



Culture, Sports and Leisure

Where we are now

East Sussex has a rich cultural heritage, having been home to many artists and writers. Our culture continues to thrive with numerous events and festivals around the county. The East Sussex Arts Partnership enables more events to be created by pooling resources and making joint bids for funding. Glyndebourne offers world-class opera in a country-house setting and a site has been found for a new Historical Records Centre.¹ The growing importance of our cultural economy and the regeneration and 'renaissance' of our coastal strip as a 'cultural coast' is also growing: Hastings has a lively arts scene, an £8.5 million cultural centre is being built in Eastbourne, the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill has recently been refurbished, the theatres of Eastbourne, Hastings and Bexhill attract national and international companies and a new water sports centre is being developed in Eastbourne.

Opportunities to actively participate also exist. Our countryside and coast provide a wide range of sport and leisure opportunities for residents and visitors alike including walking, cycling, hang gliding, sailing and windsurfing. A project which has created flood storage, wildlife and landscape compensation at Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve, Newhaven recorded more than 42,000 cycle trips and many walkers over a one year period. 7,000 people have taken part in guided walks.² Five schools have specialist visual, media and performing arts status, a further five have specialist sports status.³ New physical education and community sports facilities have been provided at colleges and schools in Hailsham, Eastbourne, Hastings, Northiam and Crowborough and four community sports networks have been established.⁴ However, a national survey in 2005/06 showed Rother and Hastings as being in the bottom 25% of participation rates in sports or active recreation.⁵ Hastings, our most deprived district, has the lowest participation rate in the South East 16.7%, 15th lowest nationally (339 out of 354).⁶ Rother fared only slightly better with a 19.1% participation rate 76th from the bottom nationally.⁷

Mobile libraries enable residents to order books and surf the internet. Access for disabled people is improving: Express Yourself Gallery in Hailsham gives artists who have experienced mental health issues the opportunity to show their work and disability sports groups are growing.⁸ The Countryside Access

project has helped improve access to the countryside for disabled people by replacing stiles with kissing gates, re-surfacing and installing boardwalks.⁹ Culture, sport and leisure play a role in our local economy: our towns provide shops, restaurants, leisure facilities, libraries, museums and cinemas.¹⁰ We have many tourist attractions, often run with the help of volunteers, such as the Herstmonceux Observatory, castles at Lewes, Pevensey and Hastings, Battle Abbey and Newhaven Fort and Redoubt Fortress in Eastbourne.

The Challenges Ahead

Culture, sport and leisure are key components of a sustainable community and are increasingly used as community development and regeneration tools: cultural and sporting events, like the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, help bring people together, can build self-confidence, counteract obesity and help people to adopt healthier lifestyles. Physical activity, sport and play can help to tackle anti-social behaviour and promote interest in the environment. We must therefore maintain our culture, sports, leisure and play facilities and increase access to and participation in cultural, sports and leisure activities and events.

Our strategic priority for 2026 is to enable everyone to enjoy a wide range of cultural, sporting and leisure opportunities

Our key tasks will be to:

- Encourage participation in cultural, sporting and leisure activities amongst people of all ages and tackle the barriers of access and affordability, particularly in areas where active recreation and sports participation is low.
- Provide life-long learning opportunities in arts, culture and sports
- Promote the health and social benefits of an active life
- Develop support for cultural, sports and leisure based businesses
- Invest in multi-purpose community owned buildings in rural areas
- Conserve the natural and built heritage of East Sussex and its use
- Promote East Sussex as a place where the arts, culture, sports and play are valued and can be enjoyed
- Facilitate sustainable employment opportunities for professional artists, performers, sportspeople and others involved in the creative, sports and leisure industries and promote volunteering in the arts, culture, sports and leisure.

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¹ East Sussex County Council: A Cultural Strategy for East Sussex 2007

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⁵ Sport England Communications: Sport England's Active Peoples Survey 2006

⁶ Sport England Communications: Sport England's Active Peoples Survey 2006

⁷ Sport England Communications: Sport England's Active Peoples Survey (profile of Rother Borough Council) 2006

⁸ East Sussex County Council: A Cultural Strategy for East Sussex 2007

⁹ East Sussex County Council: A Cultural Strategy for East Sussex 2007

¹⁰ East Sussex County Council: A Cultural Strategy for East Sussex 2007