

OUR YEAR
Wakefield District 2024

THIS WAS OUR YEAR



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Introduction

In 2024, our district came together to celebrate culture, creativity, and community. Across 366 days, we explored heritage, shared stories, and filled our neighbourhoods with colour, music, and joy.

From community-led projects to festivals on our high streets, Our Year - Wakefield District 2024 was a time to connect, create, and be proud together.

This exhibition and film capture just some of the incredible moments that defined Our Year. The 24 striking images showcase the spirit of our communities and the creativity of the people and places in Wakefield district.

Whether in art, sport, history, or everyday experiences, culture brought us together. Culture is connection. It's movement. It's heritage. It's creativity. And in our district, it's for everyone, everywhere.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who was part of Our Year: cultural, civic, community and heritage organisations, volunteers and the many artist, businesses and partners.

As we look back, we also look forward. The impact of Our Year continues, shaping the future of our district with energy, pride, and ambition. Because here, in Wakefield district, culture never stops - it grows, evolves, and brings us together, always.



Culture and connection

Image by JMA Photography

Wakefield District came alive in 2024, celebrating the culture on our doorsteps and the everyday moments that bring us together. Families, friends, and neighbourhoods connected through performances, art, and even rhubarb pink, which became a symbol of pride. Our Year reminded us of the power of creativity, and its presence in our district - woven into our streets, stories, and shared experiences.



Discovering local spaces

Image by Nick Singleton

Sometimes, discovering our local spaces meant using them in surprising and unexpected ways. From the newly established parkrun at Frickley County Park, to Open Country's 'Wild About Water', which invited people to connect with their surroundings in creative exploration of blue and green spaces. Nature walks, art workshops, and community festivals invited everyone to experience our high streets, parks and waterways in fresh and engaging ways.



Sharing food, feeling well

Image by Nick Singleton

Food has a special way of bringing people together. Through meals, festivals, and cooking, we nourished our community spirit. Fusion Fest, hosted by Progressive Talent CIC, celebrated African and Caribbean cultures with music, dance, and delicious dishes. This was just one of many events where communities shared food and celebrated cultural cohesion. Projects like 'The Big Lunch' and 'Let's Get Cooking' focused on engaging residents in developing healthy future habits with accessible budget-friendly meals.



Nature on your doorstep

Image by Nick Singleton

By walking, cycling, and exploring, we founded creative ways to reconnect with nature. Themed guided walks, like 'Walls of Wildlife' and new 'Wonders of Wakefield' cycle routes revealed hidden gems in our district. The 'Beat the Street' game in Featherstone encouraged families to get outside more, with participants discovering new places, moving more, or simply spending quality time outside in their neighbourhood. These activities reminded us that nature is closer than we think - it's just waiting to be explored.



Movement for everyone

Image by David Lindsay

The Inclusive Sports Festival created new opportunities for disabled people and those with health conditions to be more active. Held in September, events brought people together to enjoy a range of sports, from wheelchair basketball to horse riding. The event promoted health and wellbeing, building connections and making movement more accessible for all. As part of the wider 'Moving Festival,' Featherstone Rovers Foundation hosted free family play sessions at Nostell Priory, offering fun activities in beautiful parkland.



Growing greener

Image by Nick Singleton

Wakefield is growing - literally. Community gardens, allotments, and green spaces flourished in 2024. At Appletree Community Garden's Earth Day event, people explored sustainable gardening and greener living - and had fun whilst doing it! Across the district, activities encouraged foraging, growing food seasonally and making eco-conscious choices. These hands-on efforts showed how small actions can make a big impact, inspiring a shared commitment to our greener future.



Taking part

Image by JMA Photography

We are so grateful for our volunteers, whose support made Our Year truly special. Whether supporting festivals or community projects, they built lasting connections, gained new skills, and found joy in giving back. For many it was a chance to make new friends and to try something new and rewarding. “Thank you for letting me be a part of it. I’ll remember it for the rest of my life,” shared one volunteer. Their contributions created a lasting impact we will always appreciate, and there’s more to come.



Celebrating our places

Image by Nick Singleton

Our district’s spaces became a canvas for community expression. Clarence Park Festival brought live music to thousands, while a striking new mural by artist Mohammed Barranghi at Pinderfields Hospital celebrated the anniversary of the NHS. Wakefield Pride marked 20 years of inclusion, uniting local organisations like the National Coal Mining Museum and Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners to honour and share heritage. Across our district, together we transformed familiar spaces into hubs of celebration.



Iconic festivals

Image by Nick Singleton

We live and breathe culture in Wakefield district! In November, 'The Timekeepers' installation by Illuminos, at Light Up Wakefield lit up County Hall, blending sound and visuals inspired by Wakefield Museum collections. This immersive light installation, celebrating Wakefield's heritage, brought to life objects like the Waterton Clock and Castleford Pig. Festivals including Rhubarb, Roman Castleford, and Pontefract Liquorice are central to the district's identity, uniting the community in celebration of tradition and attracting visitors from far and wide.



Our moment of wonder

Image by JMA Photography

'The Hatchling' was a moment of pure magic that brought Wakefield district together for a once in a lifetime experience. In August 2024, the giant dragon puppet hatched outside Wakefield Cathedral, with choirs, dancers, and local groups including CAPA College, CoActive and Wakey Wheeled Cats, joining forces to bring her journey to life whilst thousands watched. The event was a true celebration of community pride, creativity, and collaboration, providing people of all ages with an experience we'll never forget.



Culture every day

Image by Nick Singleton

Culture isn't just a special occasion - it's part of daily life in for our district. From Lunar New Year celebrations with the Hong Kong community to partying at Portobello Gala and enjoying food and music at Wakefield Mela, Our Year supported a diverse range of cultural events across the district. Communities, families, and individuals were also able to celebrate their own heritage within the neighbourhoods they call home. These events helped communities share traditions, bring people together and make culture an everyday experience.



Inspiring opportunity

Image by Nick Singleton

'Key to the North,' a series of talks highlighting the district as a place of opportunity, sparked learning, debate and new ways of thinking. At Wakefield Cathedral CBeebies presenter, actor, and dancer George Webster shared his inspiring message: Why not? He encouraged children and young people with learning disabilities to dream big and pursue creative careers. Talks at Pontefract Castle and Wakefield Library featured speakers like author Joanne Harris, historian Dr Jonathan Foyle, broadcaster Dr Hannah French, each sharing their journeys and proving that doors to opportunity can open in unexpected ways.



Sharing our roots

Image by Nick Singleton

Our Year celebrated cultural inclusion through community events, where diverse voices and traditions came together. Embracing our district's cultural diversity, events such as FusionFest and One Ummah's celebration during Refugee Week, brought together groups from all backgrounds to share in the richness of Wakefield's multicultural communities. These celebrations provide a platform for cultural exchange, emphasise community solidarity, and ensure diverse voices are heard year-round.



Wakefield district; where culture thrives

Image by JMA Photography

In 2024, our district redefined culture; who it's for, where it happens, and how we all engage with it. The refurbished Ossett Library welcomed us, while Thornes Park Stadium's new all-weather track provided year-round access. Beyond gallery walls, partners such as The Hepworth Wakefield, The Art House, and public art installations brought creativity into everyday interactions, inviting everyone to experience art and culture in unexpected ways.



Stories that shape us

Image by Nick Singleton

Our district is immersed in history, with every street, building, community and landmark holding many stories. 2024 marked 100 years of Wakefield Historical Society and 60 years of Wakefield Civic Society with a new blue plaque, honouring important institutions that preserve our past. With support from National Heritage Lottery Fund, Our Year strengthened partnerships and promoted heritage. Exhibitions and the 'With Banners Held High' union festival commemorated the 40th anniversary of the Miners' Strike, a significant community-led moment in history.



Exploring our heritage

Image by Nick Singleton

Heritage connects us to our past while shaping our future. In 2024, the 'Our Stories' project helped uncover the district's rich history of mining, textiles, and performance. 'Seeing Double', a major exhibition at Wakefield Museum, explored the impact of Wakefield brand 'Double Two' on fashion, textile innovation, and migration with the world's first synthetic shirt. The Heritage Framework was launched, setting out how together we will protect and celebrate Wakefield's heritage for future generations.



Art and industry

Image by Studio Bokehgo

Creativity and industry came together across Wakefield shaping new opportunities for businesses. 'Creativity Around the Corner,' led by Unlimited, brought artists into workplaces like OE Electrics and NHS Mid Yorks Trust to explore modern work. The newly launched Wakefield Exchange hosted a gaming experience with modern and retro games, showcasing creative careers in gaming. Businesses joined the Leap Club to support Our Year along with sponsors like Haribo and YPO, allowing our community events to be more impactful than ever before.



Culture for everyone

Image by David Lindsay

Powered by partnerships, cultural experiences were created everywhere, for everyone. Created by artists Adam Glatherine, Akeelah Bertram and Creative Technologist Simon Fletcher, 'Light Organ' at Yorkshire Sculpture Park invited all to connect with art through sound and light. Our thanks to our cultural partners for working with us to ensure culture was, and continues to be, accessible and inclusive. From youth arts festivals to outreach with resettled families and individuals with mental health challenges, the arts enriched communities and provided amazing opportunities to explore and interact with a variety of art forms.



Building creative futures

Image by Nick Singleton

Creatives continue to transform spaces and bring art to all corners of our district. Led by Beam and YVAN for Wakefield Council, the UNBOUND mentoring programme supported underrepresented artists by pairing them with muralists to develop skills and deliver creative projects in public spaces. The first of six murals designed during Our Year, 'Lighting the Lanes' was created by artist Douglas Black. This stained-glass piece reflects Hemsworth's community, shaped by stories, ideas and contributions of local participants.



Memories made together

Image by Nick Singleton

Our Year kicked off with the '24 in 24' launch event, offering a glimpse of a vibrant 2024 ahead. From pottery to poetry, we explored new skills in every ward. Whether painting pots at Pontefract Castle, woodworking by building bird boxes in Outwood, or trying rag-rugger at the local library, there was something for everyone. These sessions sparked joy, encouraged us to try new things, and let everyone know Our Year was here.



Making time for wellbeing

Image by Nick Singleton

Our Year 2024 created space for people to connect, create, and care for their wellbeing. Wellbeing Wonders in care homes brought joy through arts, cooking, and singing, improving mood and even sleep. At Theatre Royal Wakefield, movement and musical theatre helped people find and develop their voices. Access bursaries made experiences more inclusive, breaking down barriers and opening doors across the district. Green spaces, libraries, and leisure centres hosted events, bringing wellbeing to everyone.



Skills for future

Image by Nick Singleton

Creative skills are the foundation for tomorrow's careers, and summer s'cool and WordFest are giving young people the tools to build their futures. Children and teens dived into music making, pod casting, filmmaking, and digital exploration. These practical experiences offered more than just fun; they provided insight into future careers. "Taking part in summer s'cool has definitely broadened my horizons to filmmaking and how inspired I actually feel by it." With the support of expert mentors, these young creators are shaping their future - one creative experience at a time.



Spotlighting artists and makers

Image by Nick Singleton

Wakefield's creative talent is flourishing, with local artists drawing inspiration from the district's artistic heritage. Supported by Culture Grants, artists explored diverse creative practices, from sculpture and painting to music and digital arts, to develop new work and engage local communities. Naomi Aderonke Crompton collaborated with Wakefield Museum to study historic pottery, reinterpreting traditional designs through contemporary ceramics. Workshops invited the community to craft medieval style mugs.



Learning through creativity

Image by Andrew Bengé

Wakefield schools embraced cultural learning, weaving sculpture, mining, and environmental themes into their classroom using the new Wakefield Curriculum designed by the Local Cultural Education Partnership, SPARK and supported by Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Artist-led activities, teacher training including an Educators Conference, and school bursaries ensured all children could access creative experiences. These opportunities connected children with their district's stories, people, and places. 'We couldn't have facilitated some of these "wow" moments for the children on our own,' shared one teacher.

OUR PLACE

A poem written by Max,
West Yorkshire Young Poet Laureate 2025

To read Max's poem scan the QR code



West Yorkshire Young Poet Laureate Programme

In 2023 the National Literacy Trust, in partnership with the Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin, and National Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage, launched the West Yorkshire Young Poet Laureate programme. This initiative was designed in response to declining writing for enjoyment levels in West Yorkshire and aimed to inspire and support the next generation of young poets in the region. This programme included a week of poet-led school activities to encourage pupils' creativity, giving them a purpose and motivation to write poetry, and culminated in the appointment of the first-ever Young Poets Laureate to represent West Yorkshire.

National Literacy Trust

The National Literacy Trust is an independent charity that empowers children, young people and adults with the literacy skills they need to succeed. Reading, writing, speaking and listening skills give you the tools to get the most out of life and the power to shape your future. For over 30 years the National Literacy Trust has continued to support schools, families and communities on a local and national level to help people change their stories.



Tell us what you think!