

Outdoor Arts Commission Opportunity

Milton Keynes City Council
and Croydon Council





Milton Keynes City Council and Croydon Council are working in partnership to co-commission a new outdoor arts performance to feature as part of the Midsummer Festival in Milton Keynes and Croydon Harvest , featuring The Walnut Fair in Croydon.

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Background

Milton Keynes City Council and Croydon Council are working in collaboration to co-commission a new outdoor arts performance to feature as part of the Midsummer Festival, Milton Keynes in June 2025 and Croydon Harvest, featuring The Walnut Fair, Croydon in October 2025.

Midsummer Festival, Milton Keynes

Taking place on Sunday 22 June, 10am–10pm, the second edition of the Midsummer Festival features a free, fun-packed family-friendly programme inspired by the summer solstice. Located on Midsummer Boulevard, which was built to famously align with the rising and setting sun, the Festival transforms both the road and surrounding public realm into joyful, colour filled stage, hosting performances, creative workshops, concerts, art installations, a fantastic street food offer and more.

The inaugural Festival in 2024 attracted over 7,000 visitors.

Programme highlights included

Wild Rumpus who are known for producing extraordinary, immersive worlds, taking audiences out of their day to day lives into magical and enchanting places, which can inspire and have a lasting impact. The Pavilion of the Hopeful Sun transformed Midsummer Boulevard in 2024 and will return once again this year. Folk Dance Remix and Ghost Caribou by Thingamajig Theatre wowed audiences alongside a series of newly commissioned works by local artists and creative practitioners. A music tent, creative workshop space and a sold-out food and drink offer completed the 2024 line-up.

2025 promises to be even bigger and better. The Festival will spread further along Midsummer Boulevard, with a second music tent, larger street food offer curated by Sophie Eats and more free creative workshops for all to enjoy. Confirmed programme highlights include a new commission by Leap then Look; a fairy-tale performance by Bernadette Russell and a performance installation by Seiko Kinoshita.

An open call submission has resulted in over 60 incredible proposals – four of which will be selected for inclusion. A Folk Tent curated by local folk duo Drywood, alongside an experimental music programme taking us through to late evening promises to be a popular addition.



Croydon Harvest — featuring The Walnut Fair, Croydon

Following Croydon's year as London Borough of Culture 2023–24, the Council's culture team has been leading a legacy programme targeting new and diverse audiences with an emphasis on supporting town centre regeneration objectives.

Croydon Harvest featuring The Walnut Fair was instigated in 2024. It brought together Croydon communities and visitors to celebrate food, folk, faith, countryside/nature and sustainability. The event represented multiple cultures and cultural traditions from Bhangra dancing to Flamenco, Mummers to Mariachis, toy menageries to petting farms. It included roaming street performers, crafts, storytelling, and food stalls across The Queen's Gardens, Katharine Street and Surrey Street. It attracted circa 5,000 people.

An October fair taking place in central Croydon is not something new. The Walnut Fair started in Surrey Street in 1314. It moved to various locations around the town before ending up at Fair Field where the present Fairfield Halls sits today.

Pollock's Toy Museum recreated Croydon's historic Walnut Fair from their much-loved collection of bears, dolls, toy theatres and more for the 2024 event!

The 2025 edition of Croydon Harvest will take place on 4–5 October.

Context

Milton Keynes

Conceived in 1967, Milton Keynes is the one of most ambitious social projects ever to be realised in the UK. Guided by a set of founding utopian principles: the very best place to live; freedom of choice; ease of movement; everyone welcome; and jobs for all – the city is one of the world’s most successful new towns. Milton Keynes has a current population of 267,000 and by 2050 the population of the city and surrounding areas will be at least 400,000. As one most diverse cities in the UK, the 2021 census records over 160 different languages are now spoken in MK’s schools.

Milton Keynes has one of the fastest growing economies in the UK, with an exceptionally high number of business start-ups,

particularly within the digital and high-tech arenas. The city is a major centre of the UK’s high-tech manufacturing and research industries. Other major industries include agriculture, tourism, construction, entertainment, education, retail and finance.

Milton Keynes’ has a vibrant, innovative and growing cultural offer where festivals, events and temporary commissions form part of a burgeoning annual calendar. For the next five years, Milton Keynes City Council has pledged a commitment to support a ‘spotlight’ on central Milton Keynes, pledging resources for a city-centre cultural programme designed to increase footfall, deliver a positive economic impact and enhanced cultural reputation.

Croydon

Croydon is the ‘capital of South London,’ and critical to plans for sustainable growth in London, the South-East and the wider United Kingdom. Described in 2024 as ‘the biggest single opportunity site in London’ by the Deputy Mayor of London, Croydon is at the centre of London’s plans for sustainable growth being identified as only one of two Metropolitan centres with high growth potential in London for commercial, residential and officer growth.

Croydon’s town centre regeneration will draw on five sources of advantage, unique to Croydon. Croydon’s rich heritage, its unrivalled connectivity, its diverse and inclusive culture and communities, access to some of the best green spaces in the world,

and its offer of affordable housing with significant regeneration potential. The vision is a vibrant, attractive and flourishing town centre, that celebrates the past and draws in residents of the future.

It will:

- Celebrate Croydon’s proud history
- Build on strengths in creative industries and the experience economy
- Increase the number of high-quality, mixed tenure homes
- Support growth of anchor institutions from the public and private sector
- Be easily accessible, from London, the South-East, and around the globe

The Commission

Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) and Croydon Council (LBC) are looking to appoint an experienced artist, creative practitioner or outdoor arts company to develop and deliver a new outdoor performance commission, which will feature as part of both Midsummer Festival, Milton Keynes and Croydon Harvest, Croydon in 2025.

Through this commissioning process, both MKCC and LBC are keen to demonstrate the value that artists and creative practitioners can bring to public spaces, and evidence how creative interventions can enhance the lived experience through the meaningful engagement of communities.



The overarching aims and objectives for the commission can be summarised as:

- Develop and deliver a two-location, high-energy, impactful and engaging outdoor performance work, suitable for a family audience.
- To take inspiration from, explore and reveal the various themes and ideas inherent within each Festival including; Midsummer folklore, summer solstice, global harvest festival traditions seasonal customs of the British Isles (including overlooked folklore traditions), local myths, stories and legends.
- Take into consideration each Festival's wider programme and ensure that any proposal is complimentary.
- Consider and respond to the public realm context of both Festivals, taking into consideration both the opportunities and constraints of both locations.
- Prioritise audience engagement and participation; exploring the possibility of a processional, participatory element of the performance.
- Consider seasonality. Midsummer Festival is in June and Harvest Festival takes place 4–5 October. The performance will need to be responsive and flexible enough to respond to different weather and light conditions.
- Both Festivals are free and non-ticketed, therefore it is not possible to predict exact audience numbers. Consideration should be given to the possible need to scale up or scale down accordingly. The expectation is that there would be two performances of the new work at each Festival.
- Consideration should be given to environmental impact of the commission.

Learning from previous Festivals

Both MKCC and LBC have good evaluation reports and audience intelligence gathered from previous Festivals. The selected artist/practice/company will be required to put forward an approach within their application which outlines how they have acknowledged and reflected this learning.

Other Considerations

- The appointed applicant will be expected to work closely with Festival Directors and Producers in both locations to oversee all aspects of production and delivery.
- Sufficient time and resource should be allocated to research and development within budget proposals.
- Consideration must be given to health and safety implications of work in both locations from the outset.
- The appointed applicant will be required to support any applications for necessary permissions required to deliver the commission.
- Evaluation mechanisms must be considered and fed into the overarching evaluation strategies for both Festivals.

Stakeholders and Local Partner Engagement

There are many creative practitioners, programmers, makers, fabricators and a rich variety of cultural organisations in both Milton Keynes and Croydon. It is important that applicants make use of these resources if appropriate.

Selection Process

Applicants should understand the context and aspirations of the commission and then submit a proposal via:
culture@milton-keynes.gov.uk

Shortlisted applicants will be required to present to Festival teams.

A final proposal will be selected and the applicant awarded the commission. The successful applicant will be expected to further develop their proposal working in close collaboration with MKCC and LBC. This process may require revisions to the original concept and potential locations.

To make a submission please submit the information outlined below under **How to Apply**.

Budget

The overall commission budget is £40,000 ex VAT. This is to include all fees (including travel, accommodation and subsistence), fabrication costs and costs associated with delivering two performances of the commission in both Midsummer Festival and Harvest Festival.

Marketing and Communications

The appointed applicant will be required to work with MKCC and LBC's Marketing and Communications teams to co-ordinate the delivery of a marketing and communications campaign.

Evaluation

Qualitative and quantitative evaluation methodologies alongside Economic Impact Assessments will be delivered by MKCC and LBC to ensure that feedback and data is captured.

Additional Support

A dedicated Project Manager will be assigned to support the delivery in both locations.

Exclusions

We will not accept proposals for existing artworks; projects that do not meet the timescales/budget or approaches that do not respond to the requirements of the brief as outlined.



How to apply

If you are interested in this opportunity please submit the following information:

- An outline of your approach to this commission brief: max two sides of A4.
- Provide up to three examples of previous relevant commissions (pdf or jpg file types only) with information about each project: max five sides of A4. Please include indicative budget spend for each example and images.
- An indicative budget breakdown and timeline of activity
- Current Curriculum Vitae or practice profile
- Letter confirming your availability and contact details for two referees (email and telephone). *Note: preferably from recent commissioners*
- Evidence of insurance cover at required levels

Please do not exceed 6MB in file size.

Submissions will be assessed according to the following criteria:

Approach: respond to identified themes, aims and objectives, with the ability to research and respond creatively to the Brief.

Quality of previous projects: a proven track record of high-quality delivery, working in collaboration with communities and partners to develop and deliver exceptional, innovative, and engaging outdoor performance works.

Experience: successful delivery of projects of similar scale and budget, demonstrable experience of working collaboratively with communities, partners and stakeholders, excellent communication skills with the ability to articulate ideas and processes.

Deadline

Thursday 3 April at 5pm



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