
BUSK Leicester – Overview

Culture & Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission

Date of meeting: 3rd September 2026

Lead Officer: Graham Callister

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected:
- Report author: Graham Callister, Head of Festivals, Events & Cultural Policy
- Author contact details: graham.callister@leicester.gov.uk
- Report version number: 1

1. Summary

To provide Members with an overview of the new BUSK Leicester pilot initiative March – May 2026 delivered by the F&E team and proposed next steps.

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny:

Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission are invited to:

- Note the outcomes of the BUSK Leicester pilot (March–May 2026), including levels of participation, stakeholder feedback and early operational learning.
- Comment on the proposed expansion of approved busking locations across the city centre and whether these support the ambitions of the Heart of Leicester Strategy while balancing the needs of residents, businesses and visitors.
- Comment on the proposed next phase of the initiative, including future promotion, management arrangements and opportunities to strengthen Leicester's live music and cultural offer.

3. Detailed report

A. Background

As part of the Heart of Leicester Strategy a proposal was put forward by F&E to introduce an accessible, simple process for buskers / street performers to utilise the city streets, positively impacting visitors and local businesses.

This would include:

- Implementation of a simple online process for buskers / street performers to book pitches in prime locations around the city.
- Identifying suitable pitch locations within the city that attract natural footfall without causing obstruction or nuisance.
- Marketing through a promotional campaign and online awareness.

B. Booking Process, PSPO enforcement, Monitoring

A simple online booking process running alongside the current city centre booking system managed by the Festivals & Events Team was created allowing buskers / street performers to choose a set area within the city for a maximum of 3 days per location. As part of the booking buskers / street performers would agree to and sign LCC T&Cs which identified

appropriate noise levels, consideration to local businesses, protocols and licensing conditions.

For the pilot it was decided that an audition process for buskers / street performers would not be required as music /street performance tastes are wide and varied.

LCC F&E budget would cover all performance license fees and the F&E team continue to monitor local business and stakeholder feedback.

City Wardens and PSPO Enforcement Officers are kept informed and provided access to the bookings calendar.

C. Locations, Marketing & Communications

A range of possible locations for the pilot were considered including Jubilee Square, Granby Street Train Station and future Market Square. For the pilot it was decided that the BUSK Leicester would focus on the following locations:

- High Street
- East Gates
- Belgrave Gate
- Gallowtree Gate

A bespoke BUSK Leicester brand identity and signage was created highlighting allocated spaces in the city centre with QR codes directly linking buskers to the online booking form. Launched at the Leicester Music Conference in February 2026 the pilot was supported with a social media campaign led by LCC, Visit Leicester and local partners that included Leicester Music Board partners and BBC Radio Leicester.

Promotion of BUSK Leicester continues via Leicester F&E social media channels, tagging by city partners, a monthly Visit Leicester music blog update and the artist / busker own self-promotion. The initiative was also featured at Riverside Festival which enjoyed attendances of c.60,000.

D. Stakeholder Engagement

Local creative stakeholders involved in helping to promote the initiative and local musicians / artists included 2Funky Arts, CDCA Academy (dance), HQ Recordings and Studio79 (dance).

Leicester Music Board has also been briefed of the initiative which includes PPL PRS, De Montfort University, TiME, Leicestershire Music Service and UMC Management.

E. Budget

Budget

A provisional annual budget of £15,000 was allocated to support the following costs:

- Brand design
- Signage production
- Marketing / promotional costs

- Premises Licence and PPL PRS performance fees

To date the brand, signage, marketing and PPL PRS costs have been minimal at £5,152.

Premises Licence and PPL PRS fees are estimated to cost up to £9,000 in Year 1 and reduce Year 2. Additional investment will be required to produce more robust outdoor signage.

F. Bookings to date

117 bookings have been taken during the initial pilot phase. Individual performers have been the largest booker at 80% of all bookings, with 17% groups and 3% bands. Vocalists (singer) with backing tracks have been the largest form of busker type, followed by guitar and acoustic instrument performers.

Popularity by location:

- Gallowtree Gate 37%
- High Street 32%
- East Gate 18%
- Belgrave Gate 13%

G. Evaluation

Partner feedback

PSPO Team - Feedback from neighbouring businesses to adjust location of High Street spot due to noise to residents and storefront presence e.g. Lumbers. PSPO officers now have postcards for promoting the scheme and are moving people into the official busking locations from other parts of the centre e.g. Humberstone Gate West.

Police – Police colleagues have raised no concerns with the pilot to date and have indicated that additional managed busking locations could support the wider ‘look and feel’ of the city centre and help discourage unregulated activity elsewhere.

LCC Marketing & Comms - Media interests sparked during announcements and TV filming opportunities are under discussion. Recommendation for targeted recaps and announcements of upcoming bookings e.g. school holidays to keep momentum plus paid advertisements for next phase to maintain momentum and build online brand presence.

Leicester Music Board – ‘Busking has always been a vital entry point into the industry. We are proud that Leicester Music Conference is the first event helping relaunch it and embed it within a stronger music ecosystem for Leicester and the Midlands.’

Participation Survey – Key Findings

The survey findings should be treated as early indicative feedback rather than statistically representative results. The survey remains open for a further four weeks to increase the response base, particularly from local businesses and creative audiences. Early survey findings however provide a positive overall picture of BUSK Leicester, particularly from artists and creatives.

Artists and Creatives – Strong Positive Response - Feedback from artists and creatives is the strongest aspect of the survey:

- 92.3% said BUSK Leicester has provided creatives with a space to perform in the city.
- 79% would return to busk in Leicester.
- 76.9% felt it had helped animate the city streets.
- 73% of responding artists were Leicester/Leicestershire residents, demonstrating a strong local creative dimension.
- 71.4% felt locations were clearly branded and identifiable, and the same proportion felt there were sufficient locations for their needs.

The qualitative feedback also suggests BUSK Leicester is helping artists reach new audiences and build their profile, with one artist highlighting new audience reactions, donations and social media/streaming engagement.

Key strength: BUSK Leicester is clearly providing valued performance opportunities and helping animate public space, with strong support from the creative participants.

Areas to improve: Repeat participation was relatively low (only 10% of survey respondents were repeat bookers at the time of the survey) and only 29% said they engaged with more people than expected. Further research will explore how to increase repeat participation; audience reach and progression opportunities for artists.

Local Businesses – Business feedback is currently being collated to gather insight into their individual experiences since the launch of BUSK Leicester.

Further engagement will explore the relationship between busking locations, business experience, footfall, perceptions of safety and potential anti-social behaviour concerns.

Overall Feedback

- 84.6% of survey respondents overall felt BUSK Leicester has a positive impact on the city.
- Overall experience rated by all survey respondents (including partners, local artists and creatives) was 3.23 out of 5.

Overall, the findings support the continuation and further development of BUSK Leicester, with the strongest evidence relating to its value to artists and city-centre animation. The priority for the next phase will be to build on the positive creative response while assessing locations and impact, supported by stronger audience and economic impact research.

Complaints

Only one complaint raised to date on personal safety concerns. A busker received verbal abuse from a local resident. An alternative location for the busker was found and complaint regarding abuse was passed on to the Police.

H. Next Steps

The next phase of BUSK Leicester will focus on building on the strong positive response from artists and creatives, whilst awaiting further insight on the feedback of local

businesses. This will be supported by stronger audience and economic impact research to better understand the wider value of the initiative and inform its future development.

1. Strengthen the creative offer

- Continue to provide accessible performance opportunities for local and visiting artists, with a focus on maintaining a diverse range of art forms.
- Monitor the impact of the revised two-hour performance slots, including whether this increases the number and diversity of performers able to participate.
- Continue discussions with the Leicester Music Board to explore how BUSK Leicester can become an established element of its wider programme and contribute to other festivals and events in the city.
- Explore opportunities to create progression routes for emerging and local artists, potentially through links with city-centre venues, festivals and other live performance opportunities.

2. Expand and improve performance locations

- F&E explore the feasibility of additional locations including New Walk Museum Café, Granby Street, St Peter's Square, Haymarket Bus Station and Leicester Train Station.
- Potential new locations will be assessed against suitability, audience potential, business impact, safety, accessibility and operational requirements.

3. Improve branding and on-street assets

- Review the current lamppost sleeves and other on-street assets, which have proved vulnerable to adverse weather and anti-social behaviour.
- Work with LCC Highways and Cleansing to explore more durable and prominent solutions, including weighted felt lamppost sleeves, painted/stencilled floor logos, durable floor vinyl's and digital projections, subject to budget and permissions.
- Review asset positioning to address visibility issues caused by trees, street furniture and existing signage.

4. Improve the booking and application process

- Continue to review the application process to reduce administrative pressures on F&E and improve booking turnaround times.
- Consider minimum notice periods, booking windows and other measures to better manage demand while retaining flexibility for artists.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the revised booking arrangements and use participant feedback to inform further changes.

5. Strengthen marketing and promotion

- Implement the developing BUSK Leicester marketing and communications plan.
- Improve visibility across LCC, Leicester Festivals and Visit Leicester digital platforms.
- Develop promotional collaborations with Highcross, Haymarket, BID Leicester and East Midlands Railway to increase awareness among artists, audiences and businesses.

- Explore opportunities to integrate BUSK Leicester into wider city-centre events and activity.

6. Strengthen evaluation and evidence

- Continue gathering feedback from artists, local businesses and creative audiences to build a stronger evidence base.
- Develop measures to assess audience engagement, artist participation and progression, city-centre animation, business experience and economic impact.
- Use this evidence to identify which locations and approaches deliver the greatest benefit and to inform the longer-term operating model for BUSK Leicester.

Overall, the aim is to move BUSK Leicester from a successful pilot towards a more established, evidence-led initiative that delivers clear value for creatives, audiences, businesses and the wider city centre.

I. SUMMARY

Key Headlines

- 117 bookings were made during the March–May 2026 pilot, demonstrating clear demand for managed city-centre busking opportunities.
- The strongest response has been from artists and creatives, with 84.6% of respondents overall reporting a positive impact on the city.
- The pilot has generated limited complaints, with no significant concerns raised by Police to date.
- Further evidence is required on audience engagement, business experience and economic impact.

The BUSK Leicester pilot has demonstrated clear demand for accessible, managed performance opportunities and provided positive early evidence of its contribution to city-centre animation and Leicester's creative offer. The pilot has also provided valuable operational learning around locations, booking arrangements, promotion and stakeholder engagement.

The next phase will build on the overall positive responses to date. This will include reviewing and potentially expanding locations, strengthening business engagement and promotion, refining the booking process, and developing stronger audience and economic impact research to inform the longer-term approach.

4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

4.1 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications beyond those detailed in the main body of this report.

Signed: Stuart McAvoy - Head of Finance.

Dated: 19.08.2026

4.2 Legal Implications

There are presently no legal implications from a litigation perspective.

Signed: Shazmina Ghumra (Principal Solicitor – Civil Litigation) Ext. 37 1433

Dated: 21 August 2026

4.3 Equalities Implications

In carrying out its duties under the Equality Act 2010, the Council must pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (the Public Sector Equality Duty). Protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The report provides Members with an overview of the BUSK Leicester pilot initiative. The initiative aimed to increase access to city-centre performance opportunities for artists and creatives. It is important to have managed locations, clear terms and ongoing monitoring to reduce potential nuisance or anti-social behaviour that could disproportionately affect people with protected characteristics. No eligibility criteria restrict access on the basis of protected characteristics, and licence fees are covered by the Council to reduce financial barriers. Ongoing evaluation will monitor participation and impact.

To ensure that equality impacts are considered as an integral part of any future review or amendment of the initiative, it is recommended that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) be undertaken if significant changes to locations, times, scale or management arrangements are proposed, or if monitoring identifies potential disproportionate impacts on people with protected characteristics. Overall, the proposal is considered to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations by supporting a more inclusive and diverse cultural offer in the city centre.

Signed: Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

Dated: 17.08.2026

4.4 Climate Emergency Implications

There are no significant climate emergency implications arising from this project.

Signed: Duncan Bell, Change Manager (Climate Emergency). Ext. 37 2249.

Dated: 19.08.2026

4.5 Other Implications

Highways

As highway authority the Council must ensure that any adopted highway is not unlawfully obstructed. Under S137 of the Highways Act 1980 busking can be considered to be an unlawful obstruction if paths or roads are obstructed or if a busker wilfully prevents free passage of pedestrians or vehicles. Festivals & Events should therefore liaise with Highways to prevent complaints or unlawful obstruction of the highway.

Consideration should also be given as to whether the buskers will require street trading licences depending on whether they are permitted to sell merchandise or CDs from the busking points. Passive collection (such as asking for donations within an open instrument case) may not require licence, but the selling of CDs or merchandise is classified as street trading and requires a separate licence.

Signed: Zoe Iliffe, Principal Lawyer (Property Highways & Planning)

Dated: 20.08.2026

Highways are very supportive of the BUSK Leicester scheme pilot and have not been made aware of any issues arising from a highway management perspective.

The Highway Authority has a duty to ensure the safety of the travelling public and manage obstruction of the highway, so it is appropriate for sites to be shared with Highways for review.

Locations should ensure safe access/egress to and from premises is maintained, especially emergency exits and routes, and emergency Service and Large Goods Vehicle routing should not be obstructed. Busker sites should not compromise the effective operation of the Pedestrian Preference Zone infrastructure, such as the Automatic Access Bollards and CCTV installations.

Under the Traffic Management Act 2004 and the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, statutory undertakers (i.e. utilities) have powers, including emergency powers, to enable them to exercise their statutory obligations and undertake street works to maintain services. Proposed BUSK Leicester sites should be co-ordinated with the Council's Network Management Team to avoid clashes with utility works.

Signed: Martin Fletcher, City Highways Director. Ext 37 4965

Dated: 20.08.2026

5. Background information and other papers:

N/A

6. Summary of appendices:

N/A