

# Ludlow Assembly Rooms: Organisational Strategy April 2026 – March 2028

## Executive Summary

Ludlow Assembly Rooms (LAR) is a community-centred arts organisation delivering high-quality artistic programmes while serving as a cultural hub for Ludlow and the surrounding district. This strategy sets out how LAR will achieve financial sustainability, programme excellence and operational resilience, underpinned by a strong and healthy organisational culture, over the next two years.

This two-year strategy builds on LAR's two fixed charitable objectives:

- To foster and promote the maintenance, improvement and development of artistic taste and a knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the arts among the inhabitants of Ludlow and the district thereof.
- To promote a community centre for the use of the said inhabitants without distinction of political, religious, or other opinion, with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said inhabitants.

The strategy is organised around four interconnected priorities:

1. **Revenue Generation** – sustaining LAR by generating a diversification of income needed to deliver exceptional programmes and community experiences.
2. **Programme and Community Offer** – delivering high-quality performances and events that inspire creativity and connection and where everyone feels welcome.
3. **Operational Capacity** – providing spaces, systems, and technical support that allow creativity and community experiences to flourish.
4. **People and Culture** – ensuring LAR's workforce and Board operate within a healthy, inclusive and values-led culture, where people are supported, accountable and empowered to deliver the organisation's strategic objectives safely, effectively and sustainably.

This strategy integrates insights from our November 2025 staff and volunteer consultation. It also considers our strategic context and relevant national and local policies. Finally, it outlines how we will monitor and measure the impact of the changes this strategy achieves.

*"LAR provides the opportunity to meet new people, learn new skills and to be part of a community."*

Workforce consultation, 2025



## Introduction and Purpose of the Strategy

The aim of this strategy is to set the overall organisational direction of the Ludlow Assembly Rooms from April 2026 – March 2028. It sets out what we will aim to do over this timeframe and why.

The strategy takes into account the presence of a new full-time CEO, who took up post in November 2025, and her observations of the current needs of the organisation, informed by feedback from the Board of Trustees, staff, volunteers and key stakeholders.

The strategy intentionally spans a short time frame, acknowledging the need to swiftly address the current financial situation, as well as embed the culture and processes needed to enable the organisation to thrive.

## Organisational Information and Objectives

Ludlow Assembly Rooms (LAR) is a vibrant arts and community hub at the heart of Ludlow. We provide a wide range of creative experiences – from cinema, live performances and art exhibitions to participation programmes, workshops, and community hires – all led by a committed workforce made up of paid staff and volunteers.

*“There’s always something to do and see, a huge choice.”* Workforce consultation, 2025

Through our spaces and programmes, we support creativity and connection, ensuring that people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities can access arts and culture.

Our two charitable objectives guide everything we do:

- To foster and promote the maintenance, improvement and development of artistic taste and a knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the arts among the inhabitants of Ludlow and the district thereof.
- To promote a community centre for the use of the said inhabitants without distinction of political, religious, or other opinion, with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said inhabitants.

**LAR’s Vision:** Our vision is to be a place for all our community, where the arts inspire connection, creativity, and wellbeing.

**LAR’s Mission:** Our mission is to provide welcoming, accessible spaces and high-quality arts experiences, supporting creativity, wellbeing, and community connection across Ludlow and its district.



## What Factors Shape our Work?

### Strategic Context

#### *Contextual overview:*

Ludlow is a historic market town with a population of approximately 11,000 and a wider catchment area of around 46,600. The area is predominantly older and White British, with many residents living in rural communities that can face limited access to cultural infrastructure and fewer social or creative amenities. In rural areas like this, opportunities for shared activities play a vital role in reducing isolation, building social cohesion, and supporting wellbeing.

#### *Economic situation:*

Despite areas of prosperity, pay levels in the area remain below regional and national averages and there are areas of economic deprivation. Approximately 23% of children in Ludlow are eligible for free school meals.

#### *The impact of the arts on social wellbeing:*

A growing body of research shows that engaging with the arts and cultural activity has tangible benefits for individual and community wellbeing.

A landmark UK Study <sup>i</sup> commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and UCL found that cultural engagement can significantly enhance physical and mental wellbeing, reduce depression, delay cognitive decline, and improve quality of life — generating an estimated £8 billion in annual societal benefits from health and wellbeing improvements alone.

Arts engagement is also associated with improved subjective wellbeing, including positive emotions, life satisfaction, and a sense of meaning and purpose. This engagement can reduce risk factors for mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety, particularly in older age. <sup>ii</sup>

Community arts and cultural participation contribute to social capital — stronger social networks, community cohesion, and trust — which are especially important in rural contexts where opportunities for shared experiences may be fewer. <sup>iii</sup>



Participation in creative activities is increasingly recognised in health and social prescribing, with NHS and public health initiatives using arts-based programmes to support mental and physical health outcomes.<sup>iv</sup>

*The impact of the arts on learning:*

Engagement with arts and culture also supports learning and skill development across a person's lifetime.

Research indicates that creative activities can boost a range of skills — including self-esteem, problem-solving, and cognitive performance — and even contribute to better outcomes in literacy and numeracy when arts experiences are embedded in learning pathways.<sup>v</sup>

Community and cultural participation is linked to higher civic engagement, such as volunteering and voting, which strengthens social networks and active citizenship.<sup>vi</sup>

## **Policy Context**

***National Policy:***

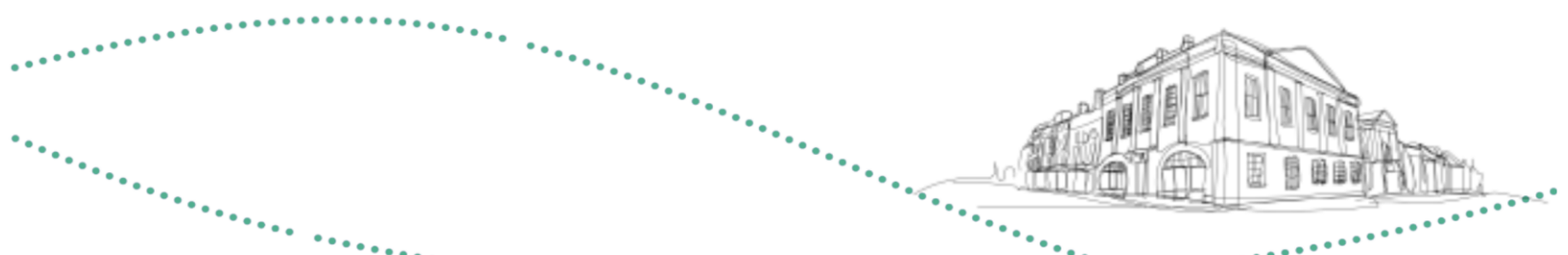
The UK government's cultural policy recognises the arts as a driver of wellbeing and social cohesion. Cultural participation is included in frameworks that assess national wellbeing and community resilience.<sup>vii</sup>

Health and wellbeing guidance (e.g., from WHO and UK frameworks) highlights the arts as a preventative and promotive factor in mental and social health strategies.<sup>viii</sup>

The recently published report on the Arts Council, chaired by Margaret Hodge,<sup>ix</sup> whilst acknowledging the fiscal constraints that have significantly reduced arts funding, calls for innovative ways to boost funding and support. Most notably for LAR, the report calls for a simplification in the way venues / companies can apply for and report on funding, and a focus on strengthening local engagement and decision-making to better redistribute funding and access to arts for under-served smaller towns and rural areas.

***Local Policy:***

Shropshire Council's arts and recreation planning emphasises rural cultural access, inclusive engagement, and the role of arts in community wellbeing and social connection. They are also supportive of community spaces / centres where a wide variety of opportunities take place under one roof.



The Vibrant Shropshire Cultural Compact has invested, and will continue to support, county-wide cultural programmes that celebrate creativity, improve health and wellbeing, and strengthen local economies through community participation.

## **Implications for LAR**

- LAR has a critical social and cultural role, especially as it is situated in a rural context.
- Accessibility and affordability must be core to LAR's mission, particularly in its wish to enable young people and marginalised groups to benefit from its services.
- LAR is well placed to deliver measurable outcomes contributing to lifelong learning, public health, community resilience and civic participation, aligning with broader national and local wellbeing priorities. This is increasingly important at a time when socio-economic inequalities, political divides and the ways we digest news, has led to increasing division and distrust between groups of people.
- Our ability to demonstrate the impact of our work against these measurable outcomes, will align our work to local and national policy objectives and make our work more attractive to grant providers
- Future sustainability depends on active and varied partnerships and diversified income streams.

## **Current situation: 2025 SWOT analysis of LAR**

A current SWOT analysis of LAR's work is provided in Annex A. The conclusions for this strategy are:

### **Strengths to leverage:**

- Use the central location, refurbished facilities, and strong reputation to increase visibility, footfall, and daytime use.
- Leverage our diverse programming and strong partnerships to grow audiences and income.
- Mobilise staff, volunteers, and trustees as key strategic assets and community ambassadors.

### **Weaknesses to address:**

- Tackle the financial deficit and high building costs as urgent strategic priorities.
- Improve accessibility, visibility, and perceptions of openness, including entrance and branding issues.
- Simplify systems, IT, and internal communication to increase efficiency and capacity.

### **Opportunities to exploit:**

- Expand youth and community engagement to broaden participation and future-proof audiences.
- Improve ability to collect and learn from data.



- Grow partnerships and collaborative projects to increase impact and funding success.
- Invest in space re-modelling and automation to improve access, safety, and sustainability.

**Threats to mitigate:**

- Mitigate rising costs and funding competition through efficiency and income diversification.
- Resolve or manage lease uncertainty to protect long-term viability.
- Address participation inequalities and local competition to maintain relevance.

## What Will We Do?

### Strategic Aim

By the end of March 2028, LAR will, once again, be widely recognised as a vibrant cultural centre in rural Shropshire, rooted in a healthy organisational culture and empowered workforce, with a sustainable financial model, increased audience diversity, dynamic community partnerships, and a safe, accessible and well-functioning building.

### Strategic Priorities:

In order to achieve this aim, LAR will focus on four strategic priorities:

### Priority 1: Revenue Generation

**Purpose:** Sustain LAR by generating a diversification of income needed to deliver exceptional programmes and community experiences.

**Scope / Activities:**

- Box office income from ticketed events.
- Digital revenue opportunities: online ticketing, streaming, merchandise.
- Marketing and sponsorship.
- Hiring income for studio spaces and main auditorium.
- Revenue from the bars.
- Revenue from Bill's Kitchen.
- Support from Friends and Patrons.



- Fundraising from Ludlow Assembly Rooms Fundraising Events (LARFE), trusts and foundations, statutory grants.

**Key Actions:**

- Develop a clear and coordinated marketing strategy, including our digital marketing strategy, using best practice and innovative tools to increase ticket sales and room hire.
- Ensure pricing balances financial sustainability with inclusivity.
- Explore and improve brand recognition with new audiences / audiences from our wider community.
- Review and relaunch the friends, patrons and sponsors support scheme - providing vital income for LAR, whilst simultaneously providing an outstanding service for donors, reinforcing their loyalty to and engagement in the organisation.
- Cultivate key trusts, foundations and donors to secure increased income streams, including working with key local partners to submit joint funding proposals where appropriate.
- Understand and benefit from tax incentives designed to support arts providers.
- Review current spending to ensure the organisation's expenditure is efficient and effective.
- Explore the automation and centralisation of some administrative and booking services, reducing the workforce time / capacity spent on these tasks.

**Expected Outcomes:**

|    | <b>Description</b>  | <b>Date by</b>  |
|----|---|---|
| 1a | LAR's deficit is reduced and LAR achieves financial break-even.   | Reduction by March 2027<br>Break-even by March 2028       |
| 1b | LAR raises at least £30,000 per annum through external grants.  | By March 2028   |
| 1c | LAR increases revenue by 10% from friends / patrons / sponsorship schemes.  | Year on year from March 2027                              |
| 1d | LAR develops a mechanism for assessing profitability of programmed events leading to increased average profit margin per event. | Mechanism by June 2026<br>Increase profits from June 2027 |

## Priority 2: Programme and Community Offer

**Purpose:** Deliver high-quality performances and events that inspire creativity and connection and where everyone feels welcome.



**Scope / Activities:**

- Cinema, cinema streaming, live performances (music / theatre / comedy / literature), and art exhibitions.
- Participation programmes: workshops, community classes, lectures etc.
- Support for events driven by local creators.
- Partnerships with local providers of care and education.
- Partnership with local and national providers of outstanding arts events.
- The Visitor Information Centre (VIC).

**Key Actions:**

- Curate each season thoughtfully, informed by audience feedback, community consultation, and emerging artistic trends.
- Balance affordability of tickets with financial need of organisation, ensuring external subsidies as needed to encourage new audiences.
- Close collaboration and co-design of programme with local residents, charities and statutory providers, ensuring our work is designed to support and welcome our most vulnerable and marginalised citizens, including thoughtful timing of events to coordinate with local transport and community car services.
- Reframe LAR as an umbrella organisation – a space for convening different groups / stakeholders to support local creative initiatives, including non-professional groups.
- Closely collaborate with Pentabus Theatre and other arts partners on productions, workshops, and community outreach projects, with a particular focus on reaching young people in our wider community.
- Ensure that the VIC provides an outstanding information service, supporting local business and a welcoming environment for anyone who seeks information.
- Only provide retail which is directly connected with our unique positioning as an arts provider.
- Ensure safeguarding, inclusivity, accessibility, and a positive audience experience is at the heart of everything we do.



**Expected Outcomes:**

|    | <b>Description</b>  | <b>Date by</b>                   |
|----|---|----------------------------------|
| 2a | LAR implements a robust customer data collection process, enabling us to understand who visits our venue, why they visit, the quality of their experience and how to respond appropriately to feedback. | By September 2026, then annually |
| 2b | LAR signs long term partnership contracts with at least two arts providers.   | By March 2028                    |
| 2c | LAR enjoys strong engagement with at least six local organisations (schools, libraries, care homes, and social prescribing initiatives).  | By March 2027                    |
| 2d | LAR welcomes a 10% increase in audience numbers and year on year, including an increase in the proportion of under-represented groups, including youth.   | Year on year                     |

### Priority 3: Operational Capacity

**Purpose:** Provide spaces, systems, and technical support that allow creativity and community experiences to flourish.

**Scope / Activities:**

- Lease management.
- Building management, accessibility improvements, safety compliance.
- IT systems
- Technical team: lighting, sound, staging, audiovisual, production support.
- Operational policies and procedures.
- Facility upgrades and security improvements.
- Environmental improvements.

**Key Actions:**

- Resolve lease and building responsibilities with partners.
- Implement building improvements with focus on accessibility and safety as highlighted in workforce feedback (lighting, toilets, auditorium upgrades, signage).
- Ensure regular, ongoing, proactive building maintenance.
- Consider building usage and wayfinding so that the user journey is improved.



- IT upgrades to ensure system is fit for purpose.
- Ensure effective and regularly certified health and safety compliance.
- Ensure technical team has resources, equipment and training.
- Arrange environmental audit of building and implement measures to reduce energy use.
- Explore collaboration with other local organisations to share resources, reducing waste.

**Expected Outcomes:**

|    | <b>Description</b>   | <b>Date by</b>   |
|----|--|--|
| 3a | LAR has long-term, signed leases which secure the building and its ownership.  | By March 2028  |
| 3b | LAR demonstrates that we are fully compliant with all health and safety best practice and legal requirements.  | By September 2026  |
| 3c | LAR identifies area for upgrading building and technical facilities, with a focus on environmental improvements. Priorities from this assessment are identified and delivered. | Identification by September 2026<br><br>Delivery by March 2028 |
| 3d | LAR develops a plan to re-imagine the use of under-used space in the building, focusing on making its creative work more visible and accessible.                               | By March 2027  |
| 3e | LAR reduces its energy consumption by 10%.   | By March 2028  |

## Priority 4: People and Culture

**Purpose:** Ensure LAR’s workforce and Board operate within a healthy, inclusive and values-led organisational culture, where people are supported, accountable and empowered to deliver the organisation’s strategic objectives safely, effectively and sustainably.

**Scope / Activities:**

- HR policies, procedures, and compliance.
- Safeguarding policy, procedures, and reporting.
- Workforce planning, recruitment and succession.
- Trustee recruitment, induction, skills audit and development.
- Performance management (appraisals, targets, professional development plans).
- Training and professional development (including bi-annual safeguarding training).
- Board development and governance effectiveness.
- Internal communications and workforce engagement and consultation.



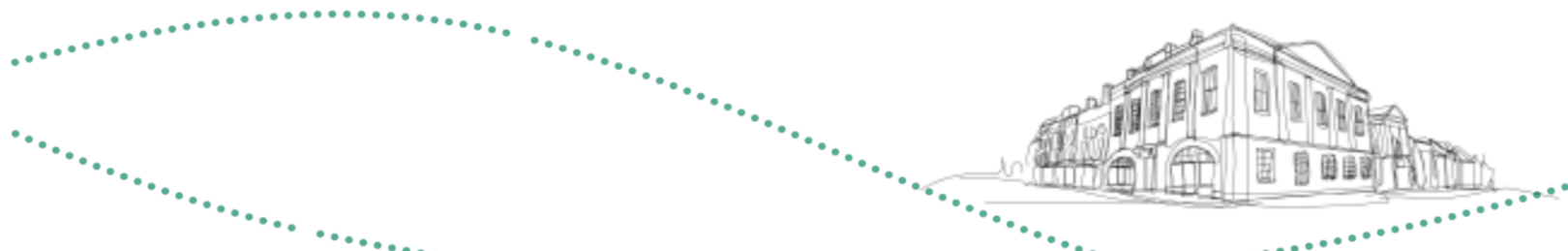
- Statutory and regulatory compliance.

**Key Actions:**

- Actively engage the workforce and Board in co-developing, embedding and monitoring LAR's organisational values and culture.
- Complete a workforce restructure aligned to LAR's strategic priorities, ensuring clear accountability, role clarity and capacity to deliver.
- Update all staff job descriptions, contracts, annual targets and professional development plans, ensuring alignment with organisational culture, strategy and needs.
- Provide regular, transparent internal communications to improve engagement, alignment and organisational trust.
- Ensure all staff, volunteers and Board members consistently recognise, respond to, and report safeguarding concerns, ensuring the safety and well-being of children, young people, and vulnerable adults within LAR.
- Arrange an accessibility audit of the building and develop an action plan to address identified weaknesses.

**Expected outcomes:**

|    | <b>Description</b>  | <b>Date by</b>   |
|----|---|--|
| 4a | LAR implements an annual workforce survey (with a minimum 60% response rate) to measure engagement, satisfaction, and understanding of our organisational values and culture. | By September 2026  |
| 4b | Workforce responsibilities and targets are aligned to our strategic objectives and values.  | By September 2026  |
| 4c | Safeguarding reporting demonstrates increased confidence in reporting concerns, timely responses, and documented outcomes – evidence of learning and continuous improvement.  | By March 2027  |
| 4d | LAR identifies accessibility improvements required to make the building fully accessible.<br>Priorities from this plan are identified and delivered.                          | Identification by September 2026<br>Delivery by March 2028 |
| 4e | LAR meets 100% of statutory and regulatory reporting requirements on time, with Board oversight evidenced in meeting minutes.   | By December 2027   |



## Monitoring, Evaluation and Risk Management

The success of this strategy will be measured as follows:

- A quarterly report to the board demonstrating progress against an agreed set of key performance indicators, aligned to priority outcomes.
- An accompanying risk register that identifies risks to delivery and mitigating actions.
- Annual report that will set out our progress against the objectives in this strategy. This will incorporate staff, volunteer, audience, and stakeholder feedback.
- Adaptive management based on what we are learning and what is changing – this strategy outlines the direction ahead for the organisation, but we will need to adapt and be open to new opportunities, whilst responding appropriately to organisational / contextual threats. This will be reflected in our regular reporting to the Board and outcomes may be added or altered as appropriate with Board agreement.

## Closing Statement

LAR was created through the passion and dedication of individuals and groups in our town.

*“We created something out of nothing.”* Workforce consultation, 2025

Over the years, it has provided a place of joy, creativity and connection. Despite the current challenges to arts funding and changes in audience behaviours – its existence, as a place where people can assemble to meet, talk, move, learn and have fun, is essential to the harmony and wellbeing of our local area. This strategy strives to ensure that LAR is set to continue to grow and flourish - benefiting our whole community for years to come.

*“We want to be the beating heart of our town.”* Workforce consultation, 2025



**Annex A**

## **2025 Organisational SWOT Analysis**

This analysis was developed in consultation with staff and volunteers.

### **Strengths:**

- Central historic location with recently refurbished facilities.
- Increasingly broad programming: cinema, concerts, gigs, theatre, workshops.
- An exceptionally strong and talented volunteer ecosystem.
- A skilled and committed staff.
- A knowledgeable, committed and experienced Board of Trustees.
- A strong local reputation.
- Committed support from many of our local residents.
- Existing contracts with [Pentabus Theatre](#) and [Bill's Kitchen](#).
- Presence and use of the VIC.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Currently running a year-on-year financial deficit.
- A complex and expensive building which needs ongoing maintenance and support.
- Lack of visibility of activities taking part in buildings, with under-utilised / hidden spaces.
- LAR's entrance is perceived as intimidating or unwelcoming and causes safety concerns.
- A complex IT system which hinders the management of efficient working.
- Long term challenges in internal communication.
- A lack of robust analysis on our customer/users.
- Perception, by some, that LAR is a venue for the 'elite', rather than its whole community.
- The name Ludlow Assembly Rooms / LAR may lack recognition, and / or be confusing to those who do not know the venue.

### **Opportunities:**

- Expand youth and community engagement programmes.
- Programming and audience development to bring new audience members into the building, including providing affordable / free opportunities to those who may not be able to afford our offering.
- Develop stronger partnerships / collaborative projects with local statutory / charity providers and local / national arts providers.



- Better collection and analysis of data to inform future decision making.
- Local and national funding opportunities.
- Targeting of new residents moving into the community.
- Targeting new businesses (sponsorship, donations, employee benefits).
  
- Re-modelling of current building space to improve accessibility, safety, and visibility of the services we offer.
- Relatively new administration at Shropshire Council who have shown their willingness to explore new opportunities for the lease.
- Increased use of automation / AI to make services more efficient and reduce costs.

**Threats:**

- Rising operational costs (energy / repairs / staffing).
- Complex and unresolved situation with leases (Shropshire Council / private landlord).
- High competition for public funding and sponsorship.
- Participation inequalities.
- Tension through competition with other retail services in the town.



---

## References:

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/dec/17/consuming-arts-and-culture-is-good-for-health-and-wellbeing-research-finds>

<sup>ii</sup> [SCSo248 - Evidence on The social impact of participation in culture and sport; https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30560742/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30560742/)

<sup>iii</sup> [The social value of place-based creative wellbeing: A rapid review and evidence synthesis - Ganga - 2025 - Sociology of Health & Illness - Wiley Online Library](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [Assessing the direct impact of the UK arts sector | McKinsey](#)

<sup>v</sup> [Assessing the direct impact of the UK arts sector | McKinsey](#)

<sup>vi</sup> [Thriving Culture](#)

<sup>vii</sup> [Briefing -The-social-value-of-place-based-arts-and-culture-final o.pdf](#)

<sup>viii</sup> [Associations between neighbourhood deprivation and engagement in arts, culture and heritage: evidence from two nationally-representative samples | BMC Public Health](#)

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/arts-council-england-an-independent-review-by-baroness-margaret-hodge/arts-council-england-an-independent-review-by-baroness-margaret-hodge>

