chief Executive,
The Earls Court Development Company**



What we did

The Earls Court Development Company (ECDC) is responsible for driving the regeneration of the former Earls Court Exhibition Centre site, with a vision 'to bring the wonder back to Earls Court'. Culture is a central part of this and the specialist consultancy Sound Diplomacy Limited ('Sound Diplomacy') was commissioned to help develop this Initial Cultural Strategy.

ECDC plans to root culture in the community and heritage of the local area, make it accessible to and inclusive of all, and establish it as the cornerstone of what makes Earls Court a world-class destination and an exceptional place for people to live, work, visit and return to.

Cultural vision:

- Workshops with members of ECDC (including senior Directors, Architects, Retail Agents, the Planning team and others).
- A review of existing key ECDC documents and strategies to discover where ECDC is today and how culture is currently being considered across all elements of design, planning and communications. Eight overarching themes central to the development were then identified.
- Analysis of ten policies from the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (LBHF), the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Arts Council England (ACE) to align with their ambitions and objectives and to identify unique culture and

heritage opportunities and key areas not currently built into ECDC's planning process.

- Reassessment of the Sound Diplomacy 15-minute City Vision for Earls Court and Cultural Mapping work completed in 2021 to understand how these can be integrated into the Cultural Strategy.
- Research into the nearby Olympia development to establish a complementary offer at Earls Court.
- Analysis of six creative districts to identify exceptional culture-led approaches to placemaking and their applicability to Earls Court.

Stakeholder engagement:

- Workshops and interviews held with the local creative and residential communities, local businesses and organisations outside of Earls Court to gain insight into overarching themes and local cultural opportunities, focusing on what is missing, what is already happening, and how ECDC can enhance the cultural scene in the area.

Ambitions and next steps:

- A set of ambitions and recommendations to serve as a clear next-steps guide on how to achieve Earls Court's cultural placemaking ambitions, centred around the strategy's eight identified themes.

What is culture?

Culture has different meanings to different people, from arts, music and dance to food, language and religion. ECDC adopts a wide definition that is referred to (for the purpose of this report) as 'culture', but is distilled into the following categories:

- **Traditional arts and 'big C' culture**
Fine art, design, visual arts, music, dance, theatre, comedy, fashion, film, photography, crafts, literature, etc.
- **Technology and digital**
- **Workspaces**
Studios, galleries, co-working spaces, etc.
- **Built heritage**
- **Local community**
Community centres/hubs to encourage interaction and co-creation of culture such as youth centres, libraries, religious spaces, etc.
- **Tourism**
Visitor attractions and festivals
- **Evening and night-time economy (NTE)**
Events, activities, work and activations.

What else can be included?

A cultural strategy needs to consider the wider cultural ecosystem for it to enable meaningful change in the local cultural landscape. This Initial Cultural Strategy also includes the following that are not defined as 'culture', but are equally crucial to the growth and success of the cultural ecosystem.

- **Retail and business**
Cultural retail and businesses such as independent fashion / art / craft / design stores or local creative coffee shops.
- **Spaces for cultural programming**
Creating spaces that can be adopted for cultural programming such as public space, meanwhile use locations, public art and performance, etc.

Where The Earls Court Development Company is today

Effective planning for how culture can be considered across all elements of design, planning and communications as the masterplan progresses required understanding where the Earls Court Development Company is today. Community engagement workshops, masterplans, public realm concept designs, the initial retail strategy, and stakeholder interviews contributed to the identification of eight overarching themes.

Destination

- Earls Court aims to be **progressive, artistic and cosmopolitan** with diverse residents, visitors and tenants from across London and beyond.
- Earls Court aims to **bring public spaces to life and have a diverse and ever-changing**, sometimes surprising, year-round programme of events attracting diverse audiences.
- Earls Court will have a **destination factor** to bring the 'wonder' back to the area.

Spaces and places

- The cultural spaces and venues at Earls Court are to be **flexible, adaptable and multi-purpose**, and **outdoor spaces** will be connected to the cultural offering.
- **Affordable and flexible workspace** is planned to be included in the offer at Earls Court. The workspace aims to meet the needs of the community and be appropriate for creative and cultural uses.
- Earls Court intends to be a **safe, exciting and affordable** area for **young people**. ECDC is working closely with its youth panel to explore what young people would like to see in the cultural spaces.

Curation

- **Impactful and meaningful meanwhile and temporary interventions** are planned from the start as these set the tone, experience, and personality of Earls Court.
- The **cultural programming at Earls Court is to be packed year-round** with exciting and diverse events, with a range of low-cost and free performances and activities (live music, theatre, interactive public art).
- **Management and governance arrangements** will be put in place to enable the curation of cultural programmes.

Community

- **Proactive engagement of the community** will take place throughout the development as it is acknowledged that **culture is created by participation**, rather than observation.
- Authentic cultural programming is to be based on the **community's shared values** and what already exists in Earls Court. Plans include **learning from existing culture** and linking the new development to the existing values, while **showcasing local groups** in art, drama, dance, and music.
- Earls Court aims to ensure that all people in the local community are **well informed** of the cultural opportunities available to them and feel **empowered** to access them. Issues such as litter, crime, noise and traffic will be taken into consideration to lessen the impact on residents and neighbours.

Sustainability

- **Addressing the climate emergency** is a key priority for ECDC and it aims to **achieve net zero carbon** no later than 2050 and to reduce carbon emissions by 50% by 2030. This will be done through initiatives like energy sharing infrastructure, harnessing renewable sources, and generating energy on site.
- Earls Court is ultimately working towards obtaining **sustainability certifications** for the development, aspiring to be climate positive, not just climate neutral.

Heritage

- The Earls Court development aims to **leverage its heritage** in order to bring a sense of place and uniqueness.
- The development team will explore how they can **reflect the rich heritage of the site** within the future development.
- The development intends to **celebrate Earls Court's history** and commemorate the past whilst looking forward to the future.

Health and wellbeing

- Health and wellbeing is a key focus for Earls Court. Plans aim to **incorporate it into the Earls Court ethos** and connect it to all aspects of the development.
- **Access to green outdoor spaces is considered important** to connect people to nature and provide communal spaces for cultural activity, encouraging community cohesion as well as participation in arts and culture.

Innovation

- A key intention is to become an **innovation hub**, working with neighbouring universities, research centres and businesses to curate knowledge exchange, development, mentoring and networking opportunities, and incorporating **state of the art technology** into the development.
- Earls Court plans to **optimise the areas with condensed cultural activity** by animating them with culture and retail to make them the first place that people want to go, serving as a **cultural and entertainment anchor** to draw visitors and tenants.
- Active and animated **daytime and night-time offers** are intended to keep footfall high at all times.

Coordinating the vision

Using policy documents from the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, the Greater London Authority and Arts Council England, the following key areas were identified for ECDC to build into the planning work.

Audience development

Growing audiences, increasing reach and building stronger relationships with the local community. The LBHF Arts Strategy and London's Culture Strategy state that audience development ensures residents and visitors are aware of the arts and culture opportunities available to them and feel invited to participate. As well as large attractions to draw international audiences there should be a level of trust from local audiences that there will always be a cultural event or activity to engage with via a constant year-round programme.

Talent development

The LBHF Arts Strategy and Industrial Strategy, London's Culture Strategy and the RBKC Draft Culture Plan all consider talent development to be central to the creative industries. Decision makers intend for young creatives in the area to be supported through talent and skills development opportunities. This would include local creative businesses and institutions through education, training or employment programmes, and these opportunities and their access routes should be widely available so as to encourage a diverse range of participants. The local policy documents also view international talent attraction as important, bringing artists, institutions, festivals and events of international significance to the area.

Crime and safety

The NTE and its connection to safety and cultural events is high on the agenda for local authorities and the GLA. Reviewed reports argue that well-designed spaces and programmes for cultural engagement can promote social integration, deter crime and increase neighbourhood safety. Plans are also in place by the GLA to improve access, inclusion and safety for NTE users and workers as well as ensure safe and convenient night-time transport.

Health and wellbeing

The RBKC Draft Culture Plan places importance on mental health in conjunction with arts and culture. Potential actions regarding mental health in the Draft Culture Plan include supporting a new cultural festival to coincide with World Mental Health Day and working with partners to use culture to create positive futures, particularly focusing on mental health in young people.

Other key areas

- **Festivals** - encouraging the development of new local arts and culture festivals and supporting existing ones.
- **Local cultural business opportunities** - supporting local creative businesses by providing employment, networking and development opportunities.
- **Addressing inequalities** - a central theme in many of London's cultural policies. Ensuring equal access to the arts and equal opportunities to learning and employment in the creative industries, particularly ethnic minority Londoners and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Workshop and interview findings

In May and June 2022, Sound Diplomacy undertook interviews and workshops with cultural stakeholders inside and outside Earls Court, and with the local community to gain insight into overarching themes and local cultural opportunities, focusing on what is missing, what is already happening, and how ECDC can enhance the cultural scene in the area. Conversations revealed demand for the areas set out below.



Ambitions for Earls Court

Below are some of the recommendations that have been developed to achieve Earls Court's cultural placemaking ambitions. These are grouped around eight themes, which have been developed in connection to ECDC's existing four priorities and all with the objective to 'bring the Wonder back to Earls Court'. These four priorities are:

- Open up the former Exhibition Centre site for the first time in 150 years, giving back to local communities.
- A showground of world class ingenuity, celebrating its legacy and history.
- Create a better piece of city, an inclusive blueprint for future generations.
- Addressing the climate emergency, with an ambition to go beyond net-zero.

THEME ONE: Destination

1. Plan how Earls Court will become a world-class cultural destination

Organise and use design workshops between the masterplanners, cultural consultants and the ECDC Development team to map out who is likely to visit the site, the different visitor journeys, what programming and curation they will be attracted to, and what spaces and places they will attend. By analysing the user groups - whether that is someone local or someone visiting Earls Court for the first time and looking at them specifically through a cultural lens to analyse their different needs and expectations, it is possible to better determine what infrastructure needs to be built and where it should be on the site. Planning work needs also to include defining 'world class' and success in terms of what culture means to Earls Court.

2. Spotlight the site's unique cultural offer with high-quality, locally-designed wayfinding

Work with local designers to create engaging wayfinding that emphasises a sense of arrival to the site. Creatively signpost and map all events, activities and businesses connected to culture, music, the arts and the night-time economy on site and in the local area, highlighting the offer from the moment attendees arrive at a train station so that they know that something is going to happen, or is happening. Wayfinding needs to continue once on site, directing visitors to the various cultural offerings and spaces within the development. An online component

will enable wayfinding to be updated as needed throughout each development phase, and needs to be accessible. ECDC's Public Realms Inclusivity Panel, which is made up of local people with a range of different abilities, needs and experiences will need to test it. The creation of a cultural map will help coordinate the local offer while increasing awareness of what is available in the area, as well as determine safe and accessible routes from other sites/transport to the cultural offer on the Earls Court site.

3. Design spaces so that they are high-quality, resilient and future-proofed

Prioritise design considerations that ensures all spaces (internal and external) are appropriately soundproofed, accessible and energy efficient to mitigate against future issues and to continue to attract high-quality talent and experienced promoters to Earls Court's cultural spaces. Having an excellent offer of high calibre cultural spaces that are fit-for-purpose will contribute to Earls Court's ambitions, promoting it as a destination and ensuring that all spaces are sustainable. Updates in technology will continue in the cultural sector in the coming years, especially with regards to digital engagement, so spaces that are designed to be adaptable and grow with new technologies are preferred. The provision of additional services helps mitigate against costly upgrades in the future, such as sufficient electrical specs, ventilation and data.

THEME TWO: Spaces and places

4. Support the activation of meanwhile spaces for cultural use

To deal with the lack of available spaces on site for meanwhile uses, it is recommended that ECDC continues to ensure that areas of the site not yet being developed can be activated. For example, working with the local creative community to develop a programme that encourages the use of flexible, multi-purpose space will enable a range of cultural uses, such as rehearsals and creative workspaces. Meanwhile activation also provides essential opportunities for artists to establish themselves through programming, curation and places of exhibition. Utilising the ECDC Meanwhile Strategy to measure the economic impact and social value of those activities will allow for ECDC to use that knowledge to build on the successful, significant and popular meanwhile events, activities and attractions in more permanent spaces on site.

5. Create a permanent community centre that is open and free to access

Implement an informal community centre that provides and encourages the opportunity for collaboration and thought and idea development amongst local residents. It is recommended that the community centre becomes a facility used by multiple organisations and individuals at the same time. This can become a space for local creatives, such as students and individual professionals to congregate, whilst also attracting other creatives and residents. Facilities that stakeholders would like to see include a library and independent F&B offer within the space.

6. Encourage engagement with culture in the public realm through play

Create outdoor informal spaces in the public realm that support intergenerational encouragement of play through culture and performance. Consider including features such as a mini outdoor theatre and outdoor musical instruments. Facilitate these spaces to allow for flexible and affordable public engagement so that cultural experiences are embedded in all aspects of the site, running parallel to the ticketed offer. Frequent interactions with culture have the potential to enhance the quality of life for site residents and users by stimulating their daily lives, as well as improving their view of the site as a fun and exciting place to spend their time. Cultural activations that exist adjacent to, or in the same area as playgrounds, parks, cycle paths or other outdoor spaces create the opportunity to encourage accidental cultural experiences. Additional digital technologies such as Geocaching can be used to extend the cultural experience beyond the physical, as well as play specially curated playlists in public spaces on site.

THEME THREE: Curation

7. Develop a Charter of Best Practice that provides opportunities for local talent

A Charter of Best Practice that guides and encourages cultural venues and public events to offer work experience, school visits, apprenticeship programmes and hire members of the local creative community will support ECDC's goals for local talent generation. ECDC should consider what incentives might be required by operators to sign up to this agreement. Include all cultural activities (music events, film screenings, dance and theatre shows, art exhibitions, comedy shows, street parties and

performances, public art, etc.) in the Charter and extend it to external event promoters that already use the site, such as Underbelly. In order to facilitate this work, we propose ECDC creates and updates a database of local artists.

8. Ensure programming is diverse in offer, cost and opening times

Allow for a wide range of entertainment activities throughout the daytime, evening and night-time and ensure that there are activities and events designed for people of all ages, including children, young people, older people, the LGBTQ+ community and others. Encourage hands-on, participatory events that encourage collectiveness, intergenerational mixing and community relationships. Curation needs to take diverse interests into consideration, such as flexible and relaxed activities, as well as late night events that are not centred around the consumption of alcohol (experiential and immersive events, late night opening of exhibitions, libraries and cafes, community-led events, family festivals, gigs for adolescents, etc.)

THEME FOUR: Community

9. Provide opportunities for cultural engagement with underserved groups

ECDC has an opportunity and responsibility to be a facilitator for inclusion by identifying and designing a 'Community Inclusion' plan with local charities and organisations that support underserved groups. It is recommended that the plan determines which spaces at Earls Court to make available at dedicated times to local, hard-to-reach groups for the purpose of increased access to cultural creation, performance and rehearsal. Potential activities for consideration include organising pop-up performances and cultural workshops, and providing rehearsal space for community groups, music education services, youth clubs and any relevant groups in the area.

10. Create a loyalty scheme for residents and visitors

Developing a loyalty scheme for local residents and users to engage with the many cultural activities on site will help cultural businesses to be seen in the community and develop a loyal audience base. Loyalty scheme users can be the first to hear about what is happening, gain invitations to private screenings and viewings, and access perks such as discounted and pay-it-forward ticketing. A specific designation under

the scheme of free and low-cost tickets and offers for children and young people will work to engage that demographic and increase cultural experiences on site.

THEME FIVE: Sustainable development

11. Enhance economic inclusion through talent and skills development for the local cultural ecosystem

Create and support talent and skills development opportunities to grow the cultural ecosystem. An effective way to do this is by working with local schools, businesses, organisations and venues to provide talent development pathways, apprenticeship programmes, and mentorships.

12. Make sustainable design choices for public realm facilities

Open up spaces within the public realm for culture in a sustainable way, by innovatively designing built-in elements that easily facilitate temporary cultural activities. Facilities for consideration include an efficient electricity supply and accessible power ports, a permanent stage, a clean water supply with frequent outlets for drinking water, foundation ports for removable infrastructure (e.g. scaffolding), built-in speakers for those who do not have the means to bring their own equipment, and an attentive and dedicated maintenance team who can ensure the facilities are serviced for continued use.

THEME SIX: Heritage

13. Showcase the existing celebrations of local heritage

Utilise knowledge from local stakeholders and community members to learn more about what is already happening to celebrate the area's heritage. Speak to local organisations, and the community in organised workshops to explore how the unique characteristics of the area can be included in existing and planned initiatives.

14. Keep Earls Court's heritage alive in the naming of streets, spaces and places

ECDC has the opportunity to celebrate the heritage of the site and surrounding area in the final development by including references to it in the built environment. For example, naming streets, squares or significant buildings within the site after people who lived and worked in Earls Court and nearby who were culturally significant (e.g. James Bohee, David Bowie,

Alfred Hitchcock, Ellen Terry and Agatha Christie). Any decisions connected to this must ensure they are inclusive in representation to reflect the local communities and align with the GLA's work on diversifying the public realm. Street naming would also be subject to local authority approval.

THEME SEVEN: Health & Wellbeing

15. Provide permanent informal and accessible green space for congregation

Make green spaces plentiful and designed to encourage congregation, quiet individual reflection, engagement and exchange between those using it. The importance of interweaving informal green spaces that facilitate community interaction into the development must not be overlooked in the masterplan design. These spaces are often adopted by the community as places to gather and their cultural significance grows organically. It is important that these spaces are designed with a balance of intimacy and privacy but also safety and security in order to be a space where people feel comfortable to spend prolonged periods of time without feeling exposed or unsafe.

THEME EIGHT: Innovation

16. Make Earls Court a destination for immersive events

Leverage the area's expert knowledge and skills by working with local creative and tech industries to host high-quality, immersive events that will put Earls Court on the map for technology and innovation. Include high-quality, high-spec technology in all design considerations across the development to encourage innovative and unique events and experiences at Earls Court. This approach can be integrated into public spaces, streetscapes, flagship buildings and smaller cultural and community venues.

What we did

This document is being published in February 2023 as part of the ECDC consultation on its emerging design proposals for the site.

That consultation also sets out the types of cultural venues and other attractions being considered as part of the development to help deliver on this strategy.

Please see the details here earlscourtdevco.com/consultation and you can get in contact with the ECDC team or leave us comments the following ways:

Online survey: ecdc.commonplace.is

Email: info@earlscourtdevco.com

Phone: 0330 333 1510

You can also visit one of our consultation events. Conversation Corner will be open from Thursday 23 February – Saturday 1 April, at the following times:

- Wednesday: 12pm – 4pm
- Thursday and Friday: 3pm – 7pm
- Saturday: 11am – 3pm



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