

**EVALUATION
REPORT**

River Light '25



**Sleaford's award winning
FREE arts festival!**

**River
Light**

**River
Light**



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Summary and Highlights



RiverLight returned to Sleaford in June 2025 with another resounding success! The festival is a joyous celebration of Sleaford - its stories, unique spaces and the creativity of the local community.

Kicking off with a vibrant Fringe Week from Sat 14 - Fri 20 Jun, the wide-reaching programme included walks, workshops, performances, exhibitions, events and activities, culminating in the spectacular Festival Finale on Sat 21 Jun, which was one of the hottest days of the year.

For the first time, RiverLight was programmed around a theme; 'Circles, Cycles and the Summer Solstice', inspired by the area's rural heritage, medieval water mills, local folktales and Sleaford's connection to the natural world.

Artists collaborated with community groups, venues and schools to co-create dances, costumes, songs, stories and installations, bringing the town's culture and heritage to life.

The Finale filled the town centre with beautifully designed art installations, live dance, circus, street theatre and music performances, and hands-on craft workshops. This year there was a focus on the newly regenerated Market Place - which saw hundreds gathered for the start of the RiverLight Parade.

The economic impact for the finale day alone has been calculated to be over £150,000 based on visitors to the town, with businesses in Sleaford town centre seeing a turnover increase of an average of 15 %.

The social impact of RiverLight has been huge. The festival generates feelings of celebration, pride, joy and belonging. Feedback from partners, participants, audiences and businesses has been overwhelmingly positive. RiverLight is seen as an exemplary festival - delivered collaboratively with the community, and bringing what is special about Sleaford into the light.

The festival was funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, administered by North Keven District Council. It is co-produced by the Hub and many local partners.

hub-sleaford.org.uk/riverlight



2025 Highlights

- Stalker Teatro (from Italy) performed twice during the Fringe Week on Sun 15 Jun, delivered in partnership with Magna Vitae and SO Festival.
- RiverLight Parade inspired by the Summer Solstice and the elements Fire, Water, Air and Earth, with over 150 community and school participants.
- Autin Dance Theatre presented 'The Giant Wheel' in Market Place and Parade with local dancers and inclusive community cast.
- Eight new festival flags by Lincolnshire-based Imogen Joyce, celebrating local folklore and customs.
- Over 35 partner organisations including local schools, heritage sites, pubs and venues, community and voluntary groups, artists, local authorities, climate action groups and local businesses, contributed to festival delivery.
- Lincolnshire Craft Open exhibition at the Hub with 8 local artists featured.

“Lovely day, gentle, continuous joy”

Participant in Fringe Week events at the Nettles

“Cannot wait for next year”

Audience at Finale

“You all do a marvellous job.
Keep up the amazing work!”

Audience at the Finale



Headline Figures

- **26,493** engagements with the public across 9 festival days from Sat 14 - Sat 21 June 2025, plus more than **30** days of workshops activities from January - May 2025.
- Estimated **7,984** unique visitors for RiverLight 2025 across the Fringe Week and Finale.
- **142** creative workshops and activities giving **8,364** people a special opportunity to express themselves through creativity.
- **71%** of the budget invested into Sleaford and Lincolnshire-based artists and businesses.
- **15%** increase in turnover for local businesses on finale day.
- **247** visitor surveys completed and **19** town centre business surveys.
- Gross Value Added to Sleaford for the finale day totaled **£151,426**.
- **2** business sponsorships.



New for 2025

- Naturally Inspired at the Nettles - a mini-eco festival with sustainable craft, funded by Sleaford Renewable Energy Plant's Community Fund.
- Sleaford Little Theatre open day and taster workshops celebrating 75 years of their historic Georgian theatre building.
- Sleaford Little Theatre Youth Academy performance of 'Forest of Forgotten Whispers'.
- Youth Music & local bands at the Solo Bar, hosted by Shug Studios.
- Ceilidh held at St George's Academy with 54 North Ceilidh Band and Sleaford Youth Folk-Rock Band.
- Local DJs at Watergate Yard & Marquis of Granby, bookending the Festival Fringe & Finale.
- 'Future of the Past' National Heritage Lottery partnership programme with Sleaford Museum and local sixth form students creating a heritage-inspired performance for the Finale.
- New commissions: upcycled festival merchandise (Recycling Rachael) and hand-printed T-Shirts and Flags (Dizzy Ink).
- New local young artist Ron Clarke supported for first solo commission on the 'Stop & Make Bike'.
- LGBTQ+ creative workshop at Sleaford Library with Creative Rebel CIC.
- Sponsorship opportunities for two local companies: Ian Williams and Smith's Construction.

Achievements

- **15** venues across town
- **5** outdoor spaces
- **35+** community partners
- **14** new partnerships
- **60+** local artists/companies
- **1** international arts company with **6** artists
- **6** UK-based artists/companies
- **255** volunteers
- **57** community-led performances and events
- **18** exhibitions and artwork installations created
- **205** parade participants and performers
- **8** walks
- **5** schools
- **34** school workshops
- **3** home education workshops
- **552** engagements in education sessions
- **1** care home and **1** day centre involved
- **3** different faith centres involved
- **19** local businesses engaged

Audience demographics on the day of the Finale

- **54%** local residents of Sleaford
- **40%** day visitors (living in the UK)
- **6%** overnight stay, short break or holiday
- **74%** attended with at least one child under the age of 16
- **66%** of the audience were female
- **32%** of the audience were male
- **2%** were non-binary/other
- **11%** identified as D/Deaf, Disabled or had long term health condition
- **9%** of the audience were on their first culture event of the year
- **7%** of the audience attended less than one culture event a year



“My daughter has loved being involved in the workshops & parade over the last 3 years, thank you.”

Audience at the Finale



Locally Rooted and Co-produced



In its 4th year, RiverLight is now firmly established as Sleaford's annual celebration of community, culture, heritage and place. The festival showcases the town's rich history, stories, and unique spaces, with the River Slea at its heart.

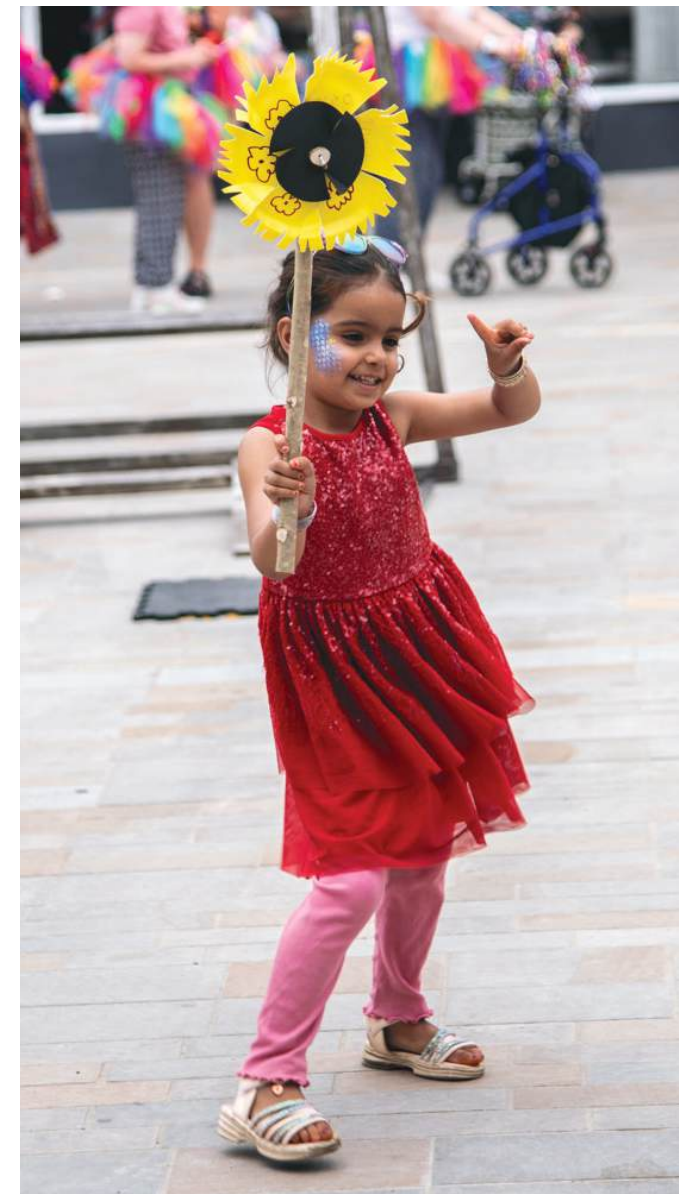
RiverLight has been funded using the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and is produced by the Hub, in collaboration with many local partners including artists, community groups, heritage organisations, schools, businesses, local authorities, retailers, pubs, cafes and faith centres.

Consultation and creative planning takes place with partners throughout the year in the build-up to the festival. New artistic, education and community collaborations are encouraged through open calls.

The festival ethos is designed to ensure the festival is:

- Locally rooted
- Co-produced
- Inspiring and joyful
- Sustainable and ethical
- Welcoming, accessible and inclusive for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities - especially those who have not been involved before.

The theme this year centred on local cultural, natural and social history. This directed the programming of community-led projects and artist commissions and also focused the selection of national acts - such as Osian Meilir's 'Mari Ha' - an energetic contemporary folk dance celebrating the yearly cycle of life and Welsh customs and rituals that chimed with Lincolnshire traditions.



Locally rooted and co-produced highlights:

- **The Giant Wheel** - a 12ft structure referencing Sleaford's historical mills, co-produced with Autin Dance Theatre (Autin DT) and local community dancers. Autin DT were a key partner for 2025, who provided their stunning 12ft high Giant Wheel - reminiscent of the medieval water mills that helped Sleaford to flourish in the 1100s. Their acrobatic dance performances provided a key focus for the Finale involving local participants from the Hub Youth Dance and Unify programmes in performances in the Market Place and throughout the parade, choreographed during a two-day residency in the Easter holidays. Movements from this performance were also taught to pupils from local schools by Hub Dance Producers, which were delivered throughout a number of pauses during the parade.
- **Parade Costumes and Puppets** - Lumo Workshop worked in collaboration with three local primary schools and one secondary school, Circus Starlight and Sleaford Day Centre. Costumes celebrated the Summer Solstice, local millers and their crops of wheat and barley, midsummer bonfires and the bounty of local fertile land.
- **Origami Umbrellas** - Emily Carwright created seven with students from KSHS that provided a stunning finely crafted floral installation in the Market Place throughout the day, before being paraded through town by students from the High School.
- **Firebird and Lady of the Well** - Lumo Workshop were also commissioned to create two new large-scale costume and puppet pieces for the Parade linked to the theme. In addition they provided The Green Lady costume and a large Barn Owl puppet for the parade, previous commissions by Sessions Arts and Transported for other festivals in Lincolnshire.
- **Sleaford Little Theatre Youth Academy** - in their woodland-themed costumes, Rainbow Stars and the Clansband Drummers. The Drummers brought a powerful community-led performance to the front of the procession. The group included people of all ages and abilities including people with visual impairments, mental health challenges and mobility issues.
- **Townfolk Tales by Boondog Balladeers** - collected songs from diverse community voices. Two musicians worked with The Chestnuts Retirement Home and Sleaford Islamic Centre, producing new folk songs containing stories and phrases collected during the workshop sessions. One of our stewards stated that "this performance was my favourite moment in the festival; it was very moving to witness the coming together of these cultures in folk song form, and that members of the Islamic Centre were clearly very proud to have their stories told".
- **Folktale Flags** - Eight stunning new flags in the Market Place, rooted in local tales and customs. Stamford-based Imogen Joyce, a new artist to the festival, was commissioned to create the festival flags which adorned the Market Place. Drawings and collages produced during workshops at the Hub fed into the design process which led to eight new flags celebrating local tales and traditional customs including folklore relating to sacred bees and wildflowers, midsummer bonfires and parades, wishing wells, May Day and the Holly King and Oak Queen.

Plus:

- Ruth Burrows & Sketchbook exhibition at Mosaic Youth Hub
- Ruth Burrows 'windmill'
- Solstice-inspired batik and willow circle installations by the Hub's Craft Club
- House-music sets with #4EBT2 local DJs
- Shug Studios student showcase
- Shug Studios local live bands performances
- Exodus and Jumpstart performances
- The Hub's National Saturday Club ceramic artwork installation
- Take Note Choir
- Sleaford Landlubbers
- Sleaford Rock Choir
- Sleaford Concert Band
- Sleaford Library Zentangle Workshops & Display
- William Alvey School Choir
- Sleaford Navigation Trust stalls and activities
- U3A stall
- Kesteven Morris
- Sleaford Ukulele Orchestra
- Open days at Interflora, Sleaford Islamic Centre and Sleaford Little Theatre
- Model displays at Riverside Church





Sleaford and NK partners

Appetites / Aurora Security / Beautifully Handmade Gift Shop / Bristol Arcade / Cogglesford Mill / Hill Holt Wood / Hub National Saturday Club / Interflora / Kesteven and Sleaford High School / Lincoln Co-op / Marquis of Granby / Mosaic Youth Hub / Nettles Volunteer Group / NK Walking Festival / Osbournby Primary School / Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Primary School / Rainbow Stars / Riverside Centre / Riverside Church / Slea Navigation Trust / Slea Paddlers / Sleaford Climate Action Network / Sleaford Day Centre / Sleaford Islamic Centre / Sleaford Library / Sleaford Playhouse / Sleaford Little Theatre Youth Academy / Sleaford Model Railway Club / Sleaford Museum / Sleaford Standard / Solo Bar / St Denys Church / St George's Academy / The Chestnuts Retirement Home / Watergate Yard / William Alvey Primary School / Your Local Lincs and North Kesteven District Council.



Sleaford and NK Artists and Arts Organisations

Andy Biddulph 'Tom Cat Flows' / Bruce Knight / Charlotte Mills - Sleaford Local / Chelsey Bamford & Take Note Choir / Chris Rogers - Krisma4 String Quartet / Circus Starlight / Dahlia & Truly Lee - Elbow Room / Dean Barnshaw / Dizzy Ink / Emily Cartwright / Evie Smith / Band From County Hell Clansband / Emma Nicholls - Creative Heights / Hannah Peacock & Caley Starbuck - Mishap Theatre / Heather Benson & 54 North Ceilidh Band / Imogen Joyce / Jamie Hawker & Team - JRH Services / Joanne Moules / Karen Chesney / Keith James / Laura Hudson / Lauren Williams / Lee Sass / Liv Hennessy - Creative Rebel / Lois Pitman / Louise Jones & Nadya Monfrinoli - Lumo Workshop / Louise Haddon / Maria Bates / Marion Sander and team for Naturally Inspired / Mark Clarke / Martyn Bignell & Dan Morgan - Boondog Balladeers / NK Morris Dancers / Sleaford Ukulele Orchestra / Rachael Moore - Recycling Rachael / Rhubarb Theatre / Richard Knight / Rob Pitman / Ron Clarke / Rose Croft / Ruth Burrows & Team / Sarah Parr / Scott Salt / Sessions Arts Stewards / Simon Hollingworth / Shug Studios / Sleaford Concert Band / Sleaford Landlubbers / Sleaford Rock Choir / SO Festival / Tom Lane / Tom Martin / Unify Dance and Zest Theatre.

UK and international artists / companies

Ashleigh Armitage and Jasmine Forbes (Programme Design and Illustration) / Autin Dance Theatre (The Giant Wheel) / Osian Meilir (Mari Ha!) / Simple Cypher (Roll Play) / Matt Pang (Thingamabob)

Stalker Teatro from Italy (6 artists)

Local Sponsorship

Two local businesses took the opportunity of the advertised sponsorship packages - Ian Williams and Smith Construction. Both sponsors were invited to attend the launch event in May and thanked for their involvement. Sponsorship enabled them to support festival zones, with their company name and logo on promotional material and thanked on social media.



Ethical and Sustainable



From the outset the Hub team made a firm commitment to consider any impact on the environment through the programming and delivery of RiverLight. An ongoing partnership with Sleaford Climate Action Network (CAN), and the Hub's own Green Group, advised and supported the delivery of the festival. Key 'green' events and activities this year included:

- ECO Village on Eastgate Green, led by Sleaford Climate Action Network, supported by NKDC Eco Team. This focused on sustainable and ethical food production, with twelve stalls and activities ranging from cookery demonstrations to green waste and sustainable farming methodologies.
- Upcycled merchandise made from promotional vinyl banners from previous festivals.
- Artwork from recycled materials in Navigation Yard.
- Festival staff & volunteer T-shirts hand-printed on organic cotton which can be for future events.
- Nettle Dress film screening, exploring slow, sustainable craft.
- 'Naturally Inspired' mini-festival at The Nettles, supported by Sleaford REP Community Fund and delivered by Marion Sander and Mark Clarke, alongside other sustainably-focused artists, delivering workshops with natural materials.
- Collaborations with other Lincolnshire events sharing resources and reusing costumes and props.
- Partnered with Magna Vitae to bring international acts visiting the UK for SO Festival to Sleaford for our Fringe Week, reducing the environmental impact of flights by commissioning multiple performances and festivals.
- Priority given to local artists, contractors and suppliers with over 71 % of the budget reinvested back into partners from within the district and county.

Welcoming and Inclusive



Programming for activities in the lead-up to the festival, during the Fringe Week and for the Finale centred around being family-friendly, free and inclusive. A wide range of venues and partners were involved in hosting and promoting events, to help the festival to reach new audiences.

Approaches for 2025 include:

- Most events and activities take place outdoors, in public locations across the town, that are accessible, wheelchair-friendly, easy to find or to 'stumble across'.
- The majority of events and activities were free and drop-in, apart from specific targeted workshops for schools or home educating families.
- Unify, the Hub's inclusive dance group took part in Autin Dance Theatre's workshops during the Easter Holidays, and later performed in the Market Place and as part of Finale Parade.
- New activities were delivered at The Chestnuts Retirement Home and Sleaford Day Centre.
- Sessions for Home Educating families at the Hub were designed to engage children of all ages, with neurodiversity in mind.
- New hand-crafted benches provided accessible seating at key venues and spaces.
- Improved accessibility information was provided in the Festival Programme including events that offered different sensory experiences, i.e. primarily visual, sound or non-language based events and performances.
- Rainbow Stars Hub offered a sensory-friendly quiet space in the Finale.



Engagement and Attendance Figures



RiverLight Growth Year by Year

	RiverLight 2022	RiverLight 2023	RiverLight 2024	RiverLight 2025	% increase from last year:
Participants	2,115	3,007	3,684	8,364 *	+127 %
Unique festival visitors	5,008	7,734	7,847	7,984 **	+1.7 %
Total engagements	11,519	17,788	18,049	26,493 ***	+47 %

* Increase in engagements were recorded with an increased offer of popular workshops and activities in the lead up to the Festival led by the Hub and other partners (including Cogglesford Mill), during the Fringe and on the Finale day, and also due to long term engagement with Kesteven & Sleaford High School led by Emily Cartwright, new partnership with Band from County Hell running rehearsals for the Clansband Drummers, and a project delivered by Sleaford Museum called ‘Future of the Past’ funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund, with 6th form students from St George’s Academy.

** See Economic Impact Report Section 3 for methodology.

*** In 2024 the Market Place was unable to be used to host activities. In 2025 not only were we able to host events, we were also able to monitor footfall in this area with the recent installation of the MRI Footfall cameras. This has allowed us to include Market Place figures within our totals for 2025 unlike previous years. We also now have an accurate footfall camera on Southgate and again have been able to capture actual numbers/visitors within our total engagement figures, unlike previous years.

Hub Footfall

	RiverLight 2022	RiverLight 2023	RiverLight 2024	RiverLight 2025
Hub visitors for RiverLight Finale	1,445	2,963	3,540	3,009 *

* Finale footfall at the Hub was slightly down on previous year, possibly due to extremely high temperatures on Sat 21 Jun and a full programme of activity at the Market Place.

Education Engagement

Total engaged in education workshops: **552**

Total cash cost from RiverLight Budget: **£4,367**

Value for money: **£8 per head**

Date	Event Details	No. of Sessions	Year Groups	Total Attendance
3 Feb - 9 Jun	Emily Cartwright - Origami Umbrella Workshops	14	8 & 12	154
1 Apr - 21 Jun	Rob Pitman & Sleaford Museum - Future of the Past Workshops	10	12 & 13	150
20 May	Lumo Workshop - Kesteven & Sleaford High School parade costume workshop	1	7	22
21 May	Hub Creative Learning Programme Ceramic Workshop	1	12 & 13	8
21 May	Lumo Workshop - William Alvey Primary School parade costume workshop	1	6	29
3 Jun	Lumo Workshop - Osbournby Primary School parade costume workshop	1	5	21
4 Jun	Hub Dance Team - Osbournby Primary School parade performance workshop	1	5	21
5 Jun	Lumo Workshop - Our Lady Primary School parade costume workshop	1	6	32
10 Jun	Emily Cartwright - Origami Umbrella Workshops	1	9	17
13 Jun	Hub Dance Team - William Alvey Primary School parade performance workshop	1	6	27
17 Jun	Hub Dance Team - Kesteven & Sleaford High School parade performance workshop	1	7	20
17 - 18 Jun	Elbow Room activities for home educating families	3	Mixed	19
20 Jun	Hub Dance Team - Our Lady Primary School parade performance workshop	1	6	30
			Total	552



Evidence and Impact

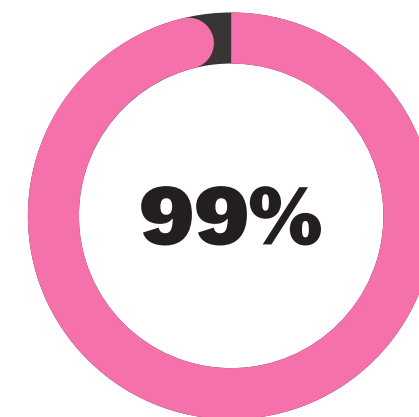


Evaluation was conducted in person at events and online following the festival via surveys on social media and direct email.

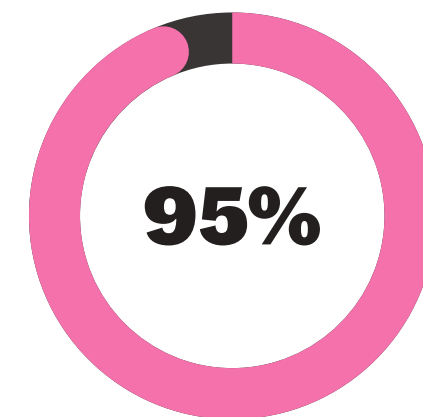
- RiverLight Finale Public Survey - **247 responses** (up from 103 last year)
- RiverLight Fringe Events - **46 responses**
- RiverLight Partner Survey- **44 responses**
- Local Business Survey - **19 responses**

Headlines from Public Survey

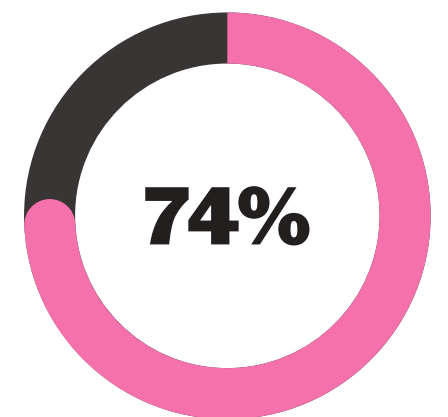
RiverLight received a Net Promoter Score of 70, which is generally considered excellent and indicates a high level of customer satisfaction and loyalty. It signifies that a large proportion of visitors are likely to recommend the festival to others.



of all respondents said that they rated RiverLight Finale 2025 as good or excellent and 100 % of respondents rated the Fringe week as good or excellent.



of all respondents rated RiverLight as accessible and welcoming to people of all ages and abilities.

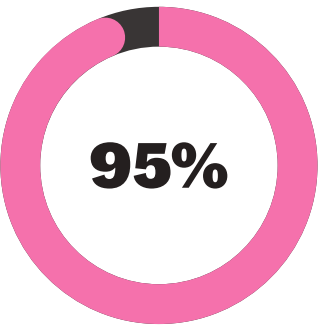


of visitor groups had at least one child under the age of 16, with the largest age group of children being 5-11 years.

To ascertain the level of success regarding RiverLight being locally rooted and co-produced - we asked visitors how much they agreed/disagreed with the following statements:

(245 responses in total)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Percentage that agree / strongly agree:
It helped me feel part of the community	3	3	23	77	139	88 %
It made me feel proud of my local area	3	1	20	70	151	90 %
It's important that it is happening here	2	1	8	62	173	96 %
It's important that RiverLight celebrates local cultural heritage	2	3	6	63	171	96 %
I want to see more events like RiverLight in Sleaford in the future	2	1	5	49	189	97 %

We also asked ‘Was RiverLight accessible and welcoming to people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities’



Yes	No	Not sure
231 (95 % of respondents)	3	9



Headlines from Partner Survey

Two local businesses took the opportunity of the advertised sponsorship packages - Ian Williams and Smith Construction. Both sponsors were invited to attend the launch event in May and thanked for their involvement. Sponsorship enabled them to support festival zones, with their company name and logo on the zone posters and digital screens, as well as being thanked on social media and the festival website.

The Partner Net Promoter Score is 91 - an exceptionally high score, considered world-class. It indicates that almost all of the partners are highly satisfied, acting as brand advocates and likely resulting in increased loyalty and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.



of partners rated RiverLight as good **14%** or excellent **86%**.

“I think Riverlight is a shining example of how to do a Festival event - engaging community & audiences, programming high quality work, working well with other regional arts organisations, bringing joy and pride to a place through cultural delivery.”

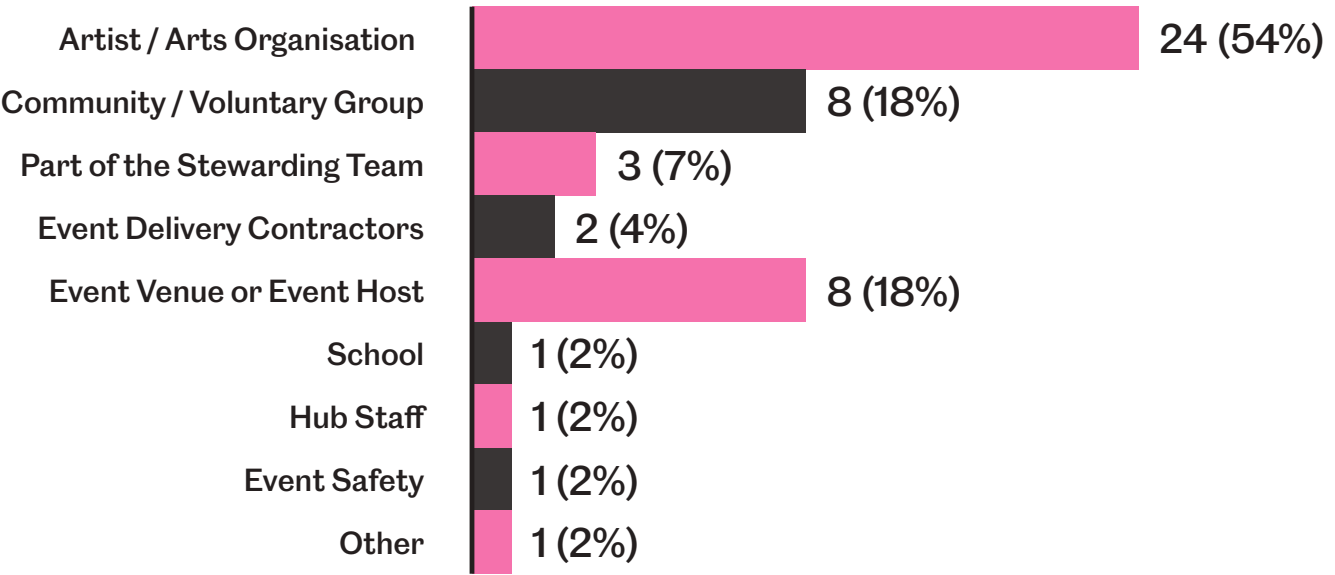


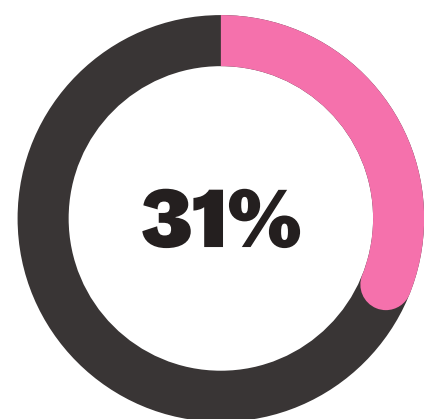
of all respondents rated RiverLight as accessible and welcoming to people of all ages and abilities.

“Is RiverLight accessible and welcoming? 110% - I’ve worked with many people with access needs in Sleaford and they were all welcomed and felt included throughout all of the programme with kind, generous and well trained staff.

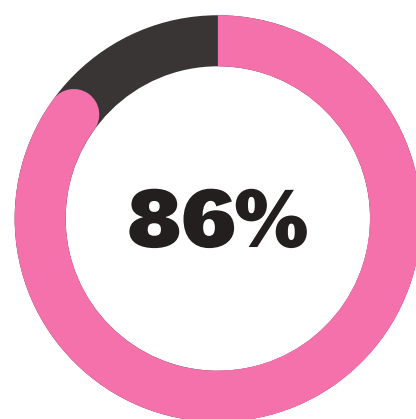
There was something for everyone all around town. It was wonderfully inclusive as the variety gave access to all community members.”

As one of our festival partners - are you:



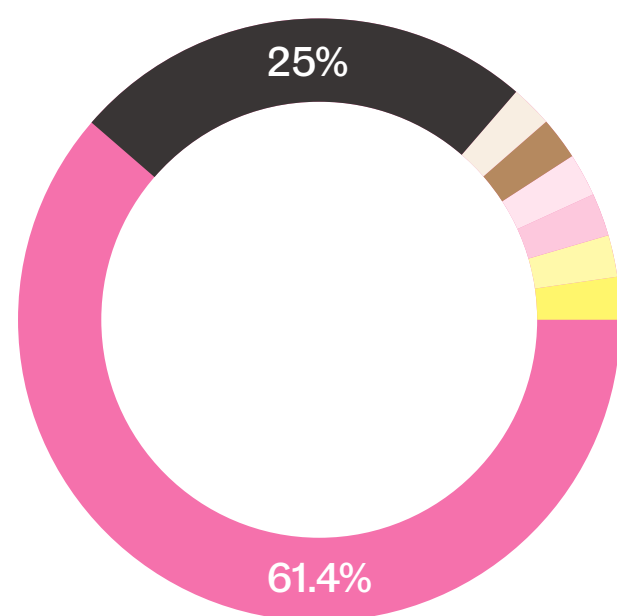


of partners who completed the survey were new to RiverLight this year.



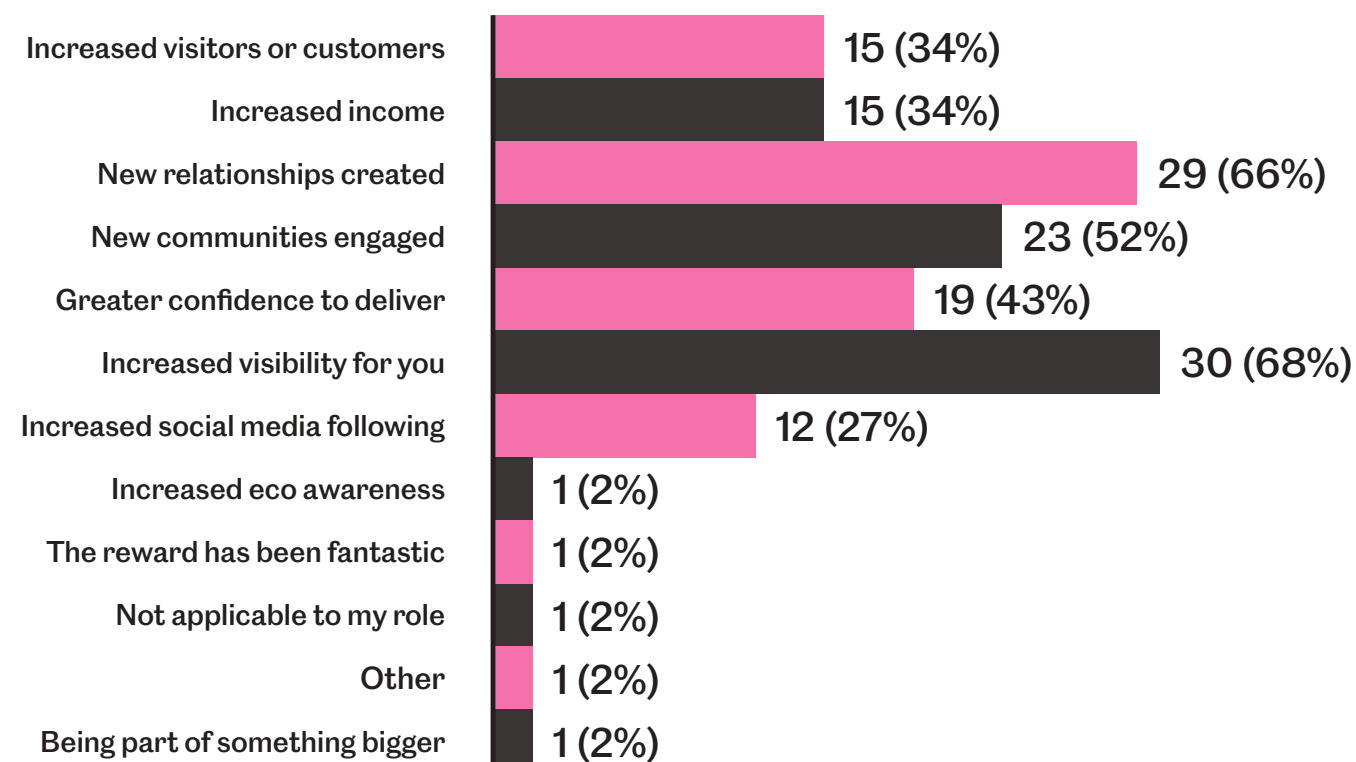
of partners who completed the survey were from Sleaford / North Kesteven or wider Lincolnshire.

Please tell us where you are based:

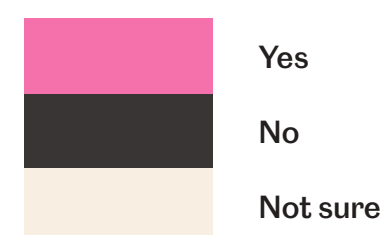
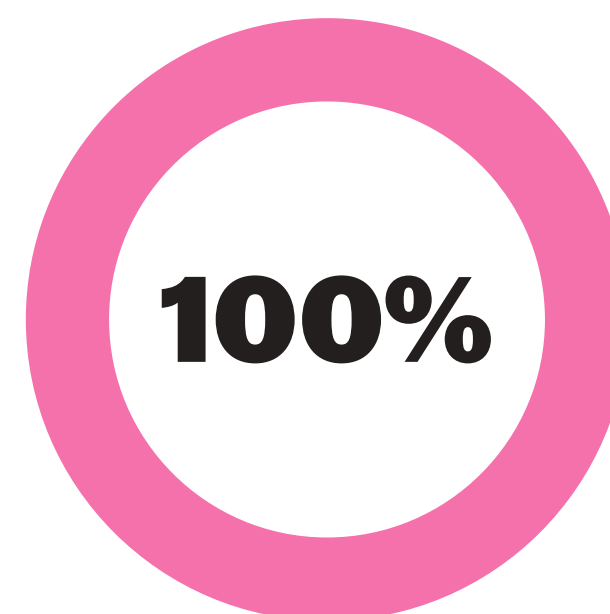


(44 responses in total)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Percentage that agree / strongly agree:
It helped me feel part of the community	0	0	4	6	34	90 %
It made me feel proud of my local area	0	0	1	6	37	98 %
It's important that it is happening here	0	1	1	3	39	95 %
It's important that RiverLight celebrates local cultural heritage	0	0	1	3	40	98 %

How did RiverLight benefit you/your organisation?



If funding allows, would you like to be part of RiverLight in the future?



“I couldn’t have asked for a better experience being a part of RiverLight festival. Everything ran like clockwork, there was always someone to assist, before and during the event. Communication was brilliant and I genuinely felt so welcome. What an amazing team and experience. Thank you”

Headlines from Business Survey

- **19** local businesses responded to the business survey (15 online and 4 in person) with 42 % being retail business, 47 % Hospitality and tourism businesses and the remainder 11 % made up of services.
- **52%** of respondents were involved in supporting the festival in some way.
- **89.5%** felt the festival was either good or excellent.
- **79%** felt that footfall had increased.
- **26%** of business cited an increase in turnover of up to 50 %.
- Businesses in Sleaford would have seen an increase in turnover of **15%** on the Finale.
- **55%** of businesses felt that RiverLight25 made them feel much more business confident.
- **94%** of business felt that RiverLight and major events were either vital or very important to the health of the town centre.

“When I walked around the town it was much busier than normal, and foot flows past the venue was increased.”

Tourism and heritage business

“RiverLight fosters more pride in the local economy.”

Town centre retail business

“Think it’s another... (Great)... event for the town. People now know about RiverLight and the Christmas market and look forward to each year. ”

Town centre food and drink business

Feedback

It felt like you were part of one big community, all working towards one common goal regardless of backgrounds or beliefs.

Artist

I have been to so many festivals across the county and the country and this is my favourite. Not only is it due to the connection I have with the community but also by how vibrant the programming is and the incredible work from the organisers and volunteers.

Performer

First time visiting and will definitely be back - hope funding is forthcoming as this is really valuable stuff.

Audience (Visitor)

What a positive and joyful event. A great thing for the town!

Audience (local resident)

It brings the community together brilliantly.

Audience (local resident)

We had a fantastic time, visiting the Sunday Fringe and the main Saturday. Honestly, I can't think of any improvements to make. We had the most fantastic time on both days. It was such a joy to see our town come to life and made me proud of our community. Thank you for two wonderful weekends.

Audience (local resident)

I loved the variety of things to do, something for everyone. I experienced things I may never have had a chance to experience in my life and for that I am very grateful- I believe festivals like this that provide free activities improve quality of life for those in the area, while also improving the connection amongst people.

Audience (local resident)

This festival is wonderful and we enjoy it annually or for as long as it has run annually. It brings together the local community and engagement with the arts and topical community issues like nothing else. It is such a valuable community event that is co-produced with so many creative people and brings people to the local area and supports the local economy. It deserves to be an annual event.

Audience (local resident)

The Nettles Volunteer Group works very hard throughout the year to keep this small but important and beautiful natural space along the river Sleas maintained, attractive and inspiring for visitors and residents to use and enjoy. It's been fantastic to be part of the RiverLight Festival to make this space and the work of the volunteers more visible and appreciated.

Partner

An amazing event showcasing all that is great about Sleaford. Great free activities to inspire and engage and a wonderful atmosphere!

Audience (Visitor)

Marketing & Media

Graphic designer Ashleigh Armitage and illustrator Jasmine Daisy Forbes collaborated to refresh the festival's visual identity for 2025. Their use of hand-drawn, dynamic circular motifs, combined with a zine-inspired brochure layout, brought a tactile and vibrant energy to both print and digital materials.

20,850 promotional flyers in bright neon pink were delivered in late May by 'Your Local Lincs' to homes within Sleaford and surrounding villages.

“Best branding / graphic design I’ve ever seen at a festival. Stunning”

Festival Steward



Programmes were ready one month before the festival, and were distributed widely around the county and in Sleaford and surrounding villages.

Hub team delivered copies to Sleaford and surrounding area primary schools including Our Lady, Church Lane, William Alvey, St Botolphs, Osbournby Primary School, Leasingham (St Andrews), Rauceby, Kirkby La Thorpe, Heckington Primary, Winchelsea, Chestnut Lane, Holton Independent, Kesteven and Sleaford High School.

- GLL distributed copies to all the local libraries including Sleaford, Ruskington, Metherringham, Heckington, Navenby, Lincoln, Grantham, Donington, North Hykeham and Spalding.
- Partners and Hub staff distributed programmes to the post office, community centres, faith centres, shops and festival venues in Sleaford.
- Tourism team at NKDC distributed copies to local visitor attractions, Lincoln TIC and to staff and members within the Council as well as FSB Business Event in Boston and at Harlaxton (Grantham) and the Lincoln Arts Centre in Lincoln.
- Marketing Assistant, Aja Ireland, distributed around galleries and cultural venues in Nottingham.
- Lincolnshire County Council distributed programmes at the Lincolnshire Show.

This year, handmade merchandise was piloted through two interactive activities with Dizzy Ink:

- **Print It, Wear It:** Visitors screen-printed a bespoke festival design onto their own t-shirts to wear at the Festival Finale.
- **Print It, Wave It:** As part of the Finale, members of the public participated in stamping and screen-printing their own flags, which they proudly waved during the community parade.

We upcycled Correx boards from last year's event into creative handmade wayfinding arrows which were installed around town.

We collaborated with two artists to create exclusive RiverLight merchandise which was on sale in the Hub Shop:

- Recycling Rachel upcycled last year's banners into a range of tote bags, bum bags, purses and other accessories.
- Illustrator Jasmine Daisy Forbes created a collection of Risograph prints featuring her festival designs.



Two digital A-boards were utilized during the launch evening and throughout Fringe Week. For the Finale event, three boards; one in each zone. The boards displayed a rotation of photos, reels, and event timetables to enhance audience engagement and provide real-time information.

Tom Martin led the photography team, which included recent graduate Eve Smith, current University of Lincoln photography student Louise Hadden, and National Geographic photographer Scott Salt. NKDC also commissioned two videographers and drone footage, resulting in a comprehensive and high-quality archive film of the event.

- RiverLight promo flyers (3 designs) x 20,850**
- Banners 3,000mm x 900mm (2 colourways) x 8**
- Banners 2,000mm x 600mm (2 colourways) x 9**
- A4 Posters (30 designs) x200 approx - printed on demand in house**
- Upcycled Correx wayfinding arrows x30**
- Festival Programme x15,000**
- A1 'What's On' Zone Boards x 12**
- Digital screens x3**
- Parade Flags x300**
- RiverLight Hub Cafebar Deli Paper x1,000**
- Branded Postal Stickers x50**
- 3 min-promotional film x1**

RiverLight Social Media Stats 1 May – 1 Aug

Reach	49.6k Facebook	13.6k Instagram
Followers	1,555 Facebook	928 Instagram
Content interactions (likes etc)	2,600 Facebook	1,900 Instagram
Views from Meta Ads	40k across both platforms	

RiverLight website statistics: 1 May - 1 Aug

3,682 RiverLight page views

2,361 users visiting

Digital Coverage

visitlincolnshire.com/events/riverlight-sleaford/

heartoflincs.com/event/riverlight-festival-fringe-2/

greatbiggreenweek.com/riverlight_ecovillage

lincolnshireworld.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/sleaford-comes-alive-for-riverlight-2025-5190558?page=4

sleafordplayhouse.co.uk/news/theatre-open-day-riverlight-25

sleafordlocal.co.uk/the-festival-canvas-a-colourful-celebration-at-riverlight-festival-2025/

cvaneastmidlands.co.uk/event/riverlight-festival/

sleafordlocal.co.uk/sleaford-local-newsletter-july-2025/

inyourarea.co.uk/news/exciting-events-including-the-zone-return-of-riverlight-and-more-coming-soon-to-sleaford

Plus:

Heart of Lincs – Instagram, X, Facebook

Business NK – Instagram, X, Facebook

North Kesteven – Instagram, X, Facebook

Heart of Lincs Newsletter

BusinessNK Newsletter

UKSPF Newsletter



Budget



Income

Including UK Shared Prosperity Fund and local sponsors	£100,000
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Expenditure

Parade development	£12,800
Community projects and events	£10,612
Professional programme	£12,750
Town-wide artworks and exhibitions	£6,509
International programme	£3,000
Infrastructure and logistics	£15,215
Staffing and stewarding	£17,750
Marketing	£10,631
Admin and overheads	£8,500
Developments funds for RiverLight 26	£2,233
Total expenditure	£100,000



The Future



Approach and format for RiverLight

The evaluation has clearly evidenced that RiverLight should remain co-produced and locally rooted. The principles of inclusivity and sustainability should also be retained.

RiverLight has followed the same format every year - workshop activity leading up to the Fringe Week of events, culminating in a Finale on the Saturday. We asked partners for their feedback on the shape of future events - with the result that a number of options could be considered, depending on the funding and budget.

To date - RiverLight has had a festival 'fringe' week and a Saturday 'finale'. Do you think this works well, or would a Fri-Sat-Sun event focus the program and encourage people to stay overnight in the town?



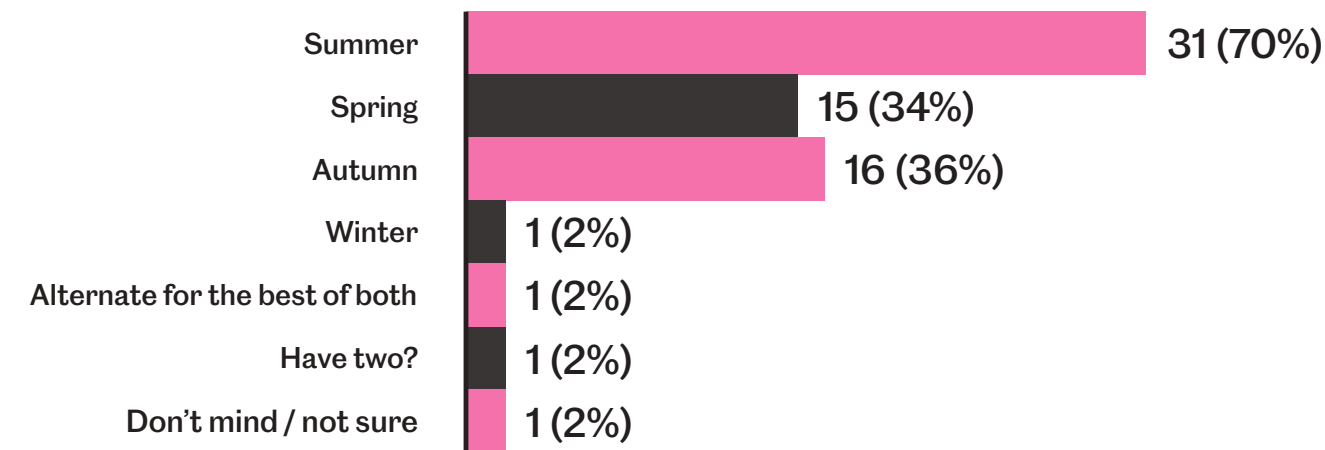
RiverLight has taken place at different times of the year: March (2022), October (2023) and June (2024 and 2025).

Depending on the time of year, activity has been focused more on day-time activities over evening activities. The addition of the parade in 2024 and 2025 focused delivery more in the day-time. The darker nights in March and October led to more evening activity - projected artworks and building/landmark illumination.

Feedback from partners suggested that summer is the preferred time of year, however partners were open to different options, which offer a wider range of opportunities to evolve and update the festival, making it unique each time:



RiverLight has taken place at different times of year in the past. Which time of year do you prefer?



Festival Theme

The Hub team feels that having a theme worked really well, and was very successful for supporting artistic programming and marketing. Partners also responded very positively to this year's theme, and to the concept of having a theme - saying it helped to bring the festival together and helped them to focus their activities. One or two were uncertain as to how well the theme was communicated to audiences.

“The theme is what made it feel like you were part of one big community, all working towards one common goal regardless of backgrounds or beliefs.”



Suggestions for future themes include:

- Greenery/the earth/sustainability.
- Autumn Equinox (when the day and night are same length, in between the Winter and Summer Solstice).
- Humanity, humanness, moral compass.
- We are all for fantasy creatures as a theme, the kids have loads of ideas around this!
- Themes are good as long as they are not too restrictive. Encourage creativity.
- Something that connects us and art to nature and heritage.
- Theatre (props, costume, scenery, music).
- Weather and the natural world.
- Mythology (local and world).
- Colour (how we make them, natural and chemical. What they mean, how they combine).
- Specific focus on the river - life-cycle.
- Building, growing, moving forward. Looking to the skies.
- Water, flow & rhythms.

Other suggestions from the public

- More local business stalls.
- More food stalls.
- More seating and dedicated crowd viewing areas.
- Provide public opportunity to join the parade.
- More / easier to find car parking.
- More use of the River Slea (sadness expressed at cancellation of Slea Paddlers due to low water levels in River Slea).
- Consider evening illuminated programme.
- Provide recycle bins for rubbish.
- More town centre signage.
- Promote further in surrounding villages and towns.



Sponsorship recommendations

- Earlier promotion of sponsorship opportunities.
- Opportunity for sponsors to appear in more of the printed materials (banners, programmes).
- Cultivate special/unique projects, acts or zones sponsorship.
- Better engagement with local businesses and involvement hosting events/workshops.

Recommendations to increase the Economic Impact of RiverLight

- Increase the overall size of the audience - as the town centre has in theory no limit to its capacity.
- Increase non-local audience - this could be done through attracting acts or activities with a regional national following.
- Increase marketing along key transport corridors.
- Look at taking more activities into the evening, this has the potential to increase overnight stays.
- Look at approaches to increase average levels of expenditure at the event which could be done in partnership with local businesses or by incorporating ticketed events.
- Look to get TV news / mainstream media coverage of RiverLight in the lead up to the event.



Images by Tom Martin, Scott Salt,
Louise Hadden, Evie Smith and Faye Parker
Illustrations by Jasmine Daisy Forbes





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