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## The Big Debate: Is Brighton's creative sector an undervalued powerhouse?

[Kerry Watkins](#), Founder of [Social for Good](#), writes up some of the key themes and actions from the debate.

By [Kerry Watkins](#) of [Social For Good](#)

Chaired by Professor Robin Banerjee, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Global and Civic Engagement at the [University of Sussex](#), and Co-chair of the [Culture Alliance](#), we heard from:

- [Marie Tulley-Rose](#), Strategic Manager for Culture and Creative Industries at [Brighton & Hove City Council](#)
- [Angus Light](#), Producer and Co-founder of [Locate Productions](#)
- [Mylinh Nguyen](#), Associate Academic Subject Lead - Fashion, Textiles, 3D Design & Craft and Academic Employability Co-Lead at [University of Brighton](#)
- [Lucy Day](#), Executive Director at [Phoenix Art Space](#)

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Brighton has always been synonymous with creativity. It's one of the reasons that many of us decided to live here!

From its thriving arts scene to its innovative industries, our city has long been a hub for people with big ideas and bold visions. But is this reputation enough?

That was the big question at The Big Debate: Is Brighton's Creative Sector an Undervalued Powerhouse?

With a panel of experts and animated table discussions, the event highlighted both Brighton's creative strengths and the obstacles that risk eroding them.

The message was clear: Brighton's creative sector is vibrant but vulnerable, and action is needed to ensure it continues to thrive.

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## So, what's holding Brighton back?

There were several clear themes that emerged, leaving plenty to think about long after the evening ended.

### Visibility

There's no denying Brighton's creative achievements, but they're so often hidden behind studio doors or exported to other cities and markets. Panelists agreed that while Brighton creates, it doesn't always get the credit it deserves. Lucy Day highlighted the need for more visibility, pointing out that while Brighton is a "hotbed of creativity," much of its work happens in isolation.

Lucy hit the nail on the head when she said, "The city can be the gallery." She pointed to Plymouth as an example, where public spaces have been transformed into cultural showcases- harnessing the existing spaces they have across the city. Imagine what we could achieve if Brighton's streets became a living, breathing exhibition of its creativity. It's time to step out from the shadows and show the world what we're made of.

### Space

Since COVID, Brighton has lost a staggering number of its creative spaces. Without affordable places to work, collaborate, or showcase talent, we risk losing the very people who make this city tick. Simon Roberts captured the urgency: "There won't be a creative city to market if we don't act."

### Funding and collaboration

Developers in Brighton do contribute to the arts through planning obligations, but it was generally seen as a tick-box exercise. Stronger partnerships between businesses, developers, and artists could take things from 'nice sculpture in a plaza' to meaningful, sustained support for grassroots initiatives.

### Inclusivity

Brighton's reputation for inclusivity is well-earned, but there's work to be done. Mylinh Nguyen pointed out that opportunities often favour those from privileged backgrounds, highlighting the gap between academic preparation and the realities of professional creative careers. Bridging this divide is essential if we want Brighton's creative sector to thrive. Levelling the playing field means ensuring everyone,

regardless of background, has the skills, networks, and opportunities to succeed.

## Global and Local Potential

Brighton's creativity isn't just a local treasure - it has a global reputation. As Angus Light pointed out, the city is perfectly positioned to think both globally and locally. We're small enough to make a meaningful local impact but boast a worldwide reputation that opens doors to big ideas - like tackling climate change through creativity. The potential is huge if we're bold enough to seize it.

## Innovation and AI

AI might feel like a looming threat, but it's also a huge opportunity. If we teach creatives how to use AI ethically and effectively, Lucy Day shared, it can become a tool for innovation rather than a job-stealer. We just need to hold that moral compass steady.

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## Brighton's potential: What can be done?

The debate wasn't just about problems - it was about solutions, too, and what positive steps we can take.

### Making physical space for creativity

Imagine a Brighton where creatives always have somewhere to work and collaborate. One of the loudest calls from the debate was for a network of affordable spaces, whether by repurposing underused university spaces or building infrastructure for grassroots creatives. For many, this would be a lifeline.

### Leverage partnerships

Collaboration is one of Brighton's superpowers, but it needs to be harnessed more effectively. Developers' contributions to the arts could be expanded and better aligned with creative organisations to ensure meaningful, sustainable support. Businesses could step up to fund innovative projects, while universities could offer mentorship and much-needed space. The idea that "the city can be the gallery," with streets and public spaces becoming a vibrant canvas for creativity, isn't just a dream - it's a possibility that I'm sure everyone in that hall in BHASVIC last Thursday would LOVE to see one day.

### Engage in city planning

Marie Tulley-Rose reminded us that Brighton & Hove Council is working on its long-term city plan and is actively seeking input. This is our chance to ensure that the creative sector - Brighton's "undervalued powerhouse" - is fully recognised and embedded into the city's future. Email [arts@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:arts@brighton-hove.gov.uk) with your ideas to make your voice heard and help keep arts and culture central to Brighton's identity.

### Support emerging talent

Programs like [Arts Emergency](#) are already mentoring young creatives, but they need more hands on deck. Volunteering your time or resources could make a world of difference for Brighton's next generation of talent.

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## Valuing Brighton's creativity

As I walked back through Seven Dials processing the big (and very passionate) debate it felt that Brighton's creative sector stands at a somewhat of a crossroads. It's a vibrant, dynamic powerhouse - and the soul of our city - but its reputation as a hub of creativity isn't always valued as it should be. This lack of recognition risks not only stalling the city's creative momentum but also jeopardising its economic future. Yet, the solutions are within reach.

By creating a network of physical spaces, aligning partnerships more effectively, and embedding arts into city planning, we can unlock Brighton's true potential. With developers, businesses, and the community working together, the city can become a living gallery, showcasing the talent and innovation that make Brighton unique - not just locally, but globally.

Let's ensure Brighton doesn't just survive as a creative hub, it thrives as the creative powerhouse it's destined to be.

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With thanks to [Kerry Watkins](#) for writing this blog, find out more about [Social for Good](#) here.

### Some extra links to resources that were discussed:

- Culture & Creative Industries team at Brighton & Hove City Council work to preserve and encourage cultural activity within the city by advocating for and working with creatives, organisations, and the wider creative sector. You can read more about the team and what they do to support the industry on the [Council website](#), and find their strategy on public art in the city [here](#). The team can be contacted through [Arts@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:Arts@brighton-hove.gov.uk).
- To share your thoughts on the [City Plan 2041](#), you can have your say in the survey linked.

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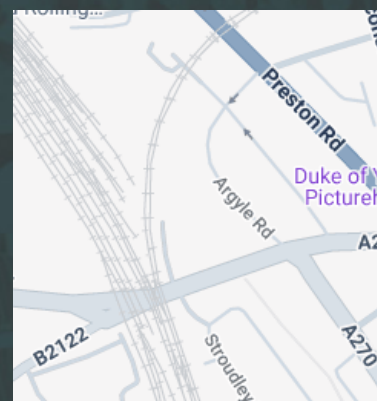
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