

St Leonards **FESTIVAL** 2026



SATURDAY 11 JULY
WARRIOR SQUARE GARDENS, ST LEONARDS ON SEA

Co-created by and for the many diverse communities of St Leonards on Sea, **St Leonards Festival** marks its 20th birthday in July 2026.

Over 20 years, this free summer festival has sparked huge joy, raising the bar for community festivals in the south east with an inclusive programme of national & international musicians, street artists & storytellers alongside local performers of all ages and backgrounds. Creative participation, especially around the much-loved carnival parade, has cultivated lasting connections.

Illuminated finales of festivals past, always cherished in audience feedback, have inspired a big birthday shake-up in 2026. Subject to funding, St Leonards Festival 2026 will see dedicated festival elements share the arena with a spectacular illuminated finale by French company Remue Menage.

There will be giant puppetry.
There will be stunt ballet.
There will be pyrotechnics.



PERFORMANCES

Music & Dance
Walkabouts
Storytelling
Carnival Parade
Special 20th Birthday
Illuminated Evening
Spectacle



Acoustic stage with community choir & dance performances, emerging bands and busking slots. To be co-chaired by two festival faves: actor & children's comedian Ben Watson, and bearded eco-minded drag queen Timberlina



Hastings Storytelling Festival will sponsor the Storytelling Yurt and interactive walkabout shows



Animals-themed parade, 700+ participants:
* walkabouts
* local drum groups
* independent community groups
* children & families from outreach by 18 Hours & Cabaret Mechanical Theatre



Illuminated spectacle:
click link for show teaser

[REMUE MENAGE](#)
[LES FOLIES](#)

COMMUNITY CREATIVITY : AIMS



Enable and encourage partnership work in workshops and parade

Workshops - stimulate creativity, problem-solving & shared joy of joining the parade:

- Mas-making led by 18 Hours for children & families in the festival's Community Zone & St Mary Star of the Sea Primary
- Automata-making led by Cabaret Mechanical Theatre for all ages in festival's Community Zone and for children & families at Robsack Primary
- Self-driven mas-making at Christchurch Primary School, Carousel Nursery, Christ Church Sunday School, Women of Vision (mixed heritage seniors group) and more

Maximise creative scope with 2026 parade theme "Animals"

- easy to create with sustainable materials
- relatable, accessible and fun for all ages - stimulates self-driven participation
- cohesion with Remue Menage animal characters boosts buy-in to evening spectacle & creative aspiration
- launch-point for Cabaret Mechanical Theatre to inspire all ages with joyful results from simple mechanical linkages

Develop local talent - emerging and unknown local artists to pitch for performance slots via social media

Nurture community creativity - locals performing include:

- Boathouse Theatre Arts (singing and signing choir embracing adults and children with learning difficulties and Autism)
- Malayalee Group (dancers of Indian Malayalee heritage)
- Refugee Buddy Project (refugees settled locally contribute eclectic musical performances)
- Soundwaves Community Choir (inclusive mixed age choir)
- Volya Voices (Ukrainian women's choir)
- Local drumming groups Raven & Sambalanco
- Tornado Twirl Stars...plus more participants to be announced and to be discovered through our 2026 social media callout

Promote volunteer programme - all ages from Girl Guides up can share in the joyful work of making a professional community festival happen

Grow legacy - each year the network of community participation grows with momentum once kickstarted by 18H workshops (eg Christchurch Primary School now has school-wide, self-driven mas-making for participation in the parade)



BENEFITS OF ST LEONARDS FESTIVAL 2026

Quality arts

- ✓ programming integrates passionate local performers with world class evening illuminated show
- ✓ international profile artists
- ✓ multiple opportunities for high quality creative participation

Placemaking

- ✓ raises the profile of the area
- ✓ inspires local pride
- ✓ unites local communities
- ✓ boosts local business - coordinates with day long street market and inspires fringe activities in St Leonards bars and cafes

Diverse

- ✓ mainstreams diverse artists, both in programming and promotions
- ✓ reflects and attracts culturally diverse local audiences

Inclusive

- ✓ free for everyone
- ✓ familiar, unintimidating, outdoor venue
- ✓ fully accessible
- ✓ extensive workshop programme and participation opportunities
- ✓ supports community cohesion

Wider impact

- ✓ works with community networks to deliver inclusive and relevant programme
- ✓ increases participation rates among hard-to-reach communities
- ✓ increases quality arts access for all residents
- ✓ provides opportunities for artistic development
- ✓ creates income and employment opportunities for artists, producers, peripheral venues

Sustainable

- ✓ using the arts and the event to positively embed sustainability messages
- ✓ zero single use plastic at all events
- ✓ carbon footprint, water usage, power usage, transport usage monitored
- ✓ sharing and learning about sustainable practice



Hastings Borough Council looks forward to supporting the 20th anniversary of St Leonards Festival in July. This was underlined by the council unanimously supporting the £8,000 of grant for the festival for this anniversary year, on Wednesday 11th February.

We recognise the importance of bringing such high-quality artists to Warrior Square Gardens and value this opportunity to engage with one of our most deprived wards. The festival showcases the vibrancy of this part of the town and encourages the multicultural residents of St Leonards to come together to celebrate in a safe, fun and enjoyable way. The festival organisers also deliver a significant level of outreach especially to the children of this area of the town which has one of the highest levels of children living in poverty from across the borough, so a free festival of this nature is integral to the social and cultural cohesion of St Leonards on Sea and the identity of this part of our town.

Kind regards

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Audiences	About	How will St Leonards Festival appeal to this audience?	How will we reach this audience?
Disabled audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May need support accessing some cultural venues and events May feel excluded from participating in cultural events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully accessible outdoor event & participatory activities Artists with disabilities reflected in a mainstream programme eg Mencap-supported Inside Out Theatre walkabout show co-developed & co-performed by artist with Down syndrome; Boathouse Theatre Arts is a signing & singing choir with learning disabled adults & children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media groups Seafront posters Networks supporting people with disabilities, eg Mencap, Boathouse Theatre Arts
Ethnically & Culturally Diverse Audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May feel uncomfortable at other local events where alcohol is the norm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alcohol free event Global food stalls by local suppliers, eg regular stall by St Leonards' Mama Putts African/Caribbean restaurant Diverse artists and performers from local communities: the network grows each year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community networks and groups eg Progress Network supporting African and Caribbean heritage), Women of Vision (group of senior women of diverse heritage), Bengali Community St. Leonards, Malayalee Group, Refugee Buddy Project Social media groups & culturally diverse eateries Schools activity connects directly to families
Low-income Families & Individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living, working, attending school in deprived areas (Central St Leonards in top 2% in country) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free, quality performances that feel accessible, not highbrow Free participation in creative parade workshops Close to home & easy to get to on foot, bus or bike Free entertaining street performances suitable for children Interactive performances all can take part in eg hula No spend pressure at the event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parade workshop outreach (schools/church group) Flyers and shop posters School newsletters and emails Community centres
LGBTQ+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May feel uncomfortable attending events where there is a lack of representation or inclusivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe and inclusive event and venue Programming challenges negative stereotypes and showcases queer performance eg returning stage compere Timberlina 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community networks and social media groups (eg Hastings Queer Collective, Hastings Rainbow and Rother Alliance) Via eateries, restaurants & seafront posters
Isolated Adults & Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May live alone, be unemployed, working from home, low mobility, low income May be homeless or insecurely housed. May have social anxiety or mental health challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very friendly, welcoming, safe vibe Close to home Unticketed – free to come and go In spaces where it is easy to get involved or step back and watch Catch passers-by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community groups Flyers through doors Homeless shelters, libraries, cafes
Students and under 25's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teenagers often under-reached in cultural events Local teenagers may feel that events are too 'family' focused or that acts don't reflect them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modern youthful design Volunteering and performance opportunities Inspiration for potential careers and interests eg. production Affordable, creative experience Unthreatening, safe environment close to home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media via youth ambassadors Secondary school newsletters Growing network of youth volunteers as advocates
Culture Vultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing audience Keen to gain new cultural experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remue Menage show a major highlight not seen elsewhere High quality, diverse performance New artists for 2026 alongside popular returning artists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media Flyers through doors and in other cultural venues Flyers in cafes & bars across town
Mainstream Families and groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing audiences All ages, and socio-economic backgrounds Mainly local, some from further afield Varying levels of cultural engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free family friendly entertainment Alcohol free event Easy access, fun, creative experiences Familiar brand & familiar outdoor location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flyers/posters in libraries, cafes, shops Social media groups and forums HTML email via partners eg 18 Hours network School emails