

METROLANDING



BRENT
LONDON
BOROUGH
OF
CULTURE
2020

BRENT'S YEAR AS LONDON BOROUGH OF CULTURE

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FOREWORD



Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London



My administration created the London Borough of Culture programme to expand access to culture; put it at the heart of local communities; and give creative talent at the grassroots level the chance to shine and thrive. It was designed to use the power of culture to bring people together, create positive opportunities for young people and inspire our communities – and I'm proud that Brent has managed to do exactly that in the face of what has been an extraordinarily tough and challenging year.

We could never have anticipated the difficulties our city would face when we came together last January for *RISE*, the opening show of Brent 2020. It was a spectacular way to start the year that saw the history and stories of the borough performed by a community cast of hundreds, against the backdrop of the iconic Wembley Stadium.

The months of lockdown that followed meant that events had to be reimagined and moved online, but Brent nevertheless responded with creativity and resilience to deliver an inspiring and uplifting programme. They were able to bring the community together as we stayed in our homes, with engaging videos, interviews and podcasts, while at the same time continuing to support local artists and young people.

Later in the year, we saw the launch of a critically acclaimed public art programme, the Brent Biennial, which brought 36 artworks to the streets, libraries and public spaces of the borough. And more than 70,000 people joined together virtually for the *No Bass Like Home* festival – an incredible celebration of reggae culture.

Brent 2020's clear focus on young people was its driving force and will be a defining part of its legacy. The 163 young people that made up the Blueprint Collective were at the heart of the programme and its success. They helped shape the fantastic online activity including the *Brent Locked In* video series and over 100 VENT podcasts, as well as developing a new charter for the future of public space in the city and establishing an independent organisation to support young people's creativity for the future.

In total, more than 1,000 artists and arts organisations were commissioned to create work, over 250 volunteers gave their time to help and nearly all the schools across the borough were involved – a true community effort. And I'm pleased to say there will be more to come this year, with a number of events supported by the Culture Fund still to take place.

Brent 2020 has underlined the importance of the arts in our society and the benefits culture can bring to our young people. It has shown why we must celebrate untold tales and unheard voices, and that even in the hardest of times, creativity can console, inspire and unite us. It will be this spirit that will ultimately be the key to London's recovery and future success.

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

FOREWORD



Councillor Muhammed Butt
Leader of Brent Council



We built Brent 2020, the London Borough of Cultures, with our community – those that live here, grew up here or were shaped by our borough. Despite a global pandemic, uncertainty and fear unprecedented in the borough's history, they worked together to make it all happen, giving their energy, heart when we most needed it. They came with the ideas, the people, the stories and the histories, and they reminded us of Brent's spirit of resilience, care and rebellion. At a time when we weren't able to come together, they kept us together.

There were the 256 volunteers, 335 educators, the countless library staff who brought their time, energy and commitment to make the year happen. There were the 41 Community Advisors, 9 engagement boards, and 163 members of the Blueprint Collective who worked with the Brent 2020 team to shape the character and tone of the programme. And, perhaps most importantly of all, there were more than 1,000 artists, musicians and performers who brought the year to life.

And together, we projected the story of Brent to the world in front of Wembley Stadium. With 8,000 young people and the help of Zoom, we made an anthem for the borough. We put art on the streets and Brent's heroes on our screens, not least with a reggae festival that travelled from Brent to Jamaica to Florida and back. Brent's year as the official London Borough of Culture was a reminder of who we are as a community – and that together, we are stronger. We remain the London Borough of Cultures.

Along with the people of Brent, we want to thank the funders who helped us to make Brent 2020 happen, working with us as we adapted the programme to the new parameters of 2020. They are The Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority, Quintain, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, St George, Infosys, Wates, John Lyon's Charity, Network Homes and Art Fund.

Thank you.

Councillor Muhammed Butt
Tokyngton councillor
Leader of Brent Council

BRENT'S 5-YEAR PROGRAMME OF CHANGE

Key



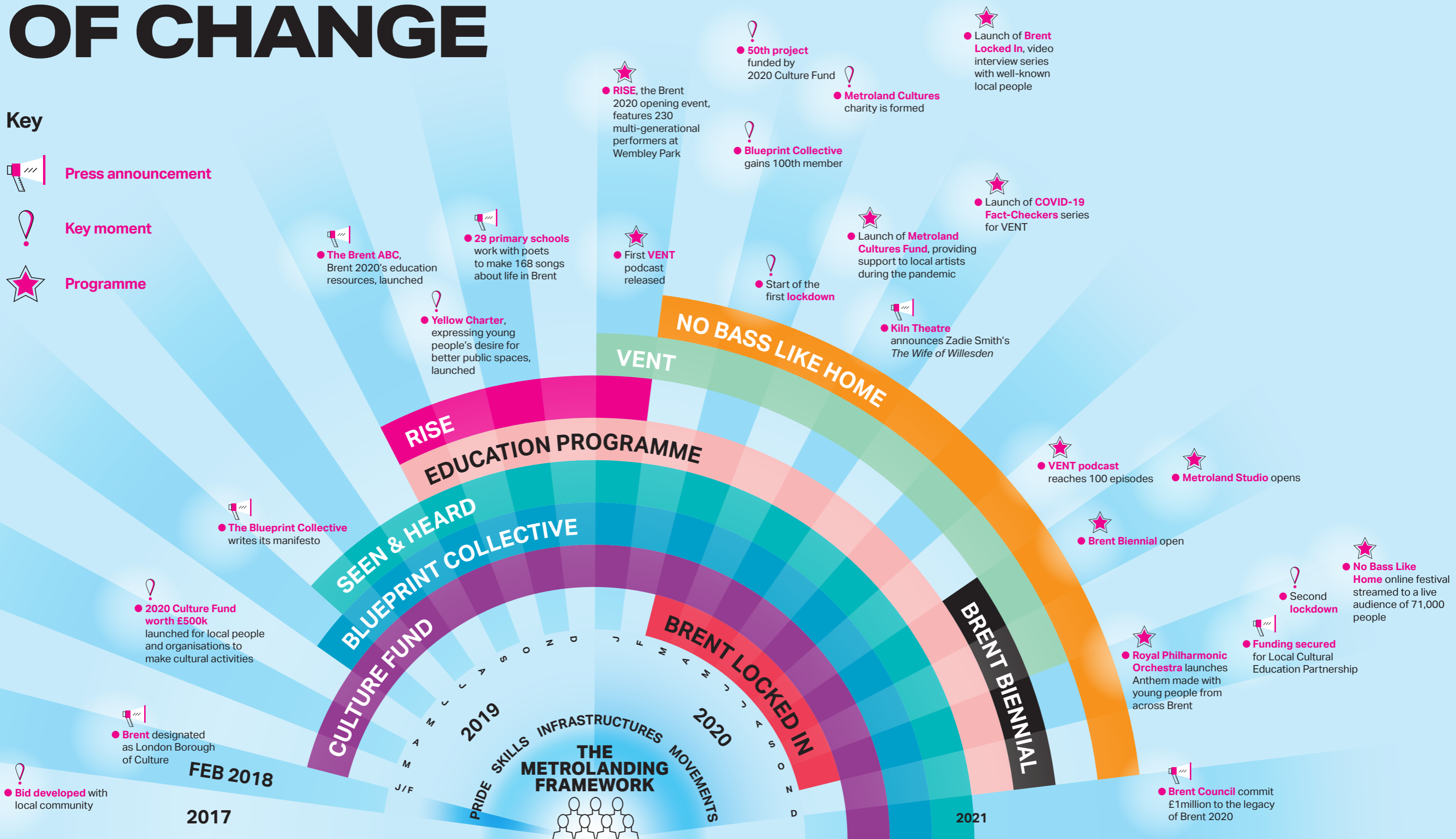
Press announcement



Key moment



Programme



METRO-LANDING

Lois Stonock, Artistic Director of Brent 2020

Brent 2020, the London Borough of Cultures, set out to be a stage for all our communities. It was not limited to art but centred on a wider idea of culture: what it signifies, what it includes and what it means to be part of a place. This place.

Brent is where the Grunwick strike happened – where migrant workers united to demand rights. It is where teachers campaigned for more inclusive practices and where the Irish gathered to build and rebuild London. It is the most diverse place in the capital, something that has meant more here for longer than anywhere else. It is not a place for institutions: it is a place for the grassroots, for the unfiltered, for the unknown new and the untold old. The lack of formal cultural institutions in the borough is exciting: it means that anything is possible, the slate is blank and things can be built from the ground up. We shaped our programme around the context of a borough that would feel Brexit as hard as anywhere – and we wanted to show, in the year that Britain was to leave the European Union, what a borough made by migration could do.

Two ideas have been continuous throughout the year. Firstly, that Brent 2020's Borough of Culture programme would be the beginning of something: that we would use the year and its planning to work with our communities and think about what culture means to Brent, then use these experiences to shape new approaches to culture in the borough. Secondly, that it would be a year in which young people would take centre stage. Together, these two ideas created the basis for a five-year programme of change, which began with the writing of the bid in 2017 and continues now in the first stage of the legacy.

The best-laid plans

Our title for the year – the Borough of Cultures – was developed with the people of Brent. It was both a nod and an acknowledgement that this is a borough of many stories, communities, peoples and histories – and we wanted to celebrate and elevate them all. It would, we hoped, be a magical year of discovering an extraordinary place.

But by the end of March, three months into our programme, Brent had become the centre of a national crisis, the first place that was struck by the coronavirus. Northwick Park Hospital declared a critical incident on 20 March; a week later, Delroy Washington – Brent musician and reggae legend – tragically died. We were confined to our homes while the NHS, care workers, delivery drivers and council officers became the front line. Brent 2020 became a year of reorientating Brent at a time when life was to be profoundly disorientating.

Brent's communities have been among the worst hit by COVID-19. The borough had one of the highest death tolls in the country during the virus's first peak in summer 2020 – most from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities. The death of George Floyd over the summer mobilised a global movement that demanded change and struck at the heart of our communities, who came together in solidarity to demand more and better. The year exposed the inequalities that are deeply rooted in our society – and in Brent, they were laid open for all to see, both to those living here and those following from further afield in the local and national press.

A year during which we planned to bring people together in theatres and arenas, and which started with a performance for 3,000 people in Wembley Park's Olympic Way, in front of the National Stadium, ended up with a programme delivered on screens and on streets, in libraries and online. We couldn't host a street party on the Kilburn High Road, stage a reggae festival in Harlesden or present a free gig at The SSE Arena, Wembley. Instead, we had to pause, withdraw, rearrange.

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Coming together

But our year was always designed to be porous, to change and respond to what was on people's minds. By June, the context of Brexit had slipped away, replaced by a collective anxiety about health, inequalities, structural racism, jobs – about the future. The cultural sector, too, was caught in a downward spiral, circled by grief, uncertainty and searching questions prompted by Black Lives Matter. We believed that by being a megaphone for our artists, citizens and communities, amplifying the conversations they wanted to have, our programme could provide a mechanism for people to engage and understand, both playing a role in Brent's recovery and helping to ensure the survival of artists and cultural organisations into 2021.

Our year was underpinned by people taking part in all levels of our programme. Through partnerships, steering groups, workshops, conversations, teas and coffees, it was the artists, partner organisations, 2020 Culture Fund recipients, teachers, educators, Community Advisors, volunteers, trustees, Blueprint Collective members, councillors and council officers who supported us to shape, drive, complement and deliver the projects throughout the shifting context of 2020. It was these people – our participants – who brought the soul, the authenticity and the kindness that helped us to constantly adapt our programme in the most uncertain of times. They selected 2020 Culture Fund recipients, initiated and promoted projects, gave up their time to volunteer, and so much more. It is them we must thank for being able to deliver on the ambition we imagined for the programme, despite not being able to deliver all our planned activity.

It was a year where Brent was finally recognised for its unique cultural power, a power that comes from the many communities who have gathered here, lived here and grown here together. Audiences in Brent, wider London, the UK and the world are starting to recognise Brent as the place that took reggae to a global audience, the place that shaped some of the UK's greatest writers, playwrights and sportspeople. And we still hold to this: that if you want to see the real London, to see what people with roots across the world living together looks like, then you need to walk down the Kilburn High Road.

Every element of the Brent 2020 programme took a different approach to working with the community: from mass-participation performances in *RISE* to a visual arts biennial – Brent's first – presented in the borough's most important public spaces; from a podcast with global reach, delivered in partnership with *VICE*, to a charter for public space authored by a group of young people on behalf of their peers; from a reggae festival programmed with a working group from Harlesden to an Anthem composed with 8,000 children – and an education programme that put the borough centre stage. Each took a different approach to the 'how' of the artform, the audience and the art.



Metrolanding

In this report, we set out The Metrolanding Framework, in which all these approaches cohere. It describes four building blocks crucial to building the borough's present and future cultural confidence: pride, infrastructures, movements and skills. These blocks and the framework in which they sit, emerged through the experience of creating the year. Pride is all about supporting projects that create attention for people and stories from the borough which have received little attention in the past. Infrastructures are things like festivals, formats, public places, learning resources that open up new spaces for cultural life. Movements are the groups, organisations and public pressure required to maintain them. Skills refers to the knowhow, technical expertise and understandings needed by young teachers, administrators and artists to make it all happen.

One criticism commonly levelled at place-based cultural festivals is that they draw value away from local people and give it to developers, politicians and special interests. The Metrolanding Framework was and is designed to help Brent avoid such pitfalls, ensuring the legacies are left for local people.

There were times during 2020 when we questioned whether carrying on with the Borough of Culture, while most people in Brent were struggling just to get through their day, was the right thing to do. But we hope that in continuing, we acted in the spirit of this defiant part of London and showed a borough that works together in solidarity in the face of adversity. We have a rich history of migrant communities coming together and caring for each other – and the Brent Biennial tried to remind us of their struggles. We are a borough of brave young people – and VENT was a place for them to finally have a voice and a platform, a testament to the borough in our toughest year. Last but not least, *No Bass Like Home* was an act in togetherness that was open to all – and got 70,000 people dancing in their front rooms at one of the lowest parts of the year.

Brent 2020 began with 230 dancers in front of Wembley Stadium and ended with Savannah, a member of the Blueprint Collective, talking to Zadie Smith on Zoom. But Brent's Borough of Culture does not end here. At the start of the year, we established Metroland Cultures, a new independent charity, to take our learnings forward and build on the work we started. Metroland Cultures will continue the Brent Biennial and will start a new music biennial, both of which will be underpinned by a cultural leadership programme for young people – and both of which will put Brent, our people, our history, our young people and our recovery at centre stage.

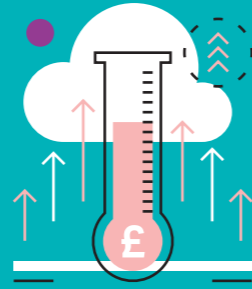
This is only the first five years of a long-term change programme in Brent. But please, if you haven't already, do come and visit us, come for tea, maybe come to stay. All are heard, all are seen, and all are welcome. This is us, the Borough of Cultures. This is Brent.

BRENT 2020 IN NUMBERS



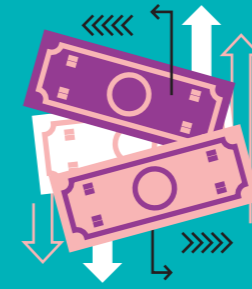
**For every £1 spent
by Brent council**

£2 of additional investment was
raised from other funders



**£525,000 invested in 77 local
people and organisations**

to make cultural activities



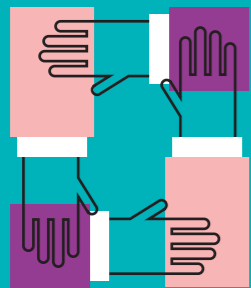
446 opportunities

employment, learning and development
opportunities for young people



163 young people

were part of the Blueprint Collective,
shaping all aspects of the year



256 volunteers

donated a total of 1,281 hours
to help deliver the programme



77% of Brent schools

engaged with the education
programme and its resources



15,340 participants

shaped the programme



649

items of media coverage



Audiences of 843,481

209,338 live and 634,143 digital



1,021 artists

involved in the programme



308.7 million

reach across social media

**METRO
LAND**
CULTURES

Metroland Cultures charity
established to deliver Brent 2020's legacy

THE METRO-LANDING FRAMEWORK

The Metrolanding Framework is a way of accounting for and directing what Metroland Cultures does in Brent. It emerged from the iterative experience of preparing, organising and supporting Brent 2020 and marks an important point in our five-year journey. Our year as London Borough of Culture showed the cultural richness of this part of London. But local heritage, global connections and multiple cultures do not guarantee enduring recognition and status for culture in schools, youth groups, festivals, events and the work of a local authority. The Metrolanding Framework is about building on Brent 2020 to make this transition. Brent has cultures – and this framework can help to create permanent platforms for them.

The Metrolanding Framework expresses a belief that these platforms come from four building blocks:

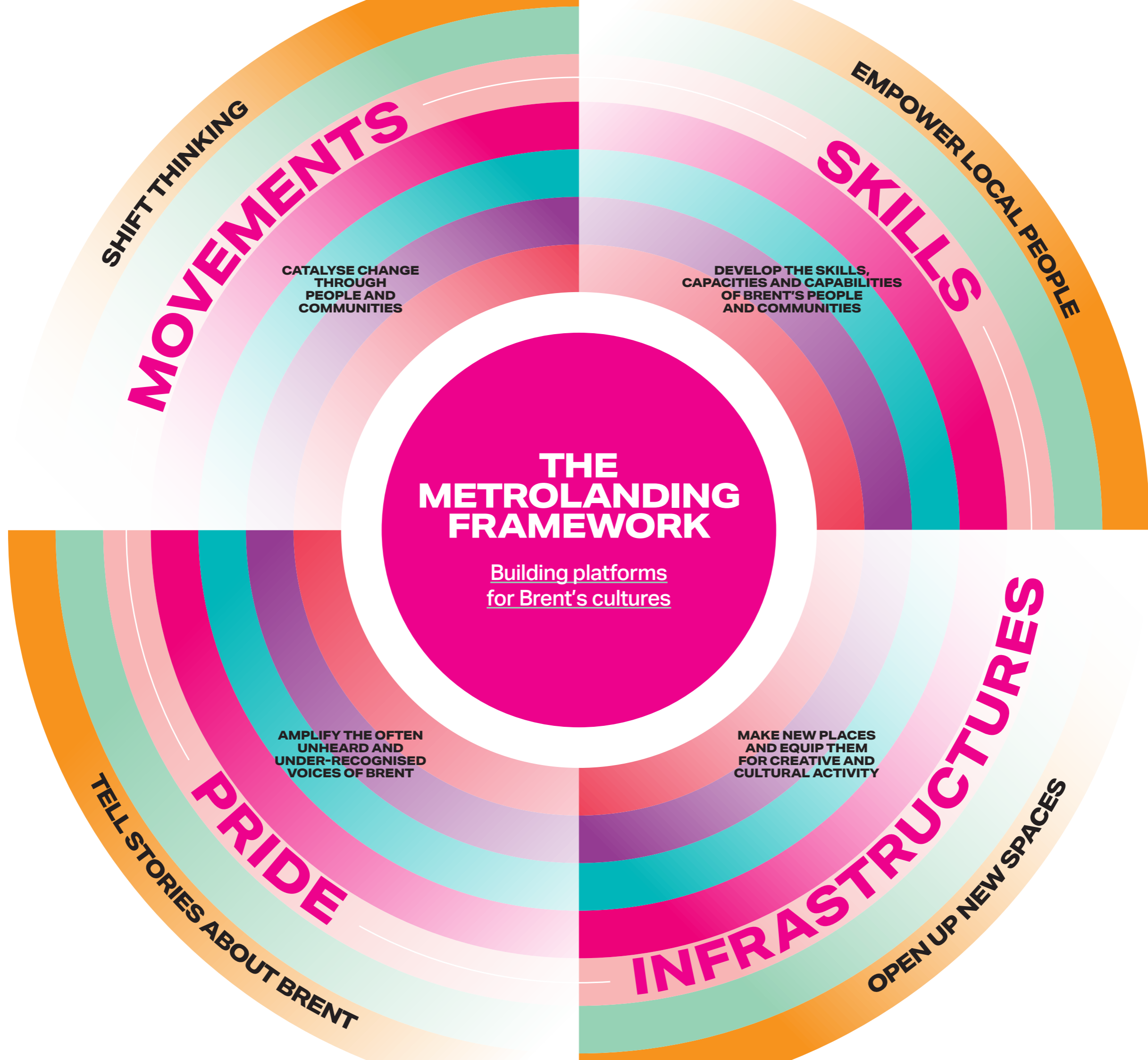
- **Pride:** To amplify the often unheard and under-recognised voices of Brent through platforming the rich social and cultural heritage of Brent past and present, and set a more representative narrative in defining Brent's future.
- **Skills:** To develop the skills, capacities and capabilities of Brent's people and communities, and especially young people, that strengthens and empowers them to make Brent the best place to live, work and study.
- **Infrastructures:** To harness Brent's assets in the material and social realm and breathe creativity into places and spaces that reach all corners of society, particularly for those who face barriers to engagement.

- **Movements:** To catalyse change through empowering people and communities to have agency within and ownership of setting the vision and value systems for a culturally confident Brent that in turn creates attitudinal shifts from Council policy to community practice.

These four blocks support one another, and every Brent 2020 project had a positive impact on at least three of them – for details, see pages 26-53. The framework is built on the principles that a proud borough is more likely to be a borough where movements form; that a borough with more infrastructure for creative and cultural life will be a place more able to support skills; and a borough with pride, skills, infrastructures and movements will be better placed to sustain platforms and spaces for culture that endure into the future.

It is important to remember that these blocks are not design principles or artistic ideas for programmes or projects. Great creativity doesn't start with a block. However, contributing to these blocks should be a natural consequence of programming artistic ideas and projects that are grounded in a commitment to people and places in the borough. The Metrolanding Framework provides specific guidance to Metroland Cultures' activities, but should also inform the work of the council and anyone who cares about the future cultural life of Brent.





BEING BRENT

Ekow Eshun

'Our programme... will represent a new chance for "Brent" to become a real and tangible place – to be more than just a council, a river or a ring-road. Through the London Borough of Culture programme, we want to discover our sense of place for the very first time – we want to find Brent.'

— Brent 2020 bid application

To understand a place, it's best to begin with its people. This is perhaps more true of Brent than many other areas. The list of famous names that come from the borough runs long. George Michael, Charlie Watts, Zadie Smith, Raheem Sterling, Twiggy, Bradley Wiggins, to name a few. But the question I want to address is not simply about who grew up in Brent, but rather how life in the borough has shaped its people – and how they, in turn, have shaped the culture around us.

Take, for instance, Jayaben Desai, the Gujarati immigrant who began a strike against racism, unequal pay and poor working conditions at the Grunwick photo processing plant in Dollis Hill in 1976. Desai's protest lasted for two years, achieving national prominence and marking a turning point in labour relations when the interests of migrants became recognised as the interests of all workers and unions. Brent is both the backdrop to this story and a catalyst in its own right. It is an imperfect home – the site of racist practices in the workplace – but a home nevertheless. The place where Desai finds solidarity with other immigrant women who have similarly settled there from across the world. Their presence helped to make Brent the most diverse borough in London. And, in turn, they helped to reshape Britain into the multicultural nation it is today.

Cultural identity, observed the scholar Stuart Hall, is 'subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power'. Hall suggested that who we are is indivisible from where we're from. But the two elements of person and place exist in dynamic, constantly shifting tension. In Hall's resonant phrase, cultural identity is 'a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being"'. This notion of perpetual interplay between origin, identity, past, future, home, history and society, it seems to me, goes to the heart of Brent's year of events and commissions as London Borough of Culture 2020.

The programme took place, of course, in exceptionally straitened circumstances. Pandemic and lockdown meant cancellation or rethinking for many of the more exuberant, participatory elements planned for the year, such as a mile-long street party on Kilburn High Road. But it's hard to believe that Brent 2020 was ever intended simply as a tub-thumping festival of civic pride.

A press release by Brent 2020's Artistic Director Lois Stonock, written during the development of the programme, noted that, 'Although we want to give a flavour of Brent, we don't want to say that it is the most "this" or the most brilliant "that". We want to destroy those measures – because those measures of accepted cultural relevance are the same ones that obscure most of what goes on in and has been special about Brent.' Instead, perhaps, the goal was to articulate, and to celebrate, something more elusive but more resonant – the sensibility and spirit of the borough as articulated through the dreams and artistic conjurings of its residents, past and present.

'Some of how Brent is can be explained by geography and transport links, or migration. But lots of what goes on in Brent is a reaction against or an expression of injustice and exclusion and generally living hard lives,' reflects Stonock. 'More often than not, what comes from this unusual place has broken with convention. Raheem Sterling, raised in Wembley, is more than a footballer. Bradley Wiggins, raised in Kilburn, is more than a cyclist. Zadie Smith, raised in Willesden, is no ordinary writer... We tend to think that what's amazing about London goes on in the centre, but there is an untold story about how places like Brent foster young minds with convictions to make Britain a fairer, more interesting and more irreverent place.'

In looking back over Brent 2020, the question I want to ask is a qualitative one: what did Brent's year as Borough of Culture *feel like*? How did the programme connect and engage with people within the borough and beyond its borders? And what did it reveal about what it means to come from Brent, to live in Brent, to be *of* Brent?

Where is Brent?

Before Brent, there was Metroland. This was the name coined to describe the corridor of newly built suburban developments and commuter towns that stretched from Willesden and Wembley to the counties of Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Middlesex. The concept of Metroland tried to evoke the kind of bucolic England evoked by George Orwell when he wrote of 'old maids cycling to holy communion through the mists of the autumn morning'.

In 1973, John Betjeman, poet laureate, made a journey through Metroland for his classic BBC documentary of the same name. Betjeman's film strikes an elegiac note. By then, the idea of the suburbs as the font of an idyllic, essential Englishness already seemed out of step with the times. Towns such as Willesden and Neasden were becoming home to increasing numbers of immigrants from the Caribbean and South India.

A hint of those demographic shifts can be glimpsed in *Marble Arch to Edgware*, an earlier Betjeman BBC documentary from 1968. In this film, the poet travels by train from central London to the suburbs, hymning the sights along the way ('Ho for the Kilburn High Road'). At Baker Street, we see him stroll past a fruit and veg stall. Among the bananas and apples and potatoes on display, a handwritten sign stuck into a root vegetable announces 'N----- Yams' for sale. There's otherwise little indication of an immigrant presence in the film. But the jarring nature of the sign is hint enough of a changing Britain.

The borough of Brent was formed in 1965, and by 1971, it already had the largest foreign-born population of any London borough. By the 1980s, Brent's classrooms were the most cosmopolitan Britain had ever seen. Today, 149 languages are spoken in the borough and English is the main language of just 57 per cent of residents. Thinking back over the changing identity of the borough, from Metroland to multiculturalism, we might say that the story of Brent is the story of Britain. Certainly, this is an understanding you could come to after watching *RISE*, the opening event of the Brent 2020 programme.

RISE was a mass-participation performance piece choreographed by Southpaw Dance Company that dramatises signal moments in Brent's history through dance, film and music. We journey from the arrival of Irish migrants in the 19th century through Metroland and the Grunwick strike to a final celebration of Brent as the crucible of reggae in Britain. In all of this, *RISE* foregrounded themes of resistance and solidarity. Successive Tory prime ministers over the past decade have decried multiculturalism as a failed credo that has weakened the character and fortunes of this country. *RISE* suggested otherwise. It argued that however contested and bitter moments like the Grunwick strike were, they are ultimately part of a larger narrative arc that takes us to a shared territory of tolerance, openness and mutual respect. Cultural difference is not what separates us, in *RISE*'s telling. It's the very thing that brings us together.

George Michael TV Outside 2020
by Dawn Mellor, a Brent Biennial
commission, co-commissioned
by Brent 2020, London Borough of Culture,
Studio Voltaire and Create London
© Benedict Johnson





Who is Brent?

The Brent Biennial took its title, 'On the Side of the Future', from the words of Stuart Hall, who lived in Kilburn in the later years of his life. As a cultural theorist, Hall wrote more insightfully about Britain's complex relationship with its history and post-empire heritage than any scholar to date. In this way, he's a fitting spiritual patron for a programme that declared its intention to encourage 'new understandings of community and place'. We can gain some insight into what that goal means in practice by looking at some of the programme commissions.

Design duo Electronic Sheep celebrated the rich legacy of the Irish presence in Brent by creating a knitted tapestry based on the untold stories of the area's Irish community living in and around Kilburn. *The Kilburn Tapestries* features traditional Irish emblems, imagery and premises that relate to Kilburn from the 1950s onwards, celebrating people of Irish descent who have left a legacy on the local area. Words and stories of Kilburn-based figures are woven into the piece, from Irish playwright Enda Walsh to music promoter Vince Power.

For *Remember this House*, the two murals he made on Kilburn High Road, British-Filipino artist Pio Abad gathered artefacts from the Brent Museum and Archives along with ornaments of personal significance from local residents. The items include an ashtray from the Empire Windrush, a face mask made from African wax fabric, a hand-painted Romanian Easter egg and a wooden clock from Fiji in the shape of a turtle. In turning them into the source materials for his murals, Abad marked how the complex and often painful history of colonialism has shaped the various communities living in Kilburn while also celebrating the people from the area whose stories are embedded within the objects.

Rasheed Araeen's *Reading Room* created a study area in the Library at Willesden Green: a set of latticed cubes forming a table upon which were presented the first 100 issues of *Third Text*, the seminal art journal founded by Araeen in Brent in 1987. Araeen was born in Karachi, Pakistan in 1935 and moved to London in 1964. He was one of the pioneers of minimalist sculpture in Britain but for many decades received no institutional recognition for his work. *Third Text* was at the forefront of debates exploring art, culture and postcolonialism for over two decades. It provided a means for Araeen to establish an influential platform for critical discourse even as he, and other artists of colour, were shunned by the mainstream. *Reading Room's* location in the library made clear the link between the politics of migration and the poetics of artistic practice, suggesting that the immigrant's journey – and all it entails, in terms of upheaval, relocation, uncertainty, bigotry, alienation, official indifference and hostility, optimism and resilience – is a worthy and unfailingly urgent subject of artistic enquiry and testimonial.

Works by Araeen, Abad and others illuminated the value and fragility of kinship and human connection. This was also a prominent theme in Ruth Beale's *Library as Memorial*. Beale's artwork invited reflection on how low-income and Black and Asian communities have been disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus, taking as its starting point the fact that Brent had the highest mortality rate per capita in the country during the pandemic's first peak in summer 2020. Beale placed a bookplate in 491 books, one for every victim of the coronavirus in the borough up to September 2020. Titles include Atul Gawande's *Being Mortal*, Nikesh Shukla's *The Good Immigrant* and Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens*. The public were invited to visit the library and add a dedication in memory of lives lost to the virus.

'A lot of my work is about having conversations about what we value in society, and how we make and remake culture based on those values,' says Beale about the piece. 'I was aware of how badly Brent was affected by COVID-19 and that it was affecting BIPOC [Black, indigenous and people of colour] communities the most... At times I've been overwhelmed by the numbers, the infection rates and the deaths, locally and globally, and I wanted to bring it back to something personal, to give space to mourn people as individuals.'

As well as a testament to individual lives, *Library as Memorial* also highlighted the particular instability of life in Brent itself. People in the borough are not at the centre of power. A third of households live in poverty. Yet despite – or possibly because of – these limitations, Brent has produced a lineage of singular success stories. What's striking about many of Brent's well-known figures is how the experiences and inequalities of life in the borough has made such a mark on the work they make and the ethics they bring to the public sphere.

For example, look at the career of George Michael, who was memorialised for the Biennial by Dawn Mellor in a mural in Kingsbury, where he grew up. Mellor's work, which remains permanently on display, features scenes from music videos for 1980s hits such as *Careless Whisper*, as well as motifs from the star's later songs like *Outside*. For Mellor, the mural charts the layered path of Michael's public life: from pop heartthrob to global celebrity to being outed in ugly and sensationalist fashion by the tabloid press, and on to a status as an LGBTQ+ icon that has only continued to grow since his untimely death in 2016. Throughout each phase of his personal journey, Michael seemed to own and embrace his place in society. Faced with homophobic attacks by the tabloids, he refused to retreat into shame, instead taking a very public pride in his identity as a gay man. Even before he came out, his hit song *Jesus to a Child* addressed the loss of his lover to AIDS in powerfully moving terms, underlining how his sexuality and his music were indivisible aspects of his life.

It's maybe stretching a point to suggest that George Michael would not have been who he was without Brent. But it is surely valid for Brent 2020 to embrace him in the way that Mellor has: as an artist who faced both success and significant adversity, but who understood himself always as part of, not removed from, the ordinary world around him. We might say the same also of other figures who spent their formative years in the borough: George the Poet. Riz Ahmed. Nikesh Shukla. Warsan Shire, London's first Young Poet Laureate. Sir Bradley Wiggins, the self-styled 'Kid from Kilburn'. Carla Marie Williams, the Grammy-nominated songwriter for Beyoncé, Britney Spears, Girls Aloud and many others who is also an advocate for women in the music industry. And think of how successive generations of Brent-raised footballers, from Cyrille Regis and Luther Blissett to Rachel Yankey and Raheem Sterling, have pushed against a tide of racism and discrimination on and off the pitch, insisting on the respect due to them as players and as Black people in Britain.

Zadie Smith was due to premiere *The Wife of Willesden*, her first play, at the Kiln Theatre as a Brent 2020 commission before COVID-19 forced its postponement. Brent, depicted as a dynamic site of contrasting cultures and classes, has formed a frequent backdrop to Smith's writing, even inspiring the title of *NW*, her 2012 novel. Her play reimagines the worldly, five-times-married heroine of Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale* as a modern woman whose street-smart self-assurance sounds very much like the voice of the borough itself. As the synopsis, written in verse, puts it, the Wife of Willesden is a woman who 'plays many roles round here / And never scared to tell the whole of her truth, whether or not anyone wants to hear it'. Now she is 'pissed enough to tell her life story to whoever has ears and eyes...'



'People came from all over the world to live in Brent. This produced new culture and ideas. Initially, the rest of the country didn't recognise or understand them. Then there was a struggle. And then (and now) the rest of the country was (and will be) reshaped by them.'

— Script for *RISE*

What does Brent feel like?

Across the course of 2020, the project *No Bass Like Home* charted the underexplored but pivotal role that Brent has played in the development of reggae in Britain. Thanks to the project, we learnt that Chris Blackwell brought Island Records, his three-year-old record label, from Jamaica in Kilburn in 1962. That Bob Marley lived in the borough in the early 1970s and Trojan Records were based in Neasden until the 1980s. That Brent was home to the Cimarrons, the first UK reggae band, to lovers rock icon Janet Kay, and to the pioneering General Levy, whose track *Incredible* was one of the very few commercially successful jungle records of the 1990s.

No Bass Like Home concluded in November with an audacious seven-hour online festival linking artists across the Black diaspora, from London to Florida to Kingston, Jamaica. Watching the event unfold, with live performances by the likes of Kay, Levy, Horace Andy and Sweetie Irie, it would be reasonable to suggest that reggae, in all its rich and varied forms, is the pulse that keeps Brent moving forward. But I want to suggest a counter-argument here. Notwithstanding the lineage of reggae greats with roots in the borough, perhaps the most affecting soundtrack over the course of Brent's year as Borough of Culture came from the voices of young people.

A caveat here. Many a festival or national extravaganza succumbs to the temptation to line up the kids in a display of massed singing, dancing, children-are-the-future-style schmaltz. To Brent 2020's credit, the programme did the opposite, and instead gave young people the opportunity to make their voices heard from their own individual perspectives.

The daily and weekly VENT podcast series, hosted and co-produced by 16- to 20-year-olds, were an ongoing exercise in honesty, intimacy and affinity. Amelia talked about moving from Brent to Surrey and being, as she put it, 'outnumbered by white people for the first time'. Khalid explored drill as a music of affirmation and connection. Santos wondered about the unspoken racial politics involved in people repeatedly forgetting his name and, a few minutes later, calling him by the apparently more acceptable alternative of Carlos instead. Other presenters discussed love and dating, economics and intersectional feminism. In other words, all the presenters

in the programmes were figuring out how to negotiate the nuanced and frequently fraught territory of a Britain that is simultaneously welcoming of and averse to cultural difference.

The VENT podcasts revealed that cultural identity isn't about race or nationality per se. It's about the set of expectations and histories you carry with you from youth and how they might match or clash with the histories and social circumstances of the mainstream world around you. The podcasts are by turns revealing, moving, hilarious and tender-hearted. The presence of young people like Santos, Amelia and Khalid as a defining aspect of the 2020 programme offers perhaps the most eloquent illustration of how Brent sees itself. Not perfect or polished. But embracing of fragility and possibility. Open to change and to newness. Unafraid to reach further and imagine bolder. Or maybe I'm suggesting this because I'm biased.

Like the presenters of VENT, I grew up in Brent. I went to the same school as George Michael, who was some years before me, and the Sugababes, who were a good number of years after me. Courtney Pine, the jazz musician, lived opposite me. When he practised the saxophone, the sound would float across the street through my bedroom window. But I always wanted more than the suburbs, and when I left for university at 18, I vowed I'd never go back to Brent. It felt to me like a place without a character or a culture of its own. I felt I had grown beyond it. True and false. I've hardly ever been back to Kingsbury since. But it's only belatedly that I've realised how much Brent has stayed with me. How it has shaped my belief that a society built on difference and cultural melange is normal and good and not in some way un-British. How the very lack of a defining, overarching Brent identity left me free to find myself in my own way.

The worth and the joy of Brent 2020 is that it similarly offered no single, prescriptive vision of what makes the borough what it is. Instead, it left the artists and individuals involved in the programme to describe the world on their own terms. Watching and listening to them across the course of a fraught and frequently traumatic year made it feel like anything was possible.

THE PROGRAMME IN REVIEW
THE PROGRAMME IN REVIEW
THE PROGRAMME IN REVIEW
THE PROGRAMME IN REVIEW
THE PROGRAMME IN REVIEW
THE PROGRAMME IN REVIEW
THE PROGRAMME IN REVIEW





1. RISE

'To the backdrop of the world-famous Wembley Stadium, the stunning mass-participatory performance tells the story of the borough's journey from the margins to impact culture in Britain through its music, activism and rebellious spirit.'

— Programme, *RISE*

230
MULTI-
GENERATIONAL
PERFORMERS

***RISE* was a spectacular mass-participation performance piece that announced the start of Brent's year as London Borough of Culture.**

Taking place on the evening of Saturday 18 January on a specially constructed five-storey stage in the middle of Wembley Park's regenerated Olympic Way, *RISE* told the story of Brent in an eight-scene series of epic dance pieces choreographed by Southpaw Dance Company. Overlaying themes of migration, rebellion and communal struggle, *RISE* celebrated Irish migrants, the construction of the Metroland suburbs, the Grunwick strike, the Windrush generation and reggae music. The performance climaxed with Harlesden MC General Levy performing his jungle classic *Incredible* with 186 dancers.

In total, the show put 230 multi-generational performers centre stage. The majority lived in Brent or the borough's immediate surroundings. Some came from local colleges, and many had no experience of dance at all. For almost all the performers, it was their first experience of being part of a mass-participation dance piece. Six months after the performance, half of the participants were still in touch with people they had first encountered through the project.

RISE was watched by 3,000 people live – it received nearly two million Twitter impressions and nearly half a million impressions on Instagram. The research for the show, which included organising background material on local cultural figures, significant local places and folk history, has left a useful legacy for anyone considering doing place-based work in the borough.

RISE was the first of five mass gatherings planned to take place during Brent 2020. Sadly, the spread of COVID-19 meant that it was also the last.

Pride: A massive showcase of Brent culture and history

Skills: 230 dancers, almost all in their first mass-choreography event

Infrastructures: Resources on local people, places and culture

Funded by Quintain

2. THE BLUEPRINT COLLECTIVE

'We are the 79,000 young people of the Borough of Cultures! We are the pulse that beats through Brent. We want the unheard voices to be heard, we are their voice...'

— The Blueprint Manifesto

DEVELOPING
THE VOICE AND
CONFIDENCE OF
163
YOUNG PEOPLE

The Blueprint Collective was a group of Brent-based young people aged 18-25 who shaped, designed and advised on a great variety of projects during Brent 2020. The central idea in Brent's initial application to be designated as London Borough of Culture was that young people would be at the heart of the programme. The Blueprint Collective was the primary way in which that became reality.

The Blueprint Collective had its origins in a 12-strong bid-writing working group that generated many of the ideas in Brent's application to be London Borough of Culture. In 2018, it gained new members and became known as The Ambassadors. Then, in summer 2019, the group wrote a manifesto and renamed itself the Blueprint Collective, reflecting the group's desire to be an autonomous presence within Brent 2020 rather than just representatives for the programmers' choices.

Members of the Blueprint Collective were visibly present at all of Brent 2020's pre-COVID-19 events – and they were an important reason for Richard Morrison, Chief Culture Writer for *The Times*, describing the Brent 2020 press launch as the most vibrant press conference he had ever attended. Members of the collective worked with the design agency Peter & Paul to develop the brand identity for Brent 2020, and were on the decision-making panel that oversaw the allocation of grants for the 2020 Culture Fund.

The Blueprint Collective grew steadily throughout 2020 and eventually totalled 163 members. Although some members explicitly joined to develop a career in the arts, most joined to connect with other people and be part of the year. The group's pedagogy emphasised overall voice and confidence as well developing specific practical skills. The Blueprint Collective was supported with a series of 30 workshops led by creatives (initially in person, then online), and were taken on visits to museums and creative businesses in central London.

During the course of the year, members of the Blueprint Collective hosted interviews for *Brent Locked In*, a video interview series with notable local people. Other members of the collective hosted episodes, made documentaries and appeared as guests on the VENT podcast series.

Left © Brent 2020, London Borough of Culture
Right © MellozWrd and Kamiah-Chae



MetroLanding: Brent's Year as London Borough of Culture

'THE BLUEPRINT COLLECTIVE WAS AN EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH TO INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PLANNING OF A CULTURAL FESTIVAL, AND IT CHANGED OVER TIME.'

The Blueprint Collective's longest-running project was *Seen and Heard*, a collaboration between Brent 2020 and the London School of Economics through which the collective developed a charter advising on the role of young people in the design of public space. More information about the various *Seen and Heard* projects and the Blueprint Collective's role in them is provided on page 51.

The formation of the Blueprint Collective was an experimental approach to involve young people in the planning of a cultural festival, and one that changed over time. The structure of the group was partly designed by the Brent 2020 team, but it also came from the group itself. The experience of the group and its managers should be of interest to anyone who is interested in how far beyond simply 'involving' young people the planners of cultural festivals can go.

At the end of 2020, the Blueprint Collective trimmed itself down to a group consisting of the 30 most involved young people and renamed itself Blueprint. In 2021, the group will work from the offices in Metroland Studios as an independent entity, developing its own projects and offering its services as consultants and advisers, and will continue to work on *Seen and Heard* in collaboration with Metroland Cultures.

Pride: Making local young people visible throughout London

Skills: Developing the voices and confidence of 163 young people

Infrastructures: A model for young people's involvement in cultural festivals

Movements: A new independent Blueprint organisation

Funded by St George





3. BRENT BIENNIAL

'Brent's communities have shaped art and culture across the globe. 'On the Side of the Future' explores the communities, contexts and civic spaces where this art and culture thrive today – while also looking ahead to a new future for Brent's artists and creatives.'

— Brent Biennial Guide

125,802
PEOPLE SAW
BIENNIAL
ARTWORKS

The Brent Biennial presented 36 artworks in libraries, streets and other places of everyday life around the borough, with world-renowned artists on an equal footing with local creatives and community groups, under the curatorial vision 'On the Side of the Future'. Featuring everything from sculpture to sound art, murals to installations, the Brent Biennial touched on faith, enterprise, activism, family, care, self-help and many of the other threads that hold life together in this intensely fluid part of London.

At the heart of the Biennial were 10 artist commissions created with libraries: six made with council-run libraries, and a further four with community-led libraries. In 2019, each library researched their local area and with a curator, then wrote a call-out to artists across London to work with them on an idea. The resulting series included:

- a large-scale mural of George Michael by Dawn Mellor on a high street in Kingsbury;
- a series of sculptures outside Preston Community Library by Carl Gabriel;
- a community story-telling project at Barham Community Library facilitated by Avant-Gardening (Polly Brannan and Paul Green);
- *Library as Memorial*, a project by Ruth Beale in Kilburn Library using book dedications as a way of memorialising those who died during the pandemic; and
- a series of audio works by John Rogers highlighting the voices and histories of the community in Kensal Rise.

Beyond the libraries, the Biennial exhibited other artworks including, among others:

- *Remember this House*, a permanent mural by leading British-Filipino artist Pio Abad, telling the unexpected history of Kilburn High Road;
- *The Children of the Sugar*, a series of new collage works by Yasmin Nicholas exhibited on bus stops and community noticeboards across the borough;
- *Soul Refresher (Mountain Rose Soda)*, a drink created by interdisciplinary artist Abbas Zahedi that was made available to buy in shops and cafés.

'Situating the Biennial in everyday places meant works could be experienced in an accidental but intimate way, something that might have been hard to replicate in a gallery setting.'

In addition, art projects by organisations ActionSpace and Crisis highlighted the continued work of these organisations in the borough.

The programme for the Biennial also pointed visitors to multiple artworks exhibited online, which included:

- *A Lifetime's Work*, photos by Jude Wacks documenting intergenerational businesses;
- *The Kilburn Tapestries*, created by Electronic Sheep and based on untold stories of the Irish community in Kilburn;
- a series of graphics created by the October Anthropologist and Abäke documenting the lives of Southern and Eastern European baristas in London; and
- *Declaration of Independence*, a project by Barby Asante that bridged art and education as it gathered 23 womxn of colour across six online workshops to make a collective reading of a declaration of independence, watched by 246 people across the globe.

The introduction of the second lockdown effectively paused the Biennial after six weeks on 5 November, but the event was able to briefly reopen between 3 December, when lockdown ended, and 16 December, when Tier 3 measures were reintroduced. In total, it had pooled attention for 36 artworks and received positive coverage in *The Guardian*, *Time Out* and the *Evening Standard*, with reviews complementing the resilience of both the organisers and the artists.

'COMBINING SCULPTURE, SOUND ART, MURALS AND INSTALLATIONS, THE BIENNIAL TOUCHED ON FAITH, ENTERPRISE, ACTIVISM, FAMILY, CARE, SELF-HELP AND MANY OF THE OTHER THREADS.'

A public programme partnership with *ArtReview* magazine resulted in three online events, 10 interviews with artists who produced new works for libraries, and a series of commissioned texts that further highlighted the work, themes and ideas behind the Biennial to national and international audiences.

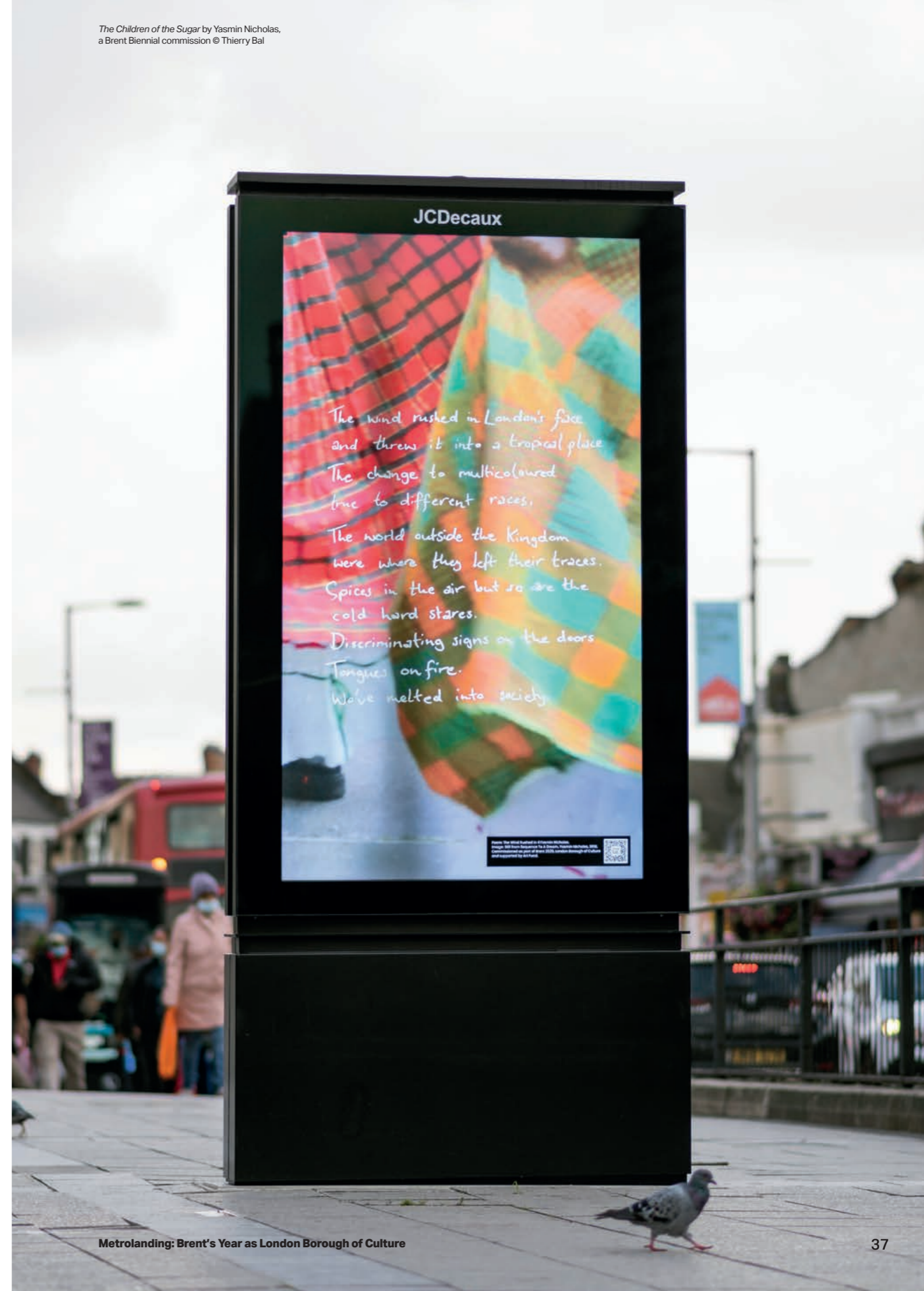
Situating the Biennial in everyday places meant that people could experience and enjoy the works in accidental yet intimate ways, which would have been hard to replicate in a gallery setting. Kensal Rise residents are campaigning to have the blue plaques that were temporarily installed for John Rogers' project made permanent; the George Michael mural has already inspired a tribute Lego-figurine animation on YouTube; and the space that Ruth Beale used for her project in Kilburn Library will continue to be used as a community space.

The Brent Biennial was the largest arts event to take place in Brent since the Festival of Brent in 1992, with over 125,000 people seeing the artworks, and was maybe the first attempt to create an arts biennial in a London borough.

Pride: Artworks by high-profile artists engaging with local histories and culture

Skills: Improved capacity at libraries to work with and commission artists

Infrastructures: Establishing the idea of a Brent Biennial





4. 2020 CULTURE FUND AND SUPPORT FOR LOCAL ARTISTS

'The second round of the 2020 Culture Fund is now open! The 2020 Culture Fund is a grant scheme supporting local people and organisations in the borough to lead their own cultural activities as part of Brent's year as London Borough of Culture. Apply now!'

— 2020 Culture Fund call-out

833
APPLICANTS
SUPPORTED BY
BRENT 2020
TEAM

The 2020 Culture Fund was a £500,000 grant scheme designed to support local people and organisations to make cultural activities as part of Brent's year as London Borough of Culture. The Brent 2020 team gave one-on-one support to 833 artists, writers, designers, youth projects, craftspeople, dancers, amateur historians and a whole spectrum of creative talent working in the borough. During 2019 and 2020, 52 projects were granted funding of up to £3,000 for individuals and up to £10,000 for artists and organisations, judged by members of the Blueprint Collective and Community Advisors and administered in three separate funding rounds.

Each 2020 Culture Fund project had to respond to one of four questions designed to link the projects to the borough:

- Where are we?
- Where do we live?
- Where have we come from?
- Where are we going?

Among several criteria, each project was required to open up opportunities for young people, take place in Brent during 2020 and create openings for volunteers. Some funded projects had a thematic connection to larger Brent 2020 projects such as *No Bass Like Home*, while 12 projects involved work with schools. Towards the end of the year, the Brent Biennial created a way to gather and exhibit some 2020 Culture Fund projects that had been disrupted by COVID-19.

The funded projects included:

- *A Lifetime's Work*, a photography project by Jude Wacks documenting Brent-businesses that have passed between generations, presented during the Brent Biennial;
- the *No Bass Like Home* Film Project, a film season at a local cinema celebrating local bass culture history and black filmmakers connected to the borough; and
- *Revival*, an exhibition by Roy Mehta gathering photos of life in Harlesden between 1989 and 1993.

489

MEMBERS OF BRENT ARTIST NETWORK

Shortly after the first lockdown in March 2020, a mini-version of the 2020 Culture Fund called the Metroland Cultures Fund was launched to provide rapid support to local artists and creatives. A total of 25 awards of up to £1,000 were made for a range of purposes, including training, purchasing equipment, supporting the Brent Artist Network, shifting work online, and research and development. Both the 2020 Culture Fund and the Metroland Cultures Fund were part of a broad effort to support local artists throughout 2020.

The Brent Artist Network operated throughout the year, and was joined by 489 local artists, creatives, venues and organisations. During the pandemic, the network went online with weekly offerings of free skills workshops, themed talks from artists and funders, Q&As, artist spotlights and regular sharings of artist opportunities, with themes such as art and social change, accessibility, how to run and promote digital events, youth-led programming, self-care and wellbeing, and sponsorship. The year also saw the creation of the Spacebook, a microsite listing 36 venues and spaces for artists and events across the borough.

In autumn 2020, Metroland Cultures opened Metroland Studios, just off Kilburn High Road. The building was acquired from the council on a meanwhile basis and is currently providing free studio and exhibition space for 14 local artists until September 2021.

Pride: A platform for lesser-known local stories

Skills: Workshops and support for local artists

Infrastructures: An index of venues and spaces available for use

Movements: Empowering local artists with connections and access to space



5. VENT

'A podcast from VICE and Brent, the London Borough of Culture 2020... it's full of joyful verve. I binged four episodes and felt thoroughly cheered by the end.'

— Miranda Sawyer, *The Observer*

13.3M
REACH ACROSS
ALL CONTENT

73%
LISTEN-
THROUGH RATE

VENT was an innovative podcast collaboration between Brent 2020 and VICE that ran to over 100 episodes and racked up 74,450 listens. The series set out to put the thoughts, perspectives and experiences of young people from the borough on to an international platform. In the year of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter, the series also provided a vital way to keep Brent 2020 in step with the rapidly shifting concerns of people in the borough.

VENT came in three half-hour formats: VENT Weekly, discussions hosted by young people from the borough; VENT Daily, a week-long mini-series of podcasts on a theme; and VENT Documentaries, young people from the borough telling important stories about their lives. During the pandemic, 11 episodes of VENT Weekly were themed as 'COVID-19 Fact-Checkers' and set out to deconstruct misinformation surrounding the pandemic.

Local young people were recruited to take part through workshops using Brent 2020's existing connections to youth groups and schools in the borough. VENT Weekly used the same four hosts throughout the series. Across all formats, VENT featured 56 people from the borough as presenters and guests.

VENT Weekly and VENT Daily episodes featured the hosts discussing an issue with a panel of guests, while VENT Documentaries offered first-person perspectives from young people on a variety of issues. The series shone a light on how the universal themes of love, friendship and identity play out for young people in Brent today: whether to have lip-filler injections; when or if to share passwords in relationships; being outnumbered by white people; what 'going cunch' really means.

VENT content reached a total audience of 13.3 million people and was positively reviewed in *NME* and by Miranda Sawyer in *The Observer*. In November 2020, VENT was awarded the Silver Medal in the Grassroots Production category at the Audio Production Awards and won 4 awards at the 2021 ARIAS, the Audio & Radio Industry Awards including GOLD for The Grassroots Award.

Pride: Local young people on an international platform

Skills: Four hosts ready to progress in media

Infrastructures: Formats for raising issues that matter to young people in the borough

Top: VENT © Brent 2020, London Borough of Culture
Bottom: Kamiah, Nuradean and Santos for VENT © Brent 2020, London Borough of Culture





6. NO BASS LIKE HOME

'So proud of our cultural heritage!!! #NoBassLikeHome has brought back so many GREAT memories and highlighted rich historical facts that I never knew 😊😊😊 Absolutely loving this! More please!!!' — @KandiceBryan

71,000
VIEWS OF
THE LIVE
FESTIVAL

2,000
MESSAGES TO
THE YOUTUBE
CHATSTREAM
(MORE THAN
5 PER MINUTE)

No Bass Like Home was a heritage project that put the spotlight on the reggae revolution that emerged from Brent in the 1960s and '70s and went on to sweep the UK. For many people outside Harlesden and Willesden, this story was little known and under-appreciated, until *No Bass Like Home* presented the stories of the people who made this reggae revolution happen – singers and musicians, DJs and retailers, producers and promoters – and the fans who hung on every beat and bassline.

No Bass Like Home consisted of three distinct activities:

- the gathering and recording of 100 oral testimonies, organised into four themes: Pioneering Artists, The Sound of the Underground, Women in Reggae and Fandom;
- the creation of a reggae history map, picking out important locations in Brent's reggae history; and
- the *No Bass Like Home* Online Festival, a seven-hour online celebration of reggae culture curated by Seani B and featuring performances from Julian Marley, The Cimarrons, Janet Kay, General Levy, Big Zeeks and Brent's Reggae Community Choir.

Reflecting Brent's historic position as a global capital for reggae, the online festival featured live link-ups from Florida and Kingston, Jamaica. On the day, the festival streamed to over 71,000 viewers across Facebook and YouTube, and the YouTube chatstream accrued more than 2,000 messages (more than five a minute) – giving it a truly dynamic feel. By the end of 2020, the Festival had been viewed nearly 130,000 times. Extracts were broadcast on London Live TV across four nights in February 2021, reaching a further audience of 91,000.

The project also updated and republished the Encyclopedia of Brent's Black Music History, created by local activist and music historian Kwaku; and included the *No Bass Like Home* University, four online discussions exploring reggae's place in British popular culture.

The end of *No Bass Like Home* coincided with the screening of Steve McQueen's landmark BBC TV series *Small Axe*, which featured much of the music, artists and stories celebrated in the project – including a starring role in *Lovers Rock*, one of the five episodes, for *Silly Games* by Brent singer Janet Kay. An article in *The Guardian* speculated that a lovers rock revival may be in the offing.

Pride: Putting the spotlight on Brent's immense contribution to reggae music

Infrastructures: Creating a model for an online festival

Movements: Helping to revive reggae and dancehall for new audiences

7. BRENT LOCKED IN

'Hi – my name's Savannah. Welcome to *Brent Locked In*, the series where we get to meet amazing people from Brent and discover how this part of north-west London has shaped who they are and what they do...'

— Clip from *Brent Locked In*

447,890
VIEWS OF LOCKED
IN FILMS ONLINE

Brent Locked In was a video interview series hosted by nine members of the Blueprint Collective and featuring significant local figures from the arts, sport and politics. The series tried to establish how coming from Brent shapes one's outlook on life.

Brent has produced many leading figures in the arts, sport and politics, but often their roots in the borough are unknown. The series set out to make these roots clearer, helping to understand how a Brent background influences creativity and action. Among others, it featured writer Nikesh Shukla, who grew up in Wembley; poet Ian Duhig, raised in Kilburn; and actor Patterson Joseph and footballer Rachel Yankey, who both grew up in Willesden. The series ran to 18 episodes, which were predominantly produced during the first lockdown. The final episode was a special 'live' edition with the author Zadie Smith, who was also raised in Willesden.

Each interview took approximately an hour to record and was edited down to 30 minutes. A brief for the interviews was prepared together with a list of questions, which the hosts were free to choose from, modify or change. Following production, a full-length video was shared on YouTube and Facebook, with shortcuts on Instagram. The combined YouTube audience was 100,000 views, giving an average audience of around 5,000 views per video; and across all Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, the series had a cumulative audience of 447,890 people.

Pride: Celebrating Brent's most iconic people and their roots in the borough

Skills: Supporting interviewing and hosting skills

Movements: Establishing a format for a video interview series





8. SEEN AND HEARD

'In Roundwood Park, there was a specific tree that I used to climb when I was a kid. I still come to sit in it sometimes, I can't lie. We need a version of that tree for us. A place to play, climb, be imaginative and learn different things!'

— Tyrique, *Seen and Heard* collective

**3-YEAR
ONGOING
PROJECT**

During the consultation for Brent 2020's bid application, young people from the borough often talked about issues with public space – where they felt safe, where they liked to go, what they could do when they were there. *Seen and Heard* was a provocative action research project with LSE Cities at the London School of Economics, the Blueprint Collective and Metroland Cultures funded by Quintain, that explored young people's place in public space and their role in designing it. The project provided a way for young people to talk about racism, crime, gentrification and other issues affecting their shared cultural life.

During summer 2019, 22 members of the collective worked with a team of researchers from LSE Cities in a summer school-type environment at the Yellow Community Centre in Wembley Park, learning about public space and exploring different options for designing it. Across five day-long workshops, they built models, went on walkabouts and met with Quintain, the Wembley Park developers.

The outcome of the process was a series of policy recommendations for addressing the needs of young people in public space, and the Yellow Charter – a statement written by the Blueprint Collective calling for young people to have a greater role in the planning and design of public spaces. LSE Cities is continuing to work with walkabouts led by Quintain, the team behind the regeneration of Wembley Park.

During 2020, members of the Blueprint Collective took part in an online workshop series supported by Metroland Cultures, with local artists and campaigners exploring the role of culture in regeneration. This led to the development of a petition building on the Yellow Charter and calling for the greater involvement of young people aged 15-21 in the design of public space around London. A promotional video campaign featuring voices of the Blueprint Collective has helped gather 200 signatures for the petition, building awareness of the issue in the borough and beyond.

The Mayor of London's new Public London Charter has identified *Seen and Heard* as an exemplary way of involving young people in thinking about the design of public space. The Blueprint Collective, now reformed as an independent group known as Blueprint, will continue to work on *Seen and Heard* with a part-time coordinator from Metroland Cultures.

Skills: Schooling young people in the politics of public space

Infrastructures: Quintain committed to building a space for young people in Wembley Park

Movements: A petition and charter supporting young people's role in the design of public space

Funded by Quintain

9. THE BRENT 2020 EDUCATION PROGRAMME

'This year I've gained a better understanding of how to support parents with educating their children at home. We've had to pivot.'

— Brent 2020 Cultural Lead

77%
**OF BRENT
SCHOOLS
ENGAGED**

The Brent 2020 education programme connected thousands of children and teenagers in schools, nurseries and other educational settings to the Brent 2020 programme. Organised by A New Direction, a non-profit working to enhance the capacity and agency of children and young people in London to own their creativity, shape culture, and achieve their creative potential.

As well as supporting young people to explore local history and heritage in creative ways, the education programme aimed to increase and formalise schools' engagement with arts and culture: firstly, by connecting teachers who are passionate about art in schools; and secondly, by helping schools evidence their work with the arts through Artsmark, Arts Council England's cultural education accreditation scheme. It was the first attempt in the borough by teachers, council staff and arts organisations to set the borough's schools on a path to greater engagement with culture and the arts.

The nucleus of the education programme was a network of 58 Cultural Leads who championed the arts in schools across the borough. The Cultural Leads worked with A New Direction in 2018-2019 on *The Brent ABC*, a learning resource that included multiple starting points for activities inspired by local history and heritage. Activities were grouped into the categories A, B and C, with A the most straightforward and C the most complicated. Although COVID-19 effectively paused the education programme in March 2020, schools had been working with the resources from the start of the autumn term in 2019. Since its launch, *The Brent ABC* has been downloaded over 2,000 times.

The Cultural Leads were joined by a further 65 Cultural Champions who promoted Brent 2020 opportunities. With the Cultural Leads, the Cultural Champions were invited to meet-ups with artists and offered continuous professional development sessions focussed on cultural education. In total, 65 Cultural Champions were organised into six local groups and took part in five online continuous professional development sessions. At the end of the year, the Cultural Champions worked with design consultants B+A to write a book gathering together their learnings from the year.

The education programme had contact with 120 schools and educational settings in Brent, including nurseries, primaries, secondaries, Pupil Referral Units, SEND Schools and childminders. Across the year, 42 artists and cultural organisations worked in schools as part of the programme, which was engaged with by 77% of local authority schools and 47% of private nurseries. A plan is now in place to build on the education programme and establish a Local Cultural Education Partnership to improve cultural education for children across all schools. Like the teachers network, the partnership will be a way of pooling resources, supporting continuous professional development for teachers, and building strong relationships between schools in the borough and arts organisations inside and outside it.

Skills: Five professional development sessions for Brent educators

Seven cultural leadership sessions and four cultural networking events connecting educators to artists and cultural organisations

13 schools were supported to apply for the Artsmark

Infrastructures: A creative learning resource for Brent teachers

Movements: 77% of Brent schools engaged, and a new Local Cultural Education Partnership initiated

Top: Steel Drums © Brent 2020, London Borough of Culture
Bottom: © Brent 2020, London Borough of Culture



10. THE AGENCY

'I'm Fizza, I'm 17 and I'm from Wembley in Brent... My project Consent First aims to broaden the amount of education young people get when it comes to consent, and what healthy relationships look like. I am working with my producer Gemma to make my project happen.'

— Fizza, participant in The Agency



The Agency was a scheme to support young entrepreneurs between 15-25 years to develop ideas for social change in their area. In partnership with the Kiln Theatre, Brent 2020 provided training, funding and professional advice from artists and local networks, and supported a group of 23 young people to research local community needs to develop their passions into brand new ideas that benefited their communities.

The programme aimed to reach less-engaged young people – so as well as being presented to over 300 young people in schools, community centres, churches and youth centres, it was also promoted in Pupil Referral Units, through personal referrals and via a street-level team. At these introductions, young people were encouraged to talk about their community and what they would like to change in it.

In December 2019, 56 people were interviewed for the programme, and 23 were ultimately selected. These young people received mentoring and support from local artists and community organisations to develop their ideas, which were shared in March 2020 at a public showcase at the Yellow Community Centre in Wembley Park. Proposals included a project supporting safe and 'rival-free' football tournaments; a peer-to-peer tutoring initiative; and a workshop series addressing financial literacy and life administration.

The young people continued to receive mentoring and advice throughout the lockdown. In July, the final 12 ideas were pitched to an expert panel for the chance to win one of three £2,000 grants that would allow them to make their idea a reality. The four successful projects included: a podcast that tells the story of care leavers; a programme to enable young people to make films about issues affecting them; a zine raising awareness about issues of consent; and an archive developed with people from places in Harlesden that are undergoing regeneration. All these projects are currently ongoing.

Originally conceived by Marcus Faustini in Rio de Janeiro, The Agency UK is a Battersea Arts Centre and Contact programme devised in partnership with People's Palace Projects.

Pride: A celebration of young, local social entrepreneurship

Skills: A crash-course in social entrepreneurship for 23 young people

Infrastructures: Four new local initiatives with the power to help local people



11. ANTHEM

'This is who we are and this is what we like. Hey! Different cultures, different food, different religions, different dudes. This is us, this is Brent! We stick together like packed cement!'

— Elsley Primary School, Year 6 Anthem



The Anthem was a mass-participation project exploring identity and place through music and poetry delivered by Brent Music Service (BMS), the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) and Spread the Word, London's writer development agency.

In spring and summer 2019, 14 schools from the borough worked with poets including Lewis Buxton, Dizraeli, Remi Graves, Momtaza Mehri and Bridget Minamore to write poems drawing on Brent's communities, values and experiences. More than 300 young people wrote original poems reflecting their experiences and feelings about Brent. Momtaza Mehri, local poet and onetime Young Person's Laureate for London, then used the work of the schools to write a new 'Anthem' poem celebrating Brent and the experience of growing up in London.

In autumn 2020, BMS tutors worked with 7,611 primary pupils from 29 schools to explore similar themes through music. A total of 264 classes wrote lyrics, composed melodies and created their own songs celebrating Brent. In total, schools made 168 videos sharing these new pieces, which used multiple musical devices from rap to folk, dance and soundscapes.

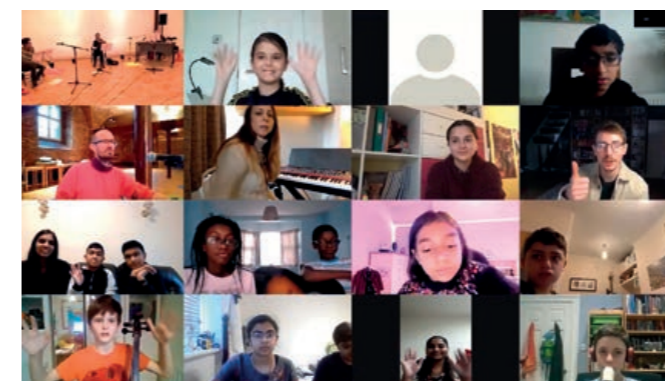
Using ideas from the earlier anthem work as inspiration, the RPO and BMS then worked with 24 young people from the borough over autumn half-term to devise a 'final' anthem for Brent. Over remote Zoom workshops, the young musicians worked with professionals to compose and record this final piece, which they named 'Sparks Fly'. The song was published on YouTube on 8 December, and with the help of national media coverage, received over 10,000 views in the run-up to Christmas.

The song will be performed by young people, BMS and RPO musicians at a concert in 2022. In total over 8,000 children from the borough took part in the project.

Pride: 168 uplifting songs and an Anthem about life in Brent

Skills: Young people introduced to rhythm, composition and wordplay

Infrastructures: A model for remotely recording a song with multiple participants across Brent



THE LEGACY OF BRENT 2020



Carolyn Downs
Chief Executive of Brent Council



Our year as London's Borough of Culture couldn't be what we imagined, but we're so very proud that in the hardest of circumstances, it carried on. This isn't a council or a borough that throws in the towel when things get tough.

Brent will continue the work of the Borough of Cultures programme, helping to create platforms and prominence for our cultural life. This year has shown that cultural programmes can start conversations, trigger emotions and boost confidence and wellbeing across our communities. This is a council that now takes culture seriously.

Doing something for the first time is an intense learning process. Brent 2020 has helped us understand how we can work with Metroland Cultures in a way that puts communities in the driving seat of cultural events. In the arts, they call this 'cultural democracy'. For our part, we know a bit more now about what we can do quickly and what takes time to build. When we need to step in and when we need to step back. And how cultural activity can help us across the council: culture isn't a service to deliver in a silo.

We are committed to taking this learning forward. The legacy will be delivered with partners and communities across the borough and it will use the four building blocks of the Metroland Framework – pride, skills, infrastructures and movements – explained in this report. It is perhaps the latter of these building blocks that we are best placed to throw our weight behind, supporting key pieces of infrastructure and convening passionate people and stakeholders.

We will support educators to establish a Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP) for Brent, bringing together arts organisations, youth organisations, educators and artists to

co-create an arts and culture offer for schools and settings in the borough. The LCEP will initially be incubated within Brent Council, with the ambition that it will become an independent organisation within 18 months. It will be a mechanism to continue the work we have started with schools, settings and educators through the Brent 2020 education programme and the resources developed as part of it. We believe that every child has a right to access arts and culture, and this LCEP will secure our young people's creative and cultural future.

The council will continue to ensure that Brent is a place and a borough that welcomes artists and creativity in all its forms by establishing a pipeline of free space, both meanwhile and permanent, for arts and culture across its building programme. The first space in this scheme is Metroland Studios in Kilburn, which is offering 12 months' rent-free space for 14 visual artists who moved into the space in January 2021.

Metroland Cultures, the charity that delivered Brent 2020, will continue to deliver great art in Brent with its many cultures: building on success of the first ever Brent Biennial and delivering a music biennial alongside it. At the same time, the Metroland University initiative will deliver a yearly leadership programme for young people. Together, these initiatives and others will establish Brent as a key place to visit in London, elevating its night-time economy, visitor economy and creative industries, with the twin biennials showcasing Brent creatives to London-wide, national and international audiences.

Carolyn Downs
Chief Executive
Brent Council



THANK YOU

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO WAS PART OF BRENT 2020

We want to thank everyone who took part in, attended, supported, volunteered and worked with us to deliver Brent's year as London Borough of Culture.

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Khadija Abdelhamid
Mehaira Abdelhamid
Ayan Abdi
Arwa Aburawa
Boaz Adelekan
Babajide Adetunji
Lauren Adeyemi
Charlotte Agran
Sophie Ajinusi
Nabil Al-Kinani
Noor Al-Kinani
Zeyn Al-Sukhny
Titania Altius
Andre Anderson
Taymah Anderson
Elizabeth Anionwu
Rasheed Araeen
Saira Arif
Dale Arndell
Benedicta Asamoah-Russell
Barby Asante
Dean Atta
Judah Attille
Amit Auluck
Seani B
Daniel Bailey
Margaret Bailey
Delia Barker
Craig Bartlett
Peter Baxter
Ruth Beale
Linda Bernhardt
Amit Bhagat
Shayna-Marie Birch-Campbell
Ezekiel Blake
David Blandy
Seneca Blankson
Peter Bonnell
Rajaa Bouchab
Polly Brannan
Eddie Brett
Anna Brindle
Phil Bromberg
Doc Brown
Mac Brown
Zerritha Brown
Scott Burrell
MC Bushkin
Laetitia Butler
Samuel Callahan
Terri Cash
Eugenia Cezar
Rajiv Chabria
Dr Monique Charles
Camilla Churchill

Leiyah Clarke
Natalie Clarke
Claire Clotey
Henry Coleman
Geraldine Cook
Rebecca Cooper
Tommaso Corvi-Mora
Kamiah-Chae Cowell
Mohamed-Zain Dada
Ciaran Daly
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Gabrielle de la Puente
Barbara de Souza
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Rahel Debebe
Leroy Decosta Simpson
Helen Delany
Rhys Dennis
Himanshu Depala
Hydar Dewachi
Sam Dottin
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Frankyn Dunn
Sadie East
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Bilal Harry Khan
Saima Khanom
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Kanya King
Jermaine King-Kabali
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Mikey Koos
Ken Korenteng
Xhesilda Kurtaj
Kwaku
Kyron
Khadija Koroma
Sophie Leer
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Gail Lewis
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Matt Littler
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Sally Long
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Moeed Majeed
Abdulla Mansour
Lola Manville
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Livio Reichenbach
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Jamie Zugasti

Organisations

A.R.M
Action Space
Addictive TV
Alminas Hands On
Alsaraji Design
A New Direction
Anisha
Annabel Jackson Associates
AQ Arts
Ariana II
Art Review
Arts Head
Demba Sow
Attitude Is Everything
Avant Gardening
B Real Productions
Bad Madam
Badele
BANG Media & Entertainment
BBMC Family
Besheh Meesheh Films
Bolton & Quinn
Brent Indian Association
Brent Museum and Archives
Bring Your Own Bars Poetry
Bush Bash Recordings
Camden Art Centre
Cara Gael Academy of Dance
CDS
Chante
The Cogency
Create London
Crisis
The Culture Laboratory
DanceWest London
Dende Collective
Design at London Colour
East London Cable
Entertainments
Europa
Event International
Excelsior Graphic Designers
FreeHand Music Services
Freeword
Fubunation
Girls I Rate
Girls of Grime
Good Space QP
Granville Community Kitchen
GREACH! Community Interest
Company
Hands On
Hbox
Huq That
ICMP

Idahir
Ignota
Impact Dance
Inanimatorz
InsightShare
Jaykoe_b
Jillian Edelstein Photography
Khadijakoro
Kilburn State of Mind
Kiin Theatre
Kizart
Kit Oates Photography
LAPL
Lassal Gayle's Kweinam Grocery
Leap London
Levy Incorporated
The Lexi Cinema
Likkledotz
Lin Kam Art
London Calling Arts
London School of Economics
LUX
Maisie Bowes Design
Mahogany Carnival Design
Mapesbury
Marcus J Leith Photographer
Marla Brown Music
Marlborough Gallery
Metropolis Music
Mindspray Associates
My-Ish Inc
New Life
New Waverley Studios
Number 8 Events
NW6 Arts
The October Anthropologist
Other Cinemas
Pennies to Pounds Group
Peter & Paul
Phoenix Rising
Pinwheel
The Playmaker Group
The Poetry Society
Positive Promotions
R Stars
The Rachel Yankey Football
Programme
Realtalk Productions
Reggae Choir
RootPrints Theatre
Roots Rockers Promotion
Roy Mehta Photography
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Run Riot
SABA UK

Sandra Shakespeare Consulting
Sarah Boiling Associates
Secaina
Shipshape Arts
SICTS & ICT
Sid Patrick (OPDC)
Simian Media
Soulful Emma-Louise
South Kilburn Trust
Sport at the Heart
Spread the Word
Square Root Soda
Stingray Records
Studio Voltaire
Sufra Food Bank
Sujata Banerjee Dance Company
Sweetie Darling
Thierry Bal Photography
Tim & Barry
TL Universal Events
To the T Designs
Tomorrow's Warriors
Triple S Productions
Turn It Up Productions
TV 4 U Cricklewood
Uber
Ultra Education
Unheard Voice Consultancy
United Borders
The Unloved
VICE
Volcano Sound UK
Word Up
Young Brent Foundation
Youth Club
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THANK YOU TO ALL OFFICERS OF BRENT COUNCIL WHO SUPPORTED THE DELIVERY OF BRENT 2020 AND TO THE PAST AND SERVING MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF METROLAND CULTURES

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