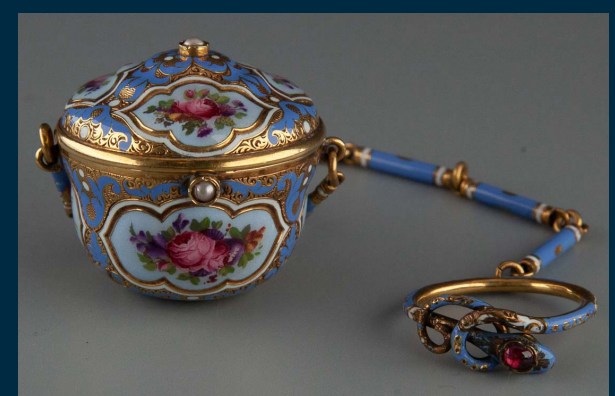
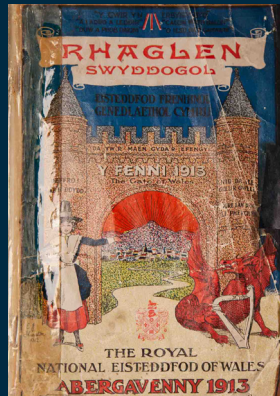
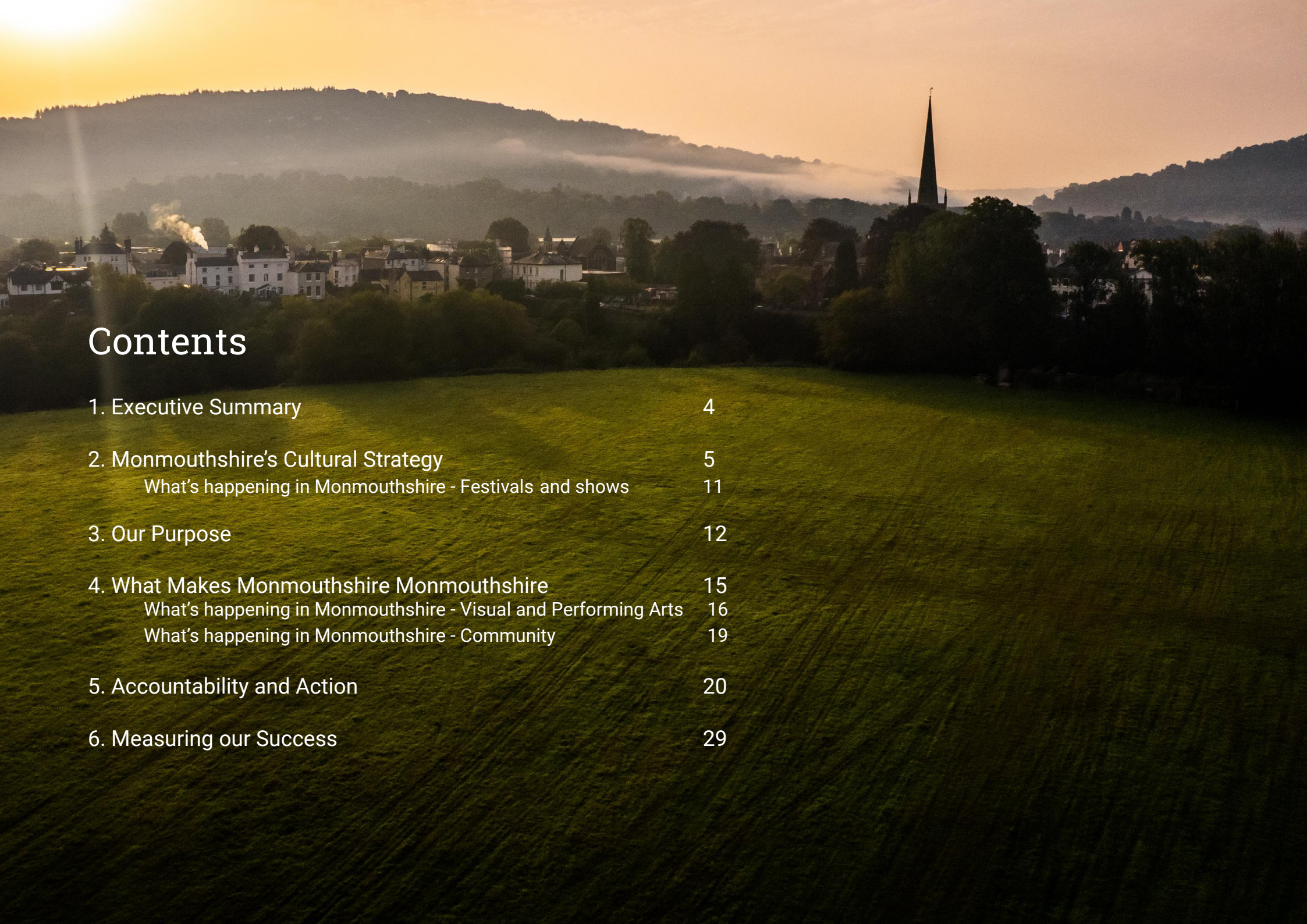


# A Cultural Strategy for Monmouthshire

2025 - 2035







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## Welcome

from Council Leader, Mary Ann Brocklesby

I am always amazed at the excellence and diversity of culture in Monmouthshire. Our county really does have something for everyone. What's more I am inspired by the extraordinary breadth of talent of all ages who contribute to the vibrancy and quality of our cultural life.

Monmouthshire Council has a wonderful inheritance of historic buildings, exciting museum collections, beautiful parks, the Borough Theatre and Caldicot Castle which we hold in trust for future generations and manage on behalf of the public.

Even more importantly, and alongside Town and Community Councils, we have a role in supporting the many volunteers who make community events and performances happen, bringing people together and brightening all our lives.

The cultural industries are important to our economy. Monmouthshire is home to hundreds of amazing people – from poets to musicians, textile artists to ceramicists and film makers to landscape painters to name but a few - who create the culture we all consume and bring wealth and visitors to our county.

This Strategy aims to bring all these strands together, as part of working towards a greener, fairer Monmouthshire, where everyone can enjoy their chosen activities in our thriving towns and beautiful landscapes.



## Croeso

from Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing and Tourism, Sara Burch

Monmouthshire is a wonderful place to live and visit because there is always something happening. This Strategaeth Ddiwylliannol/Cultural Strategy sets out our plans to support and amplify our county's rich cultural life.

We want a future where everyone, at every stage of life can be creative and active, can find the thing that makes their heart sing, and find other people who share their passion.

We want to be a county where strange and delightful things occur in the landscape, that hosts world-class events as well as the intimate and local, contemporary as well as traditional, and where people visit as much for cultural experience as for our breathtaking scenery. So many people give their time to run events, share their skills and enrich life in Monmouthshire towns and villages.

Our county is also full of people making a living through their creativity and by providing experiences and hospitality that give pleasure and bring people together. This strategy aims to celebrate their achievements and address how, by working together, we can create even more opportunities, more employment and more moments to treasure.

# 1. Executive Summary

Monmouthshire stands at a pivotal moment in its tairh ddiwylliannol/cultural journey. Our landscapes, our people, and our heritage together form an extraordinary foundation from which we can build a thriving and connected future. This Cultural Strategy sets out a bold and necessary vision for the next decade, one that recognises culture not as an isolated activity, but as a powerful force shaping wellbeing, economic growth, community resilience, and our sense of identity.

Across Monmouthshire, culture is lived. It is expressed in our festivals and performances, in our castles and market towns, in our community halls and creative hubs, and in the small moments of connection that happen every day. It is reflected in the passion of our artists, volunteers, audiences, and local organisations who bring imagination and energy to every corner of the county. Their work enriches the lives of our children, young people and maturer residents and reinforces a deep sense of belonging and pride.

Culture also drives prosperity. Creative industries, heritage tourism, and community events play a crucial role in supporting local businesses, skilled employment and the visitor economy. This strategy seeks to build on that momentum by strengthening creative capacity, promoting collaboration, and improving how we share Monmouthshire's story with the world.

This strategy recognises that culture thrives when communities thrive. It places people at the centre ensuring that opportunities to participate, create, learn, and celebrate are accessible to all. The ambitions set out here will help reduce inequality, foster inclusion, and support mental and physical wellbeing through shared experiences, active travel, and vibrant public spaces.

Our heritage assets are an important part of the cultural offer across Monmouthshire. The Heritage Strategy is a separate document that looks at them in detail, including researched site priorities and action plans.

In adopting this Cultural Strategy, we affirm our confidence in Monmouthshire's creativity, resilience, and potential. We commit to celebrating what makes this place unique while nurturing new ideas and opportunities. Above all, we recognise culture as a shared endeavour - one that belongs to every resident, every visitor, and every generation to come.

Together, we can ensure that Monmouthshire's cultural future is vibrant, sustainable, and inspiring.



## 2. Monmouthshire's Cultural Strategy

Located between the curves of the River Wye and the rolling hills of Bannau Brycheiniog/the Brecon Beacons, Monmouthshire stands as a vibrant testament to the interplay of natural beauty and human ingenuity. From historic towns where stories of Roman legions and medieval lords mingle with the local life to the tranquil countryside dotted with stone cottages and hidden abbeys, Monmouthshire's landscape is a canvas painted with centuries of culture, history and resilience.

These landscapes offer not only visual splendour, but also serve as places of inspiration, recreation, and connection. Artists, writers, and musicians have long turned to these hills and rivers for creative spark. The walking trails, cycle routes, and waterways invite residents and visitors alike to experience the outdoors, fostering well-being and a sense of belonging.

Monmouthshire is blessed with a wealth of tangible and intangible heritage. Its castles, such as those at Caldicot, Raglan, Chepstow, and Abergavenny, stand as enduring witnesses to the county's strategic significance across centuries of conflict and alliance. Market towns bustle with echoes of medieval trade, while rural churches, bridges, and stone cottages speak of lives lived.

But heritage in Monmouthshire is not only found in stone and mortar. It lives in stories passed down by families, in local festivals, crafts, and traditions. Agricultural fairs, music gatherings, and seasonal celebrations all contribute to a rich calendar of cultural expression anchoring communities in a shared sense of place and memory.

The Welsh language holds a cultural and historical significance for Monmouthshire, serving as a vital expression of local identity and heritage. Hosting the National Eisteddfod of Wales in 2016 created an excitement around the language. Welsh learner activity has increased demonstrating the interest to speak bilingually. Local eisteddfodau are regularly held in schools including in our three Welsh language primary schools across the county. Integrating the Welsh language into the county's cultural strategy strengthens community cohesion, supports educational opportunities, and attracts visitors who are keen to experience authentic Welsh culture. The preservation and promotion of the Welsh language not only honors the region's rich linguistic heritage but also ensures that future generations remain connected to their roots, fostering a sense of pride and belonging.

Everyone has a right to participate in the cultural life of Monmouthshire, whether that be as a child, a teenager, a young person or an older adult. It is important to have opportunities to access it in a variety of ways. This could include at home, in school, in our village and town halls, in open spaces, through organised events and at informal get-togethers.





Faith has equally played a formative role in shaping Monmouthshire's cultural landscape, with its churches, chapels, and faith-based traditions reflecting centuries of spiritual and bywyd cymunedol/communal life. Recognising and embracing the diverse expressions of faith within the county's cultural strategy supports inclusive community engagement and mutual understanding. By referencing both language and faith into its cultural strategy, Monmouthshire demonstrates its commitment to celebrating diversity, nurturing cultural vibrancy, and strengthening the unique character of the county.

Creating a cultural strategy for Monmouthshire will assist in preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of the county, ensuring that children, young people, older adults and future generations can appreciate and learn from it. Implementing this strategy now is crucial because it aligns with the growing recognition of the importance of culture in enhancing the quality of life. By bringing this strategy to our communities, we can ensure that cultural resources are accessible to everyone, promoting inclusivity and diversity. This approach not only enriches the lives of individuals but also strengthens the social fabric of Monmouthshire - a well-defined cultural strategy will attract tourism, boost the local economy and create job opportunities.

The cultural strategy for Monmouthshire is an investment in the county's future. It is a statement of confidence in the power of culture to unite, inspire, and transform.

It will ensure that Monmouthshire's stories are told, its creativity is celebrated, and its communities are empowered to shape their own futures. The geography of the county contributes to this, with its historic bridges, connected routes, and river crossings bringing people together, fostering the exchange of ideas, customs, and commerce. This is further strengthened by our strong twinning and cultural exchanges that offer international experiences thus further enriching learning and knowledge. By encouraging new ways of experiencing and interpreting our environment through festivals, art, storytelling, and sustainable tourism, we aim to ensure that Monmouthshire remains alive with meaning for children, young people and older adults and for present and future generations.

By working together across boundaries and generations, we can build a cultural legacy that will inspire, sustain, and connect us for years to come. Whether you are a lifelong resident, a creative professional, a newcomer or a visitor, you have a role to play in shaping the cultural life of this remarkable county.

Monmouthshire's story is still being written. With imagination, commitment, and collaboration, we can ensure that its next chapters are rich with possibility.

*'Culture is the sea we swim in'* (quote from survey participant)



# The impact and influence of culture

Culture is a living, breathing force that shapes the fabric of our lives and communities. At its heart, culture is a vessel of shared stories, one that anchors individuals of all ages within a larger collective. Participation in cultural traditions, celebrations, and rituals strengthens the sense of perthyn/belonging. Whether through language, cuisine, music, or dress, culture provides markers of identity, affirming individual worth and connection to others.

Culture broadens horizons and opens doors. Exposure to diverse artistic forms, narratives, and perspectives encourages curiosity. It provides opportunities to learn, to dream, and to imagine new possibilities. For many, cultural activities are gateways to discovering hidden talents, developing skills, and pursuing passions.

One of the most significant contributions of cultural engagement lies in its ability to support mental health and well-being. Participation in culture can reduce stress, enhance mood, and contribute to better physical health by encouraging active lifestyles. Culture supports emotional resilience and lifelong personal growth, enriching individual lives and the wider community. The act of participating in a concert or bellringing group or attending a theatre performance can lift spirits and alleviate feelings of isolation.

Opportunities exist to combine education and cultural enrichment within formal learning settings and community organisations.

The community values difference and celebrates slowness - not as a lack of action, but as space to breathe, reflect, and grow.



We understand the importance and value of cultural activities for children and young people, nurturing their creativity, self-expression, boosting their confidence and promoting a sense of identity. By participating in music, art, drama, dance, or heritage projects, young people develop essential skills such as teamwork, communication, critical thinking and transferable skills that can support their future ambitions, while also enriching society as a whole.

Overall, involvement in cultural activities supports emotional resilience and lifelong personal growth, enriching both individual lives and the wider community.

The celfyddydau creadigol/creative arts demand imagination, discipline, and resilience, encouraging participants to challenge themselves and explore new aspects of their personalities.

Comments from residents on how culture impacts or affects their lives:

*It offers a bit of peace from the relentless day to day and whether you are exploring a ruin, listening to music or trying new food at the night market, it gives you a sense of belonging and a place in the world. (Quote from survey participant)*

*It enhances my life when I can find things to do, makes me feel invigorated and inspired. (Quote from survey participant)*







For some, the journey leads to professional paths in the creative industries - artists, writers, technicians, performers, designers, and craftspeople whose contributions enrich society. The cultivation of creative skills through cultural cyfranogiad/participation not only drives personal development but also helps build vibrant economies.

Creative industries generate employment, attract tourism, and stimulate innovation across sectors, such as film, music, fashion and design, contributing significantly to local prosperity. Events also act as an economic driver, providing opportunities to support local businesses in areas such as event management, hospitality and transport. We recognise the difficulty in getting into these areas of employment and will look to support apprenticeship opportunities for young people entering the profession and those looking at a career change at a later stage in life.

Monmouthshire has provided the backdrop for blockbuster films such as Captain America and long-running BBC series including Doctor Who. The film adaptation of Owen Sheers' 'Resistance' is set in the remote and stunningly beautiful Vale of Ewyas while the more recent Netflix production 'Sex Education' features a variety of picturesque locations within the inspirational Wye Valley. We also have the ITV period drama Sanditon filming extensively at Caldicot Castle, with the Michael Sheen directed BBC drama 'The Way' and Guy Ritchie directed Netflix drama "Young Sherlock Holmes" both filming in Monmouth.

### So, what makes Monmouthshire... Monmouthshire?

It's the quiet power of the landscape, the deep roots of heritage and the spark of creativity. Here, culture isn't something we attend, it's something we live.



An increase in **creative capacity** leads to **cultural activities** which have individual and community benefits. We see a better **tourism** offer which at a societal level leads to an **improved economy** and at a personal level we see improvements in **health** and **wellbeing**.





# What is happening across Monmouthshire

## Gwyliau a Sioeau/Festivals & Shows

Festivals and performances are central to Monmouthshire's cultural life, providing a stage for talent, collaboration, and the sheer joy of gathering. Some highlights of our calendar include:

- **Wye Valley Festival:** Celebrating music, art, and the landscape that inspires them, this festival brings together performers and audiences in venues as varied as ancient churches and outdoor woodland.
- **Medieval Festivals:** Reenactments, jousts and historical workshops transform visitors back in time, giving new life to Monmouthshire's castles and historic sites. History is not just preserved here - it is performed and lived.
- **Devauden Festival:** An eclectic music festival with a family-friendly vibe, Devauden draws a passionate crowd for a weekend of concerts, workshops, and fun. Local bands share the stage with national acts, showcasing the county's musical diversity.
- **Abergavenny Food Festival:** This celebrated event draws foodies from across the UK and beyond to sample the region's produce, watch live chef demonstrations, and learn about sustainable food culture. The festival is a feast for the senses, reflecting the county's rich agricultural heritage and innovative spirit.
- **Agricultural Shows:** Shows at Monmouth, Usk and Chepstow play a vital role in supporting local agriculture, stimulating the economy, and nurturing a vibrant community spirit. They unite people, preserve rural traditions and showcase the best of the region's heritage.
- **Literary and Writing Events:** Monmouthshire is a haven for writers and book lovers. Literary festivals, author talks, and book clubs abound, turning market towns into homes for storytelling and the written word.

Festivals are year-round projects anchored by creative committees and community participation. They help foster new friendships, spark inspiration, and nurture the next generation of artists and performers.

Monmouthshire's vibrant creativity, culture, and heritage will inspire thriving, connected communities and a prosperous, sustainable future by empowering creative talent, celebrating diversity, and fostering well-being for all.







## Our purpose

By 2035, our ambition is for Sir Fynwy/Monmouthshire to be recognised nationally and internationally as a destination where culture flourishes for visitors and residents, children and adults, teenagers and older people, seamlessly blending history, creativity, and well-being across generations.

Culture can address inequality, enhance personal wellbeing, and foster social connections. Across Monmouthshire free entry and low-cost options to access culture can be found in many locations. For example, the museums in Monmouth, Chepstow and Abergavenny, in our heritage attractions such as Clydach Iron Works and Tintern Old Station and in green spaces such as Linda Vista Gardens and Caldicot Country Park. We also recognise that in some instances, payment is necessary and investment in cultural opportunities is valuable to all. By providing shared spaces for expression and dialogue, cultural activities can create opportunities for inclusion, celebrate diversity and bridge divides, helping to reduce social disparities. Research shows engagement with arts and culture supports mental and emotional health and offers outlets for creativity, reflection, and stress relief. Furthermore, cultural events and traditions unite people, strengthening community bonds and a sense of belonging, which are essential for a harmonious and resilient society.

To support culture we will, with partners, source and facilitate funding to invest in resources, our community volunteers, cultural venues, landscape and historical spaces. We will collaboratively provide spaces to support local artists and creatives to showcase their work. Existing examples of this include 'Art in the Bar' in the Borough Theatre, and the first Caldicot Arts festival in 2025, celebrating local artists and creatives.

Continued investment in active travel routes promote healthier lifestyles by encouraging walking and cycling, reducing reliance on cars and lowering carbon emissions. They enhance community connectivity, making it easier and safer for people to access local services, schools, and workplaces as well as participating in cultural events across the county.

Monmouthshire's outstanding natural heritage will be protected and ensuring our landscapes and biodiversity are valued for generations to come. Whether facing the challenges of climate change, demographic shifts, or economic uncertainty, Monmouthshire will be ready to adapt and respond. Culture is a source of resilience as it helps communities reflect, reimagine, and rebuild.





Our parks and open spaces will continue hosting major events and festivals, drawing thousands of visitors each year and providing local people with spaces to connect, dathlu/celebrate, and play.

Through ambitious placemaking, we will breathe new life into our communities. Our museums will continue to tell the stories of our communities through their diverse collection of documents and objects, hosting exhibitions that evoke pride, challenge and reflection. Our libraries will continue to host literary events for all ages and we will continue to offer space in our buildings for artists and makers. Town centres will be revitalised, and towns and villages will be animated by events, creative projects, and public art. By providing safe, connected environments for leisure and recreation, we will empower individuals and families to lead active, healthy lives.

Together we will foster communities that are vibrant, resilient, and connected. Cultural activity will champion the customs, traditions, and figures that shape our rich heritage, celebrating the diversity and depth of our communities. It will contribute to a thriving, sustainable economy by driving skilled employment and creating rewarding jobs.

Monmouthshire will welcome visitors in ways that are sustainable and positive for local communities. Monmouthshire's towns and villages will be alive with cafés, restaurants, galleries, leisure activities, and creative businesses, offering everyone the chance to enjoy and participate in our cultural life.

The strategy is a commitment to place culture and its people's wellbeing at the centre of Monmouthshire's future. By harnessing the power of creativity, heritage, leisure, and community, we will build a county where people and places thrive together, memories are made, and new stories are written.



## 4. What makes Monmouthshire Monmouthshire?

Monmouthshire is buzzing with creativity. People speak yn angerddol/passionately about the land itself. The dramatic Black Mountains, the picturesque Usk and Wye Valley, Tintern's mystical atmosphere, and our National Landscapes (previously AONB) create not just stunning backdrops but deep personal connections. For many, the landscape has been life changing; *"I didn't realise I was an artist until I came to Monmouthshire. The county doesn't just support creative practice, it awakens it. The soil is good, the views are better, and the impact on wellbeing and imagination is lasting"* (Workshop Participant).

This is a place where nature and heritage are intertwined. The canal rich with history and wildlife is more than a historic route, a place for everyone, from walkers and families to artists and heritage lovers. Improving cycle and walking routes help people experience the landscape in a more connected and sustainable way.

Monmouthshire boasts a remarkable density of castles and churches. These heritage assets are not just monuments; they are reminders of the county's long and varied past, and often serve as venues for events, performances, and festivals.

The county's identity as a borderland adds complexity. There is a strong sense of place, of movement and meeting points. Influences come from different directions which contribute to our unique culture.

Volunteers across Monmouthshire are the lifeblood of cultural events, bringing invaluable energy, passion, and commitment that transform each activity and event into a truly memorable celebration.

We are fortunate that so many give their time to ensure that activities continue to be provided and grow for our communities and future generations to enjoy.

*"The communities of Monmouthshire and adjoining co-communities are special with our own histories and friendships. This is authentic culture of people living and working together across the imaginary boundaries between counties and countries".* (Quote from survey participant)

From Abergavenny to Usk, Caldicot and Chepstow to Monmouth, each town has its own personality and traditions. It is important that we acknowledge the different characteristics in the North and South of the county alongside recognising its whole. The living levels at Magor and Undy reflect a rich historical landscape shaped by past industrial and rural activities, significantly influencing local identity, community life, and the preservation of South Wales' cultural heritage. The network of villages creates a cultural patchwork that is unique to Monmouthshire.





## What's happening across Monmouthshire

### Visual and Performing Arts

Creativity in Monmouthshire flourishes through a dense network of local groups and clubs and Monmouthshire's landscape is dotted with creative hubs where ideas are born, rehearsed, shared, and celebrated.

- Wye Valley Sculpture Garden provides an opportunity to experience creative practice.
- Artists Meet Ups like Abergavenny & Grosmont Drink and Draw where artists gather to share ideas, collaborate on projects, and find new inspiration in each other's work.
- Dramatic Monmouthshire: From pantomimes to serious theatre, amateur dramatics groups provide a supportive home for aspiring performers and backstage wizards, alongside writers and directors, in conjunction with those for whom theatre is part of their professional life.
- Choirs play an important role in our communities with Kingfisher Choir, Monmouth Community Choir, Caldicot Male Voice Choir and Monmouth Choral Society being some examples.

Grassroot activities are the lifeblood of the county, ensuring that culture is always evolving and that everyone finds their creative voice.



## What's happening in our cymunedau/communities

We asked our local communities what exciting things are happening in the area and their answers painted a vibrant picture of culture, community, and celebration. These are just some of the responses:

Local organisations help drive creativity. Dance Blast brings movement and energy to the community, Happy Dragons Theatre creates performances for, with and about the people of Wales; Suitcase Theatre offers imaginative performances, and the Film Society including Abergavenny Film club, fosters thoughtful discussion through cinema. The amateur arts scene is thriving too, with passionate people creating and performing across the county.

Music has a strong presence, from world-renowned Rockfield Studios and Monnow Valley Studio to events like Usk Choral Festival and Castell Rock that tie performance directly to place. Pubs such as The Boat Penallt, Hen & Chickens and the King's Arms in Abergavenny, are part of the cultural ecosystem where local stories, songs, and community gatherings thrive.

Thriving U3A's, Women's Institute groups and local History Societies provide a rich diverse menu of experiences and opportunities across the county.

The AM and Raglan Music Festivals, local church bell ringing groups, Morris dancers, Abergavenny Art Festival, Caldicot Art Festival and the Wye Valley River Festival bring people together through music, performance, and shared values. VE Day commemorations also stand out, reminding us of the deep connections between culture and history.

Festive markets including Magor Frost Fayre bring sparkle and enjoyment alongside the annual turning on of the christmas lights across our towns and rural communities.

Monmouthshire boasts a vibrant sporting scene which enriches its cultural life. Chepstow Racecourse, renowned for hosting prestigious fixtures such as the Welsh Grand National draws crowds from the region and beyond.



Our picturesque cefn gwlad/countryside is an attractive destination for amateur and professional cyclists, from local sportives to the Tour of Britain. These are opportunities for participation and spectating and bringing local communities together.

But it's not just the big events that people are talking about - smaller, more unique events are equally loved. From the Plant and Seed Swap by Transition Town Monmouth to the wonderfully quirky duck herding at Monmouth Carnival, there's a joyful sense of creativity everywhere. The Wye Makes and Far Open Art Trail give artists a chance to shine. There's even a Chepstow Elvis Festival, and a "May the Fourth Be With You" performance for Star Wars fans.

The locations where cultural activity happens are varied. Whether it's a community archaeological dig, a theatre production in an open space, artists and makers in our markets or a cosy book club gathering in a local community centre or even a pub, the cultural calendar is full of surprises.

The places that host these activities are just as important. Well loved venues include the Borough Theatre, Melville Theatre, Bookish and the bustling Abergavenny Market.

The Savoy Theatre in Monmouth and the Chapel and Art Shop in Abergavenny offer more intimate cultural experiences. Shire Hall and Plas Gunter Mansion are both embarking on ambitious refurbishment projects which will revitalize and regenerate their towns. The newly refurbished Drill Hall in Chepstow and Monmouthshire's many community halls hosts events of all kinds. And our cultural spaces go beyond being venues for events, they are also spaces where communities can come for support in times of trouble whether that be for practical assistance or somewhere to reflect.

Creative spaces like TogetherWorks in Caldicot and relaxed settings like The Boat Inn, Penallt, and Robin Hood, Monmouth, a 'Night out' supported cinema showing in a village hall, prove that culture happens everywhere - from formal venues to informal community hubs. The natural beauty of Wentwood Forest plays a role in Monmouthshire's cultural life as do those venues in many of our villages and towns – our schools and village halls.

These events embody Monmouthshire's ethos of "everyone welcome" - where amateurs and professionals, old hands and curious newcomers, are all encouraged to participate.





# What's happening across Monmouthshire

## Community

Partnership is the golden thread running through the fabric of Monmouthshire, evident in the multitude of grassroots and community-led events that light up the calendar year-round. They are more than just dates in the diary; they are living expressions of Monmouthshire's warmth and togetherness. Many events thrive on gwirfoddolwr/volunteer power, local know-how, and an openness to all, making them the true soul of the county. Among them are:

- **Monmouth Lantern Parade:** Each winter, Monmouth's streets are transformed into a river of light as locals craft and carry lanterns, illuminating both the town and the bonds between neighbours. What began as a simple act of gathering has blossomed into a well loved annual tradition, bringing people of all ages together to celebrate creativity and unity.
- **Mari Lwyd Tradition in Chepstow:** Folk heritage is alive and kicking in Monmouthshire. The ancient ritual of Mari Lwyd, where a horse's skull, decked in ribbons, leads a singing and Morris dancing procession from pub to pub. This event keeps the myth and magic of Welsh folklore pulsing through Chepstow's streets.
- **Usk in Bloom:** Every summer, the town of Usk explodes in a riot of colour as locals compete and collaborate to make their gardens and public spaces blossom. It's not just about flowers: it's about pride, friendly rivalry, and the collective effort that transforms the entire town.
- **Monmouth Living Windows:** Shopfronts become living canvases, animated by pop-up performances, art installations, and imaginative window displays. This event blurs the lines between everyday life and performance, inviting passers-by to pause, reflect, and connect with the creativity at the community's core.
- **Pride Events:** Monmouthshire's Pride celebrations, wherever they spring up are thriving and growing. These events champion inclusivity and diversity. From rainbow parades to community discussions, Pride in Monmouthshire is a beacon of acceptance and celebration.
- **Remembrance Parades:** These countywide events provide an opportunity for all generations with a physical reminder of all those who have served and sacrificed ensuring that no-one is forgotten.





## 5. Accountability and Action

Culture is a vital driver for achieving Monmouthshire's broader uchelgeisiau/ambitions and realising the goals of the council and its partners. Our long-term vision is ambitious but realistic and will bring together a variety of organisations to ensure delivery.

Delivering this strategy will require steady and consistent leadership, good governance, and close collaboration by individuals and organisations from across Monmouthshire and beyond. Delivery will happen through creative arts, heritage and leisure organisations who collectively make up the 'cultural sector' alongside its wider community groups, businesses, education providers, and public bodies, each of whom has a role to play in developing and promoting culture across the county and all benefit from doing so.

Effective delivery also relies on the proactive involvement and leadership of the County Council, community and town councils, alongside stakeholders and partners. Whilst the council ensures that the cultural strategy aligns with wider community goals and local development plans, community and town councils support and fund events and venues and act as vital links to local residents, fostering a sense of ownership, encouraging participation, and ensuring that the strategy reflects the needs and aspirations of the people it serves.

Monmouthshire Council supports cultural activity through several roles:

- **Regulator:** Oversees planning, licensing, and public safety at events through collaboration with internal departments, emergency services and hospitality businesses.
- **Educator:** puts cultural experience at the heart of the school curriculum and provides lifelong adult education opportunities.
- **Public Realm Steward:** Maintains streets, town centres, parks, open spaces and public rights of way to ensure they are clean and accessible culture filled spaces, enjoyable to all.
- **Landlord:** Responsible for venues where cultural activities take place, partnering with tenants, often volunteer-run to improve use, access, and sustainability.
- **Funder:** Channels funding and resources to support cultural initiatives through partnerships.
- **Information Hub:** Our Tourism team and the Visit Monmouthshire website promote the county as a visitor destination. Working in partnership with Town Councils, hospitality and culture businesses and events promoters we can do more to raise the profile of Monmouthshire and develop audiences.
- **Service Provider:** We operate museums, theatres, heritage sites leisure centres and libraries.





As a body with county wide responsibility in the areas listed above we will strive to create cyfleoedd/opportunities for culture to thrive and develop within Monmouthshire in partnership with our communities and creative practitioners.

Engaging with local businesses, cultural organisations, and educational providers broadens the reach of the strategy, leverages expertise, and fosters innovative approaches to cultural development. The council with its partners can maximise the cultural, social, environmental and economic impacts of the strategy, contributing to the vibrancy and resilience of Monmouthshire's communities.

Within the first year, a Cultural Partnership Forum (CPF) for Monmouthshire will be established. This Forum will be responsible for overseeing the implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement of the cultural strategy. The Cultural Partnership Forum will comprise representatives drawn from the public, private, and voluntary sectors, ensuring a broad mix of expertise and perspectives relevant to Monmouthshire's cultural landscape.

- The Forum will provide strategic leadership for the cultural strategy, shaping priorities and ensuring alignment with local and national agendas.
- It will monitor and review delivery against an agreed evaluation framework with clear impacts and outcomes and make recommendations for adaptation or improvement as needed.
- Forum members will continue to engage with communities who have participated bringing this Cultural Strategy to fruition.

- Forum members will engage with hard-to-reach community groups ensuring that everyone is able to participate
- Members will act as ambassadors, engaging their respective networks and communities to foster participation and gather feedback.
- An annual report will be developed to give an update to reflect progress, challenges, and emerging opportunities.

By establishing a robust framework, Monmouthshire aims to create a sustainable, inclusive, and dynamic cultural sector, ensuring that cultural activity is embedded in decision-making and delivers meaningful benefits for communities, partners, and visitors alike.



The strategy has an initial 2-year action plan that will establish clear foundations for delivery. Establishing baseline data in the first year will be crucial as it will allow the CPF to measure progress, effaith/impact and evaluate the effectiveness of stated actions against a clear starting point.

The CPF will co-produce and develop this initial action plan to create a 10-year plan.

The actions within the plan have been grouped into three key themes: Places, People and Creative Capacity.

**Places** - our buildings, spaces, and facilities provide the canvas upon which cultural activity takes place. They must be accessible, flexible, and welcoming, designed to host a rich programme of events and activities that spark curiosity, inspire learning, and forge lasting connections.

**People** – culture in Monmouthshire lives and breathes through its people. From community volunteers and storytellers to ambitious artists and active audiences. It is people who bring vibrancy, meaning and connection to the county's cultural life.

More than just events or venues, culture here is a living network of relationships, shared memories and mutual care. Monmouthshire's cultural life also helps tackle social isolation, especially in rural areas offering social connection, safe, inclusive spaces and renewed purpose. Culture offers something vital in these moments: the opportunity to be part of something meaningful.

Community participation has the power to build empathy, belonging and emotional resilience. Cultural moments often feel bigger than just entertainment – they are transformative.

Ultimately, people make culture possible. They show up, create, organise, volunteer, remember and imagine. When people feel included, respected and supported, that culture becomes stronger and truly alive.

**Creative Capacity** is the measure of our ability to nurture and unleash imagination, innovation and artistic excellence within our communities.

However, creativity needs care, attention and investment if it's to thrive. Across the county, there's a shared desire not just to protect our cultural life, but to nurture the creative capacity of our communities from early years through adulthood.







Monmouthshire is blessed with straeon/stories, landscapes, and creative energy. Its cultural strategy is a declaration of confidence in that heritage and a commitment to future prosperity. With a carefully designed action plan, Monmouthshire can ensure that its cultural strategy is more than a statement of intent, it becomes a catalyst for genuine change.

It will enable the county to set priorities, mobilise resources, build partnerships, and measure progress in a transparent and inclusive way. Most importantly, it will empower communities to shape their own cultural destiny, ensuring that Monmouthshire's legacy endures for generations to come.

The strategy and action plan together will guide Monmouthshire toward a future where culture is not just preserved, but celebrated, developed, and shared by all.

# Moments in time across Monmouthshire

**Mesolithic period** – Monmouthshire was occupied by people who were largely nomadic following herds of animals. Long bows and arrows were being developed and flints were traded from the east for tools. Early humans used the Gwent Levels for hunting and fishing As the climate warmed the landscape became more wooded and wet.

**Bronze Age** - People were starting to use bronze although stone tools were still in use. Round barrows (burial mounds) and hillforts are being built.

**Romans**– Romans arrive in Monmouthshire establishing forts and settlements like Blestium (Monmouth), Usk (Burrium), and Abergavenny to control the local Silures tribe, with later development into important towns such as Caerwent (Venta Silurum), a major tribal capital featuring impressive defensive walls and remains of temples and houses.



**End of the last ice age** - Ice had covered much of Monmouthshire but as it retreated people return to Britain. Remains from King Athur's Cave on Little Doward show that mammoths, woolly rhinoceros and hyena lived in the Wye Valley.

**Neolithic Period**- Developments in stone tools. Beginnings of more settled communities and farming. Starting to build tombs and monuments such as the standing stones at Trellech. Trading was taking place between Britain and the European continent.



**Iron Age** - Evidence of many Iron Age hillforts in Monmouthshire such as Symonds Yat, Sudbrook and Coed y Bwnydd.

**Post Roman, Anglo Saxon and Normans** - The Celtic King Tewdric dies in Mathern in about 470AD. Christianity arrives in Monmouthshire. Important early churches included Llandogo, Lancaut and Ganerew. Offa, King of Mercia reigned from 757 to 796. Under his rule the Offa's Dyke was built which marks a boundary between the kingdoms of Mercia and Powys.



- 8500  
- 4000

- 4000  
- 2500

- 2500  
- 800

- 500  
43

43  
400

400  
1066



**Medieval/Middle ages** - Several castles were built by the Normans to control the contested Welsh border, with key examples including the "Three Castles" (White, Grosmont, Skenfrith) and major sites like Chepstow Castle, Raglan Castle, Monmouth Castle, and Abergavenny Castle.

Tintern Abbey, the first Cistercian Monastery in Wales, was founded, and dissolved 400 years later by Henry VIII.



In 1175, Abergavenny Castle was the site of a notorious massacre when William de Braose invited local Welsh leaders to a Christmas feast and had them killed. This event deepened tensions between the Norman lords and the Welsh, leaving a lasting mark on the region's history.



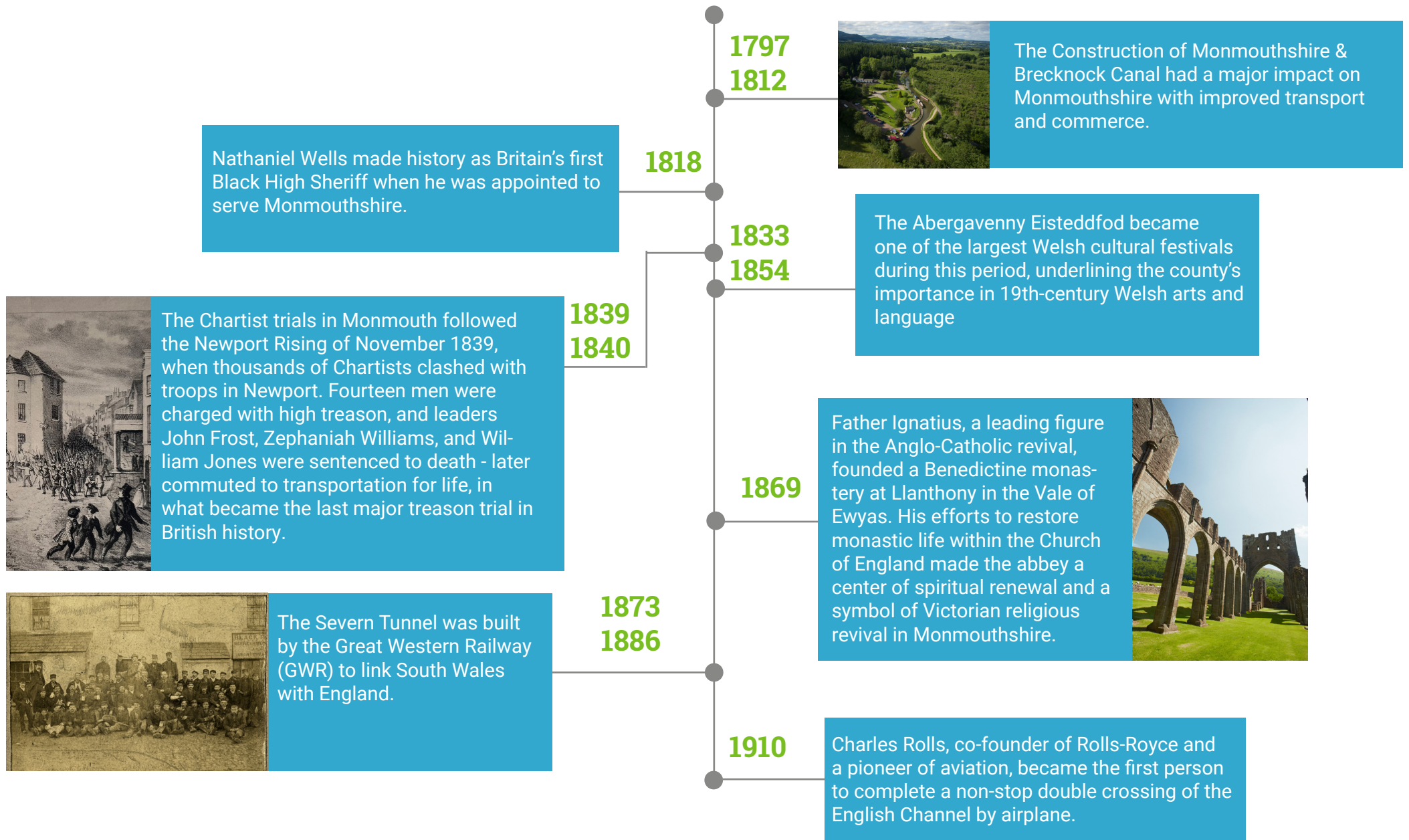
The Picturesque movement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries transformed Monmouthshire into a tourist destination. Visitors flocked to the River Wye for scenic boat tours and explored romantic ruins like Abergavenny Castle, drawn by the movement's celebration of natural beauty and historic charm.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that Earl Harold (later King Harold II) built a royal hunting lodge at Portskewett.

Owain Glyndŵr's rebellion turned Monmouthshire into a pivotal battleground during the last major Welsh uprising for independence.

**Post Medieval** – Monmouthshire played a pioneering role in Britain's industrial history. In 1536, the first brass in Britain was produced in the Angidy Valley, and by 1690, the first commercial copper smelting took place at Redbrook. These innovations relied on the River Wye, which served as the vital transport route for raw materials and finished products, driving industrial growth along its banks.

After Henry VIII's break with Rome, Catholicism faced harsh persecution, yet Plas Gunter Mansion in Abergavenny became a secret refuge for priests, with a hidden attic chapel where Mass was celebrated.







Monmouthshire becomes home to many Polish people in exile following World War 2, including artist Otto Maciag, Classical Conductor Kazimierz Hardulak and Doctor Wit Tarnawski.

The steam engines at Sudbrook Pumping Station were replaced by electric motors. The station pumps out approximately 50 million litres of water from the Severn Tunnel daily.

On 22 June 1963, the Beatles performed at Abergavenny's Borough Theatre during their early UK tour, bringing global pop culture to Monmouthshire.

Raglan Castle features in the film "Time bandits".

The Wales Coast Path opens, making it the world's first, continuous path to follow a nation's coastline.

The National Eisteddfod in 2016 is held in Abergavenny.

1940s

1962

1963

1981

2012

2016

1926

Former Piercefield Estate land was transformed into Chepstow Racecourse, opening on 6 August 1926. It soon became home to the prestigious Welsh Grand National and remains one of Wales's premier racing venues.

1958

Rockfield Studios opened at Amberley Court Farm in Monmouthshire, becoming the world's first residential recording studio, later hosting legendary artists such as Queen, Oasis, and Coldplay.

1971

The Wye Valley was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1971.



1999

Abergavenny Food Festival is established.

2011

Green Gathering relaunches at Piercefield Park, Chepstow.

And we are still creating moments in time across Monmouthshire.





## 6. Measuring our Success

This chapter outlines a detailed Cultural Strategy Action Plan for Monmouthshire for a two-year period, focusing on enhancing creative capacity, community engagement, and place development through a series of targeted actions. The plan emphasizes partnerships, education, accessibility, and sustainable cultural growth to benefit residents and visitors alike. In March 2027, a new action plan will be developed and published which will have clear baseline data within to show transparency, changes made to focus the strategy and identify emerging impacts.

Theme	Creative Capacity				
Action Number	Action we will take	Measuring progress	Links to other strategies/plans	Lead Organisation	When by?
1	Establish a Culture Partnership to facilitate the implementation of the Cultural Strategy and its future development	<b>Outcomes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A fully established Cultural Partnership Forum with clear governance and leadership structures.</li> <li>Deliver the first year of action plan and develop and agree the proceeding action plan.</li> </ul> <b>Impact:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater coordination and reduced duplication across cultural organisations.</li> <li>A more diverse voice making decisions about culture in Monmouthshire.</li> <li>Cultural activity that feels more relevant, inclusive, and reflective of diverse lived experiences.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Community and Corporate Plan - Version 3.0_Council.pdf</a>	MCC and partners	April - May 2026

Action Number	Action we will take	Measuring progress	Links to other strategies/plans	Lead Organisation	When by?
2	Establish clear baseline data that provides a factual starting point against which all future progress and changes can be measured	<p><b>Outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baseline cultural data captured and used to inform planning.</li> <li>• A countywide cultural data dashboard enabling evidence-led decision-making.</li> <li>• Annual insight reports tracking participation, economic impact, wellbeing and diversity.</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact:</b></p> <p>A better understanding of our baseline so we can make informed decisions to ensure activity leads to :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased participation among underrepresented groups—including rural residents, young people, older adults and diverse communities.</li> <li>• More equitable access to cultural activity across the county.</li> <li>• More adaptive and responsive cultural planning.</li> <li>• Ability to demonstrate long-term impact to funders, partners, stakeholders and Council with clear evidence.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Community and Corporate Plan - Version 3.0 Council.pdf</a>	Cultural Forum and Creative Cardiff	June 2026



Action Number	Action we will take	Measuring progress	Links to other strategies/plans	Lead Organisation	When by?
3	<p>Create a digital platform bringing together resources from the cultural sector in Monmouthshire. To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared marketing and publicity resources</li> <li>• A funding database that encourages organisations to work together and coordinate applications to avoid duplication where possible</li> <li>• List of approved transport providers to enable safe routes to and from events.</li> <li>• Tool and resource banks</li> <li>• Workshops and courses</li> <li>• Space where artists can share ideas for residencies</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A shared digital platform providing marketing, funding resources, transport information and creative tools.</li> <li>• Increased opportunities for showcasing local creative talent in both traditional and unexpected places.</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater coordination and reduced duplication across cultural organisations.</li> <li>• Increased visibility and accessibility of cultural events and creative opportunities countywide.</li> <li>• More artists, groups and volunteers benefiting from shared resources and networking.</li> <li>• Stronger cultural brand for Monmouthshire.</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Destination management - Visit Monmouthshire</a></p> <p>New version to be added</p> <p><a href="#">Monmouthshire Economic and Employment Strategy</a></p>	MCC	June 2026 - December 2026

Action Number	Action we will take	Measuring progress	Links to other strategies/plans	Lead Organisation	When by?
4	Review current community education course offer and identify opportunities to align with Cultural Strategy to enhance opportunities to our communities	<b>Outcomes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased access to creative skills training.</li> <li>Delivering on the Library strategy outcomes for community and learning opportunities.</li> <li>Expanded opportunities for culture to support mental health, loneliness reduction, intergenerational learning and social cohesion.</li> </ul> <b>Impacts:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growth of creative industries and freelance opportunities in Monmouthshire.</li> <li>Growth in increase in educational skill levels and knowledge base.</li> <li>Increased footfall and visitor spend in town centres.</li> <li>Measurable increases in wellbeing indicators for participants.</li> <li>Stronger neighborhood connections and reduced social isolation.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Community and Corporate Plan - Version 3.0_Council.pdf</a>  <a href="#">Library Strategy 2025-2030</a>	MCC Community Learning Services	August 2026



Action Number	Action we will take	Measuring progress	Links to other strategies/plans	Lead Organisation	When by?
5	To design and deliver a Creative Alliance across Monmouthshire that will create peer support and shared resources for those involved in events and activity planning.	<p><b>Outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Creative Alliance formed to support collaboration, resource sharing and professional development.</li> <li>• Establish cost benefit of shared resources to local events and activities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Impacts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More artists, groups and volunteers benefiting from shared resources and networking.</li> <li>• Enhanced ability for communities and organisations to plan, promote and deliver cultural work effectively</li> <li>• More efficient use of resources, reduced duplication and stronger shared accountability.</li> <li>• Greater visibility of cultural provision and strategic coherence countywide.</li> <li>• Increase in number of events and activities supported through the Creative Alliance.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">The National Events Strategy for Wales 2022 to 2030</a>	MCC	December 2026

Theme	People				
Action Number	Action we will take	Measuring progress	Links to other strategies/plans	Lead Organisation	When by?
6	To bring together high-quality opportunities for cultural volunteering with a particular emphasis on increasing the diversity of volunteers.	<b>Outcomes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A coordinated approach to improving the diversity, quality and distribution of cultural volunteering opportunities.</li> <li>Identify key areas for improving volunteering based on data and stakeholder consultation.</li> </ul> <b>Impacts:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A more diverse, skilled and supported volunteer workforce.</li> <li>Strengthened social connections, reduced loneliness, and improved wellbeing through cultural engagement.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Volunteering - Monlife</a> <a href="#">Vision for Volunteering sets out 10-year plan for volunteer work - Museums Association</a>	MCC / GAVO and WCVA and volunteering partners	February 2027



Theme	Place				
Action Number	Action we will take	Measuring progress	Links to other strategies/plans	Lead Organisation	When by?
7	Develop and deliver public art exhibitions in locations which are underrepresented in the county and which will increase footfall to the area.	<b>Outcomes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and publish a Public Arts Policy and Guidance for Monmouthshire.</li> <li>• Development and delivery of public art exhibitions in areas of the county currently underrepresented.</li> </ul> <b>Impact:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased footfall in town centres, rural hubs and lesser served areas.</li> <li>• Broader distribution of cultural activity beyond traditional venues.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Community and Corporate Plan - Version 3.0_Council.pdf</a>	MCC  Cultural Partnership Forum	March 2027

Action Number	Action we will take	Measuring progress	Links to other strategies/plans	Lead Organisation	When by?
8	To ensure that consideration is given to the infrastructure for events and activities to enable participants to attend safely.	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New public realm and infrastructure planning incorporates safety, accessibility and lighting for greater participation in events</li> <li>• Impacts Cultural infrastructure and events aligned with environmental sustainability and climate-resilient design.</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved safety, confidence and comfort for attendees at cultural events.</li> <li>• Reduced carbon footprint of cultural events.</li> <li>• Increased participation due to improved accessibility and safer public spaces.</li> <li>• Enhanced sense of pride and belonging connected to public art and placemaking</li> </ul>	Placemaking	Cultural Partnership	March 2027



All Themes					
Action Number	Action we will take	Measuring progress	Links to other strategies/plans	Lead Organisation	When by?
9	<p>Continue to implement our:</p> <p>Annual Culture, Heritage and Arts Delivery Plans.</p> <p>Heritage Strategy</p> <p>We will ensure that these continue to link to wider policies such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and sector areas such as health, economic development, social care, civic life, citizenship and community cohesion.</p>	<p><b>Outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued delivery of Monmouthshire County Councils cultural, heritage and arts plans, aligned with broader strategies including wellbeing and economic development.</li> </ul> <p><b>Impacts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A stronger, more resilient cultural ecosystem embedded across the county.</li> <li>Clear evidence of how culture contributes to health, economic growth, environmental goals, social cohesion, and education.</li> </ul>		MCC and partners	Ongoing

Action Number	Action we will take	Measuring progress	Links to other strategies/plans	Lead Organisation	When by?
10	Review this Action Plan annually, maintaining a three-year detailed forward plan	<p><b>Outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual review and publication of the Action Plan to maintain transparency and responsiveness.</li> <li>• Continued delivery of the county's cultural, heritage and arts plans, aligned with broader strategies including wellbeing and economic development.</li> </ul> <p><b>Impacts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A stronger, more resilient cultural ecosystem embedded across council planning.</li> <li>• Clear evidence of how culture contributes to health, economic growth, environmental goals, social cohesion, and education.</li> <li>• Ability to track long term change—showing progress year on year and adapting actions based on data.</li> <li>• Cultural activity recognised as central to Monmouthshire's identity and prosperity.</li> </ul>		Cultural Partnership Forum	January 2027