



BRISTOL BEACON OUR FUTURE

Strategic Plan 2026-2031

The joy of live music for everyone



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This strategy sets out Bristol Beacon's direction and ambition through to 2031. It is the result of listening, reflection and collaborative planning. At its heart is a shared belief in the power of music to connect, empower and inspire.

The plan defines six strategic goals that reflect our role as a music venue, music education hub, civic partner, major employer and cultural anchor in the city. Together, they articulate our commitment to bold artistic programming, accessible music education, talent development, audience connection, community partnership, and long-term organisational sustainability.

Each goal is supported by clear strategic objectives. These will guide our actions, investment and decision-making in the years ahead, and ensure our work delivers meaningful impact for the people of Bristol and the wider region. This plan is built on the ideas and aspirations of our staff and all those who are interested in our future. It responds directly to what we heard: the need for a bold and inclusive artistic vision, stronger civic partnerships, deeper relationships with our audiences, and a workplace culture that values wellbeing, fairness and progression. It also places environmental responsibility and long-term resilience at the centre of our future.

Through this strategy, guided and overseen by our Board, Bristol Beacon commits to being a dynamic and caring non-profit organisation, one that reflects and celebrates the city we serve, and one that uses music to shape a more creative, inclusive and connected future.

Jonathan Dimbleby

Chair of the Board of Trustees, Bristol Beacon

March 2026

Simon Wales

Chief Executive, Bristol Beacon



OUR PURPOSE

TO INSPIRE AND CONNECT PEOPLE THROUGH THE UNIQUE POWER OF LIVE MUSIC

We exist to support creativity, community and culture in Bristol and beyond. By nurturing talent, championing inclusion, and building lasting relationships with artists, audiences, and communities we will create a vibrant musical future for all.



OUR VALUES

COLLABORATION

Collaboration powers everything, from working across teams to co-creating with communities to building deep partnerships in Bristol and beyond. We listen, we learn, and we create together.

INCLUSION

We are deeply connected to the city we serve. Caring for the spaces in our charge, we embrace the privilege of being a Beacon for all, where everyone is valued and welcomed. Inclusion isn't something extra, it's at the heart of everything we do.

EXCELLENCE

As an organisation we take pride in delivering outstanding musical moments every day. We champion aspiration and excellence by supporting artists, audiences, and staff, setting bold standards where music, ideas, and people shine together.

RESILIENCE

We are bold in our vision, and considerate in our planning. Committed to environmental sustainability, building organisational resilience and investing in talent to make sure Bristol Beacon can shine for generations to come.

KINDNESS

We lead with empathy, act with care, and treat people with respect. Whether in the office, the music centre or on the stage, kindness is how we build trust and togetherness.

OUR 6 STRATEGIC GOALS



**CREATE AND DELIVER
A BOLD, INCLUSIVE
ARTISTIC PROGRAMME**

**PUT AUDIENCES
AT THE HEART OF
OUR WORK**

**BE A NATIONAL LEADER
IN MUSIC LEARNING
AND EDUCATION**

**BE EMBEDDED IN BRISTOL:
A CIVIC, CULTURAL AND
COMMUNITY PARTNER**

**BE A REGIONAL LEADER FOR
MUSIC INDUSTRY CREATIVE
TALENT & SKILLS**

**BUILD A SUSTAINABLE,
RESILIENT, PEOPLE-POWERED
ORGANISATION**

CREATE AND DELIVER A BOLD, INCLUSIVE ARTISTIC PROGRAMME

As a national leader in artistic music programming, we'll produce, present and co-create a programme that couldn't happen anywhere else. Our programme will be ambitious, relevant to our communities, artistically daring and entertaining - combining the familiar with the unfamiliar through a blend of local talent, global influences, national and international artists. With additional festivals, commissions and collaborations we'll be a "must play" venue, from developing artists to global superstars, and a trusted space for the most innovative music.

Five strategic objectives:

1. Commission original, representative work that reflects and speaks to our communities' cultural life.
2. Collaborate with artists across all genres – from internationally renowned orchestras to local emerging artists – to create memorable shared experiences.
3. Create space for experimentation and excellence across multiple genres, with a platform for new and marginalised voices.
4. Curate and develop our distinctive touring artist programme - showcasing exceptional music of all genres and building strands that are accessible and inspiring.
5. Ensure access and inclusion are embedded in how we programme, present and promote the very best music across all genres.





BE A NATIONAL LEADER IN MUSIC LEARNING AND EDUCATION

As a Music Hub Lead Organisation, we'll ensure music learning and education is accessible, inclusive and creatively ambitious - from grassroots ensembles to sector leadership. By championing diverse genres, new models and new voices, we'll strengthen pathways for all young people to learn, lead and love music.

Five strategic objectives:

1. Build national visibility for our unique approach – blending education, community, artist development and a world class music venue.
2. Deliver and commission programmes that reflect the diversity and creativity of the West of England's young people.
3. Expand access with new centres and activities in targeted areas of Bristol.
4. Advocate nationally for music's value in schools, health and community life, especially for communities facing economic, social or systemic barriers to participation.
5. Invest in a diverse, skilled workforce of educators, mentors and music leaders.



BE A LEADER FOR MUSIC INDUSTRY CREATIVE TALENT AND SKILLS IN THE REGION

We will be the beating heart of talent development in the region, supporting clear, sustainable pathways - from first musical moments to roles on and off the stage. Whether it's young people finding their vocation, or artists experimenting at the cutting edge, Bristol Beacon will offer progression, mentorship, and a launchpad to national stages.

Five strategic objectives:

1. Build inclusive, transparent pathways from early engagement to professional creative careers on and off the stage.
2. Champion the region's creative skills ecosystem, sharing practice and building sector resilience.
3. Cultivate local and underrepresented talent through residencies, mentorship, and commissions, utilising our Cellars and other spaces.
4. Connect talent development with education and community programmes to widen access.
5. Secure the people, spaces and funding that make sustainable, long-term creative growth possible.

PUT AUDIENCES AT THE HEART OF OUR WORK

We will develop long-term, dynamic relationships with our audiences through curated programmes, clear engagement strategies and innovative marketing tools. We will harness the Beacon brand to create distinctive and powerful connections that ensure diverse audiences feel part of something special; inspiring moments of discovery, celebration, opportunity and belonging.

Five strategic objectives:

1. Make every visit, lesson or experience welcoming, enjoyable and memorable.
2. Be recognised and valued as an integrated music charity through coherent storytelling that builds impact, revenue and advocacy.
3. Grow diverse audiences by creating opportunities and investing in long-term community relationships.
4. Build authentic relationships with audiences - seeking input, harnessing insight, and deepening trust.
5. Foster audience loyalty through membership, clear programming strands, exceptional visitor experience, and innovative engagement strategies.





BE EMBEDDED IN BRISTOL: A CIVIC, CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY PARTNER

Bristol Beacon will be a vital civic partner and anchor organisation in the city -welcoming, responsive and rooted in place.

We'll build long-term relationships, create shared experiences, and ensure our work reflects, includes and is guided by Bristol's communities.

We'll be recognised not just as a venue, but as a trusted partner delivering impact in health, education, placemaking and skills.

We'll attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to the city centre, supporting Bristol's reputation as an artistic and cultural city. We will grow our economic impact on the local economy, which has already reached £28 million, with an additional £3.3 million of social impact*.

Five strategic objectives:

1. Co-create long-term, impactful, community-led projects in targeted areas of the city with diverse voices and experiences at the centre.
2. Embed priority work with both care-experienced younger people, and older people.
3. Develop equitable partnerships across sectors - including health, education, the third sector and care sector; playing a leading role in initiatives such as the Impact Alliance.
4. Create more opportunities to access our spaces and ensure they are inclusive, safe, and welcoming for all.
5. Support Bristol's reputation as an artistic, cultural, and progressive city; delivering significant economic and social impact.

*Source: The Impact of Culture on Bristol 2023/24, report for Bristol City Council

BUILD A SUSTAINABLE, RESILIENT, PEOPLE-POWERED ORGANISATION

We will be a brilliant place to work and a resilient organisation. With investment in staff wellbeing, progression, fair pay, and an inclusive culture, we'll ensure we are an employer of choice. We'll continue to lead on environmental sustainability, drive income growth, and evolve our systems and infrastructure to thrive long into the future.

Five strategic objectives:

1. Invest in staff wellbeing, progression, and fair pay to attract and retain a diverse, talented workforce across all levels of the organisation. Embed diversity and inclusion within our employee experience, ensuring every team member feels valued and empowered.
2. Alongside local and national expert partners, champion the highest standards of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access within the Cultural and Live Music sector.
3. Set ambitious sustainability targets and integrate environmentally responsible practices across our operations, programming, and partnerships.
4. Grow and diversify income through private investment, strategic partnerships and commercial activity, nurturing and developing our supporter base to support long-term resilience and financial stability.
5. Invest in digital tools, operational systems, and physical infrastructure to improve efficiency, capacity building, support growth, and futureproof the organisation.



PRIORITY PROJECTS

To deliver on our strategic Goals and Objectives, we will create brand new programmes of work. And we've already begun, with a number of priority projects on which we can focus, develop and grow over the five year period. Below is a snapshot of work that can be scaled for greater impact.

CREATIVE AMBITION

Bristol Beacon's peerless programme delivers high-profile red carpet moments that showcase Bristol and the West of England on a national and international stage.

1. **In-house festivals:** Simple Things, Bristol New Music, BBC Proms in Bristol.
2. **Orchestral season** of **20** concerts including **Orchestra in Residence Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra** and **Associate Artists Paraorchestra** and **London Symphony Orchestra**.
3. Restored 1956 **Harrison & Harrison concert Organ**, one of the largest in the country.
4. Star names from **Lily Allen** to **Ludovico Einaudi** to **Kraftwerk** in a season of **500 concerts and gigs** per year.

CREATIVE PATHWAYS

Bristol Beacon is actively nurturing music talent through new ambitious, inclusive talent and skills development programmes.

1. **Resident Artists scheme:** multi-year support including rehearsal space, mentoring, funding, and performance opportunities.
2. **Festival & Carnival Lab:** mentoring, workshops, and industry insight that build skills and sustainable career pathways into the creative sector.
3. **Above the Noise: the West of England's music industry event** designed to connect anyone active in the region's music scene with the modern music business.
4. Partnership with **Bristol College** and **annual work experience** programme: creating new pathways into the music industry.

INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE

Bristol Beacon is **one of only two organisations in the country** to combine a flagship concert venue with a music education hub, creating unique opportunities for the region's young people.

1. **Regional hub lead organisation** delivering high-quality musical experiences across the West of England.
2. Supporting schools, ensembles, and individuals with **expertise and resources**.
3. **Appointed by Department for Education** to create Key Stage 1 & Key Stage 2 **national curriculum resources for music**.
4. **Earthsong programme** delivers music tuition to **Bristol schools in greatest need**.
5. Reach **30,000 young people** annually via lessons, ensembles, and large-scale events.

POWER OF COMMUNITY

Bristol Beacon believes that music has a unique power to inspire, connect, and transform lives.

1. Our **Hope Creative** programme has a **10-year legacy** supporting **young people in care and young carers**.
2. Partnering with 50 organisations as part of the regional **Impact Alliance**.
3. Working closely with public services including **NHS England** and **Bristol City Council** on arts and health programmes.
4. From 2026, delivery lead on the **All Together Now** programme to **reduce isolation and boost community cohesion**.
5. Committed to **green initiatives** and **reducing environmental impact**.



STRONG FOUNDATIONS

Bristol Beacon's work is already firmly rooted in our purpose: as a not-for-profit organisation, each day we create welcoming, world-class spaces for music, connection and community, and ensure this work resonates across the city and beyond.

Two years on from reopening our doors after a transformational redevelopment, the scale and depth of our activity demonstrate how the renewed Beacon has become a cultural engine for Bristol – supporting artists, welcoming audiences, and nurturing creativity for people of all ages.

The transformation equipped us with exceptional performance spaces, improved accessibility, and significantly expanded capacity. This investment now underpins the breadth of what we deliver every single day. In 2025 alone we staged **789** events and welcomed **500,000** visitors, selling more than **362,000** tickets across a programme spanning international artists, contemporary touring acts, orchestral work, community celebration, emerging talent and young people's learning and performance.

Our education and community work continues to grow in scale and impact. We delivered **59,000** music lessons, and ran **296** workshops with early years groups, families, elders and community partners. Our artist development activity supported **270+ emerging musicians, creatives and industry professionals**, providing the skills, networks and confidence to build sustainable careers.

Behind the scenes, our organisation is underpinned and powered by the skill, commitment and hard work of our staff, whose expertise enables us to deliver meaningful impact every day. Across conferences, hospitality, food and drink, and public engagement, the Beacon has become a vibrant civic hub – reflected in an average **4.6 star audience rating** and thousands of memorable experiences created daily.

With the support of key public partners including Arts Council England, Department for Education, Bristol City Council, West of England Combined Authority and a range of Trusts, **we have strong foundations which set the stage for the future.**

Bristol Beacon is already delivering for Bristol and the West of England, and in the next five years will further build the capability, partnerships and creative energy to lead cultural ambition in the region – championing inclusion, nurturing talent and making brilliant music experiences accessible to all.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

This plan has been developed throughout 2025 by the Leadership Team with the active oversight of the Board. We have:

1. Convened a facilitated away-day for the Board and Leadership Team to consider our progress to date, review and reflect on our work, identify our successes we wish to build upon, challenges to address and new areas for development.
2. Held staff consultation sessions utilising a Group Consensus Model to gather and share ideas and hopes for the next five years, with all staff contributions included in the overall process.
3. Held Leadership Team away-days to explore goals and objectives in detail, and identify priorities.
4. Invited community-based partners to engage with the process, contributing their aspirations for Bristol Beacon into the plan.
5. Engaged consultancy Fly A Kite to work with the Leadership Team to assess how the strategic direction of this plan aligns with current brand messages, gauge any brand gaps, and begin planning how the strategy will inform new brand stories to engage audiences and stakeholders in our work.
6. Presented back to all staff to ensure engagement with the draft plan and opportunities for discussion and feedback.
7. Held detailed discussions with the Board prior to adopting the final strategy plan.



FINANCE & RISK

We have an annual operating turnover of circa £10.7m, of which 76% is earned income, 12% is public funding from the Department for Education in our role as the West of England Music Hub, 10% is fundraised income and 2% is public funding from Arts Council England as part of the National Portfolio.

This Plan is predicated on continued core public funding from Arts Council England at current levels. There are likely to continue to be opportunities for project funding, such as we have secured in recent years for capital expenditure and creative learning and engagement projects. We are currently supported by major funders including Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Earthsong Foundation, St Monica Trust, the Grateful Society and Youth Music, and by corporate and individual donors.

In 2024/25 we ended the year with a small unrestricted deficit of £49,763 and we currently hold free reserves of £515,468.

From 2025/26, we are able to claim orchestra tax relief for the first time for some of our creative learning programme.

We hold a maintenance fund of £1 million granted to us from the capital transformation project. Ongoing maintenance and capital investment responsibilities are shared between Bristol City Council and Bristol Music Trust.

We maintain a full and detailed risk register which is reviewed by Finance Risk And Audit Committee and discussed by the full Board of Trustees. Any issues or change around risk are reviewed by the Board as a standing item at every meeting.

IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUTATION

Implementation and Evaluation

This Strategy provides the foundation for Bristol Beacon's business and operational planning through to 2031. Each year we will develop and agree a set of aligned plans and monitoring processes to ensure clear delivery and accountability across the organisation.

Programming

We will produce annual programming plans for our core Artistic Programme, across Beacon Hall, Lantern Hall, Cellars venues, and our Creative Learning and Engagement Programme. These will set out our artistic vision, audience development aims, and community impact priorities for the year ahead.

Business Plan, Budget and Reserves Strategy

A detailed business plan and budget, including our reserves strategy, will be prepared annually and approved by the Board each March for the following financial year.

Operational Plans and KPIs

We will develop an annual operational plan with clear KPIs. These plans will translate strategic priorities into day-to-day activity, delivery milestones, and measurable outcomes.

Staff Objectives and Professional Development

All colleagues will take part in an annual appraisal process through which individual objectives are set. This will reflect the overarching Strategy and yearly organisational plans, ensuring alignment at every level.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

As part of this framework, we will ensure full compliance with our funding agreements with Arts Council England and Bristol City Council. We will report progress against all agreed Activity Plans and Investment Principles according to required schedules.

Our Activity and Investment Principles Plans for Arts Council England will be reviewed and approved by the Board each year.



 **bristolbeacon**
 **@bristol_beacon**
 **bristolbeacon**
 **bristolbeacon.org**
 **Bristol Beacon**



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Bristol Beacon is run by Bristol Music Trust. Bristol Music Trust is a charity registered in England & Wales (no. 1140898). A non-profit-making company limited by guarantee. Registered in England no. 7531978. Registered office:
Bristol Beacon, Bristol, BS1 5AR.

All photography by **SoulMedia** and **ELJayBriss**