

# “Joy, Belonging and Collective Power”: Inside the Launch of the New Outdoor Arts UK Strategy

Following Clare’s galvanising keynote, the 2026 Outdoor Arts UK Conference shifted gear into a major moment for the sector: the public launch of a new national **Outdoor Arts Strategy** — a shared, sector-led framework two years in the making.

Presented by Simon Chatterton, Sho Shibata, Sid Basu, and Ralph Kennedy, the launch was not simply the unveiling of a document. It was a rallying call for unity, visibility, investment and long-term thinking in a sector that has long delivered extraordinary public value with few resources and little recognition.

This is the story they told — and the future they invited the sector to help shape.

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## Why the Strategy Matters Now

Simon opened the session with a striking reminder: outdoor arts has always flourished in moments of political rupture — from 1968 Paris to Greenham Common. And today’s moment, as Clare made clear, is one of profound rupture.

Outdoor arts:

- reaches people other artforms cannot
- animates public space
- sparks belonging
- crosses cultural and financial barriers
- delivers civic value at scale

But despite this, the sector remains underfunded, under-recognised and vulnerable. Local authority cuts, rising costs, shrinking infrastructure and inconsistent opportunities all threaten the work.

**“Our value without visibility is not enough,”** Simon said. “We must be in the room, shaping the future of culture.”

The new strategy aims to change that.

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## A Collective Strategy Built From the Ground Up

This was not a top-down policy exercise — and the presenters emphasised that again and again.

The process included:

- a major sector gathering
- 95 in-depth survey responses
- 50 one-to-one interviews
- an external reference group
- roundtable conversations

From start to finish, the process took nearly two years.

Sho described the result as **“a strategy created for, with and by the Outdoor Arts sector.”**

It reflects not just aspirations, but the lived reality of artists, producers, event organisers embedded in communities across the UK.

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## Outdoor Arts as a Democratic Culture

Sho introduced the strategy's vision: **“Culture belongs to everyone — and public space is where that becomes real.”**

The strategy identifies three interlocking foundations of outdoor arts:

### 1. Culturally democratic and accessible to all

Work that meets people where they are — in streets, squares, estates, parks, parades and marketplaces.

### 2. Rooted in place and community

Outdoor arts strengthens local identity, pride, and trust. It thrives by listening to people and responding to context.

### 3. A driver of regeneration and civic life

The work supports wellbeing, social cohesion, local economies, and shared public experience.

Importantly, the strategy rejects the outdated binary that separates artistic ambition from accessibility.

Outdoor arts, Sho argued, **holds both civic purpose and artistic excellence together** — and that is its superpower.

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## Turning Value Into Influence

Sid then shifted the conversation from principles to *practice*.

Outdoor arts already delivers what national policy wants:

- social connection
- community cohesion
- pride in place
- large-scale cultural participation
- wellbeing impact
- regenerative placemaking

Yet the sector is prone to being excluded from funding mechanisms that are designed — ironically — to support exactly this kind of work.

Sid explained that the strategy is designed to give the sector:

- a shared language
- a shared evidence base
- shared priorities
- flexible implementation pathways

Not a rigid plan, but a framework for collective action across artists, event organisers, producers, local authorities and funders.

**“This strategy doesn’t resolve the tensions,”** Sid said. **“It holds them — and helps us navigate them together.”**

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## The Four Strategic Objectives

At the heart of the strategy are **four objectives** that work together as a system:

## 1. Sector Development

Strengthening the conditions for creation, touring, production, training, environmental sustainability and equity.

## 2. Evidence & Insight

Developing shared tools to articulate value more consistently — without creating data burdens.

## 3. Advocacy & Influence

Ensuring outdoor arts is recognised as **core civic infrastructure**, not an optional add-on.

## 4. International Exchange

Keeping the sector outward-looking and globally connected, while responding responsibly to climate realities.

These objectives are not boxes to tick — they are interdependent levers for long-term resilience.

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## What the Strategy *Is* and *Isn't*

Ralph closed the presentation by clarifying what this document represents.

### It is **NOT**:

- a manifesto
- a funding bid
- a wish-list
- an organisational business plan

### It **IS**:

- a shared framework
- a set of sector-owned priorities
- a basis for collective advocacy
- a roadmap for the next 10 years
- a tool that can be used locally, regionally and nationally

OutdoorArtsUK will act as the “anchor and catalyst” — but the strategy belongs to the entire sector.

**“If we align, if we collect better evidence, if we speak with one voice,”** Ralph said, **“we can create the conditions for the next generation of artists, producers and collaborators to thrive.”**

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## **A Turning Point for the Sector**

The launch ended with [a powerful video of the Closing Ceremony for Bradford City of Culture](#), a visual reminder of what outdoor arts can do at its best: bring people together, in public, in joy, in solidarity.

The message of the morning — from Clare’s keynote to the strategy launch — rang clear:

Outdoor arts has never been more needed.

And now, with this strategy, the sector has a shared story, a shared framework and a shared direction.

This is a turning point.

A chance to claim visibility, influence policy, and fight for long-term investment.

A moment to recognise that joy itself is civic power.

A moment to organise — creatively, collectively, courageously.

The work begins now.