

# FIRST LIGHT FESTIVAL

Festival Report 2024



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND**



# WELCOME

First Light Festival 2024 was our second festival as part of Arts Council England's National Portfolio - with more partnerships than ever and audiences of 40,000 over the weekend - we think it was the best yet!

The weekend opened with our Resonance! Parade, led by three giant puppets, two of them created this year with Norwich Puppet Theatre. The culmination of months of creative work in schools and the community, the parade saw school children, families and community groups promenade from East Point Pavilion down to the festival site on the beach, with the Marina Theatre Samba Band, kazoos and instrumentalists making a lot of joyous noise to herald the opening of the festival.

Following the success of last year's festival timings we embedded the model - with a noon start on Saturday, finishing on the beach at 9.30pm followed by a range of Sundown Events at dusk in venues around Lowestoft, and with Sunday's programme starting at 10am and finishing at 4pm. Our unique dawn celebration saw hundreds of people giving sun salutations to the first light, an atmospheric premiere of new musical arrangements for viola and conch shell, a Balearic breakfast DJ set and a fish feast. This incredibly special part of the festival continues to evolve and grow.

First Light Festival has four music stages covering a range of genres with first class musicians from down the road and around the world. The New Dawn stage and our PlayBreak programme is a strand of the festival which supports record numbers of emerging Lowestoft and East Anglian musicians performing across the weekend, many for the first time.

We moved and expanded our Planet Positive zone onto the beach, strengthened our relationship with the renewable and power sector in the region with the second Power Positive zone and a bigger and better Everyone Active zone providing fitness and sports challenges to audiences of all ages. With over 220 free events and activities our audiences were engaged and enthralled, with yoga and wellbeing, sport, science, author talks, creative workshops and more. Sculpture on the beach with Laurence Edwards' Walking Men proved an enormous draw from the moment they were installed - and being able to keep them on the beach throughout the summer drew visitors in their thousands.

It is impossible to cover everything in one report, there is so much to see and do over the midsummer weekend, we hope this report gives you a taste of this unique festival.



Neptune, Sol, and community groups  
in our festival parade - *Adam Barnes*

# OVERVIEW

A snapshot of 2024's festival in numbers...

- 40,000+ people attended
- 222 events were delivered across the weekend
- 497 hours worked over the festival week
- Over 30% of our volunteers are under 24 with 37% returning from previous years
- 273 freelance opportunities were created.
- 581 performers and artists were part of the festival
- 16 community groups took part in lead-in activity and festival performance
- 22 schools took part in lead-in activity and festival performance
- 70 local businesses traded at the festival
- 54 organisations supported the festival
- 650m trackway was laid to make the festival site more accessible
- 3 BSL interpreters worked at the festival, with 18 events BSL interpreted including opening and closing events on the main stage



Audiences watch on at the Community Catwalk -  
*Mykola Romanovsky*



Planet Positive - *Gavin Butler*



Festival-goers on the beach - *Adam Barnes*



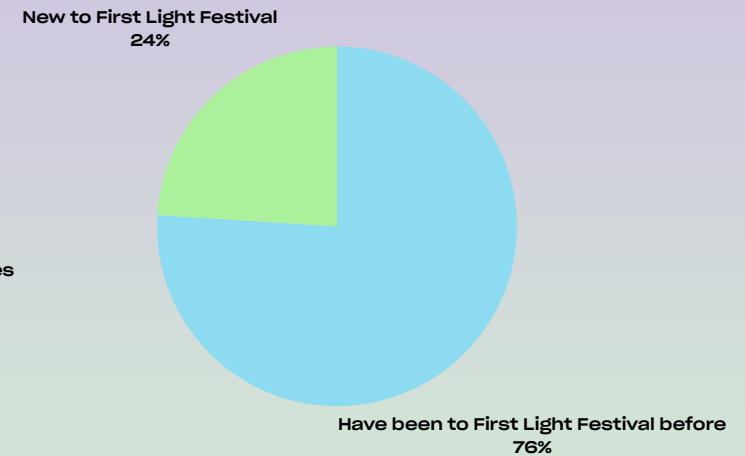
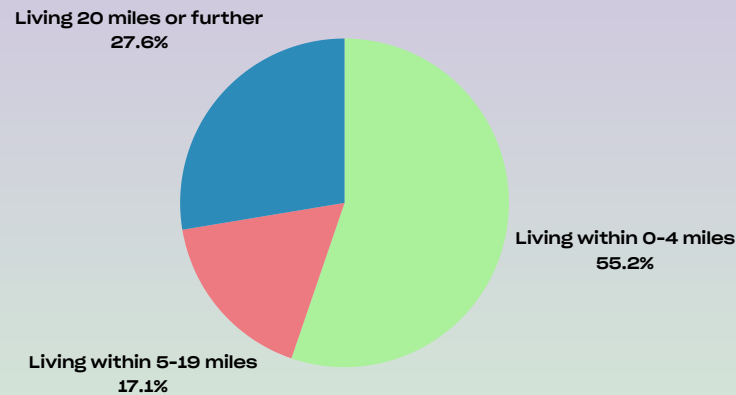
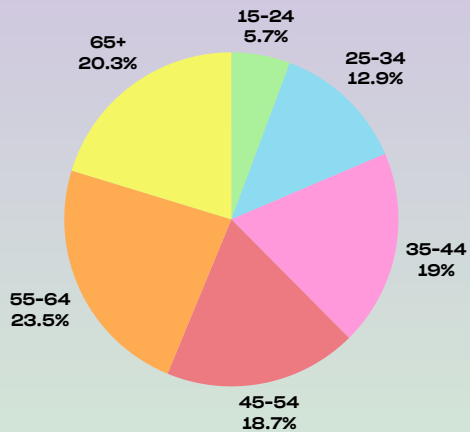
Festival-goers on the beach - *Mykola Romanovsky*

# AUDIENCES

We welcomed our biggest, most diverse crowd yet, whilst reaching our goal to increase the share of our local Lowestoft audience.

**40k** People attended the festival over the weekend

**97%** Audiences agreed that First Light Festival was good for the image & profile of Lowestoft



## MEET OUR AUDIENCE

We worked with evaluator Audience Agency to survey 829 festival goers. Here are our top 3 audience demographics, as per their Audience Spectrum tool.

**22% Up Our Street**  
Conservative and mature households who have a love of the traditional. Nationally, has **lower engagement** in the arts.

**17% Trips and Treats**  
Suburban households, often with children, whose cultural activities usually are part of a day out or treat. Nationally, has **medium engagement** in the arts.

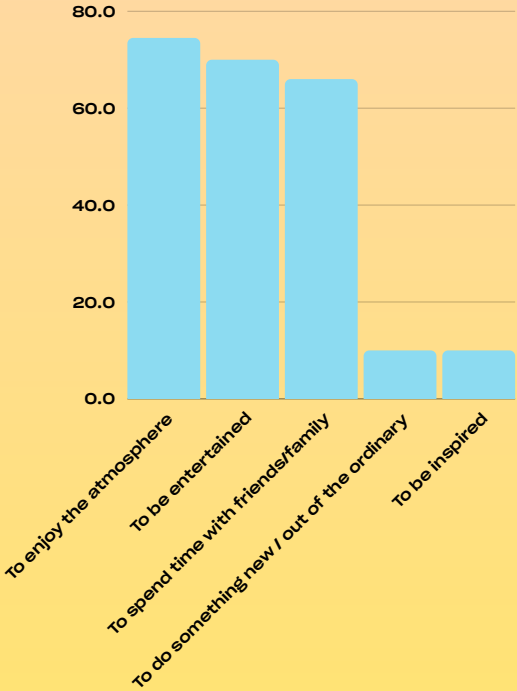
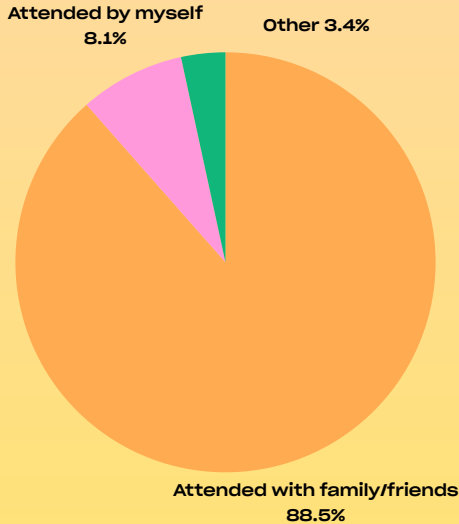
**16% Home & Heritage**  
Reasonably comfortably off households, occasional audiences for popular arts, museums and heritage. Nationally, has **medium engagement** in the arts.

# MEET OUR AUDIENCE

- 43% of audiences surveyed said they planned their trip to Lowestoft particularly to attend First Light Festival, an increase of 37% on respondents in 2023. This shows the draw of the event for cultural tourists in the region.
- Approximately two thirds of respondents were within a 15 minutes' drive time. 18% of respondents had a drive time of over 60 minutes, compared to 8% in 2023, demonstrating that a larger number of our audience travelled from further afield to attend the festival.

## Who they attended with...

## Why they came...



# FEEDBACK



‘They made ramps and put solid floor on it, and I could go all over!’ **Audience Member**

‘I loved the event and all it stands for. Gives me hope for Britain!’  
**Mary, Audience Member**

‘I don’t think it could have gone any better and the value to the town and surrounding areas is wonderful’. **Jeremy, Local Business Director**

‘First Light feels so different; so full of goodwill and vitality. Long may it continue!’  
**Steve Pretty, Artist in Residence**

What an enjoyable and successful weekend I had at First Light. The organisation and communication between the organisers and myself were second to none. An enjoyable event from start to finish, hopefully see you all next year’ **Kevin Hollick, Trader**



‘What a weekend for our home town! First Light Festival made a fabulous return this year, with thousands of people flocking back to our stunning beach. The queues at local vendors were endless, and the town felt vibrant once again...’ **Dominique, Audience Member**

‘A big boost for Lowestoft and nice to see positive posts about the town’ **Audience Member**

‘Absolutely brilliant weekend! I’ve never seen our beach so full and so many happy people! **Lisa, Audience Member**

‘Fantastic weekend, well done to all involved. Lowestoft is a great place to visit and live in.’ **Sue, Audience Member**

# CULTURAL TOURISM + VISITOR ECONOMY

First Light has a considerable economic impact during the festival weekend and makes a lasting contribution to the region's tourism economy.

## £38

Average spend per head at the festival site (up £8 on 2023)

## £28

Average spend per head in Lowestoft town (up £8 on 2023)

## £152

Average spend on Air BnBs in Lowestoft on the Festival weekend

## 70

Independent food stalls, local makers & charity pitches

## 100%

Camping & Campervans pitches sold

## 39%

Increase in Air BNB bookings in Lowestoft on the Festival weekend

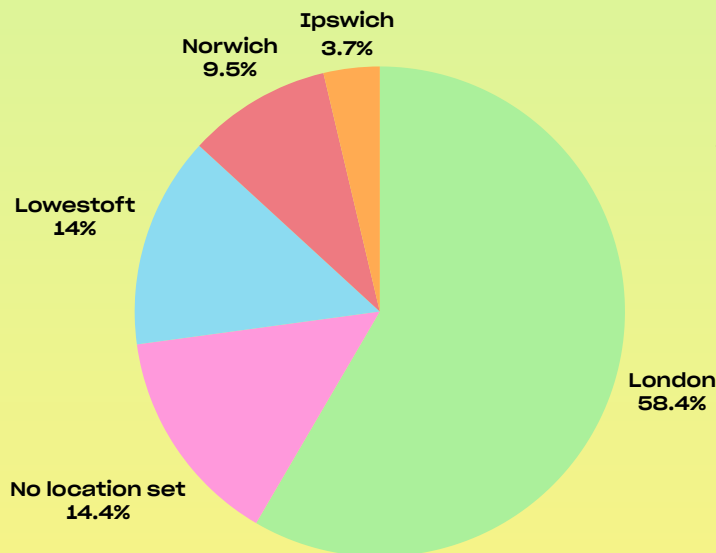
## £100k+

Income from sponsors, traders, ticket sales and merchandise.



Laurence Edwards' Walking Men at dawn - Adam Barnes

### Location of website users



## 284K

Searches of First Light Festival this year to date

## 41,376k

Clicks to the website this year to date

## 17%

Increase in searches of 'Lowestoft' on The Suffolk Coast website.

# OUTREACH

Our community arts projects run year-round at our East Point Pavilion hub, nurturing creativity in Lowestoft and beyond with much of the work culminating at First Light Festival. Partnerships with Access to Music, Britten Pears Arts and this year Latitude provide exceptional development opportunities.

## NEW DAWN



Finn Doherty at New Dawn - *Adam Barnes*

**New Dawn** showcases young East Anglian musicians giving many of them their first opportunity to perform in a professional festival setting. Our annual open callout saw 82 acts aged 14- 26 apply, of which 11 were chosen by a panel of music industry experts to perform on one of the main stages at the festival. A further 19 played in East Point Pavilion. Finn Doherty was selected as our 2024 New Dawn headliner, playing a second prime time slot on our main Sunlight Stage.

New Dawn continues to grow as a year-round platform for career and performance opportunities for young creatives and as well as inclusion in regional venues and broadcast opportunities, this year included a Creative Retreat with Britten Pears Arts and a performance at Latitude festival.

## PLAY BREAK



Cam T at on the Sunrise Stage - *Adam Barnes*

**Playbreak** Playbreak, now in its second year, spotlights local musical talent at the festival. 90 musicians who live, work or gig regularly in Lowestoft and its locality applied to play, with 8 acts selected. Cam T was chosen by our expert panel to headline the main stage on Sunday afternoon and was also give a performance slot at Latitude festival.

## NOON TO MOON



Noon to Moon - *Adam Barnes*

**Noon to Moon** saw 34 prominent regional artists, 5 secondary schools and 6 community groups creating sculptures inspired by the festival theme of Cardinal Points and Weather Vanes. These works were hung across East Point Pavilion and Kensington Gardens over the weekend and beyond.



# NEW DAWN & PLAY BREAK



Magnolia at New Dawn - *Adam Barnes*



Zamani Fitri at New Dawn - *Adam Barnes*



Queen Dogs - *Adam Barnes*

'He had an amazing time and was very proud to be involved. What an incredible launch pad for his work. He also watched and learned from the many other acts and plans to spend the summer writing new songs. He has lots of new ideas inspired by the other amazing artists that we came across over the weekend. His school friends and family were also super proud of him'. **Parent of New Dawn Artist**

First light helped me network with other people within the industry and gained more opportunities over the summer'. **Lydia Cass - New Dawn Artist**

'First Light offered me a great platform to showcase my music to a wider audience, too, as BBC Introducing recording and playing my set on air helped me to gain more exposure across the county'. **Lottie Gray - New Dawn Artist**

'Performing at the festival using sign language is making music inclusive for all, and so that people can view the same as what everyone else can view'. **Jessica Rees - New Dawn Artist**

'First Light and the New Dawn project has been a great opportunity to hone in on my performance skills. Both helped me find my confidence on stage and feeling appreciated and seen in a hugely competitive industry'. **Maciej - New Dawn Artist**

# CASE STUDY:

## Charity Super.MKT and Community Catwalk

Charity shops are the biggest circular, sustainable retailer on the British high street, doing impactful things with their profits. Charity Super.Mkt the brainchild of Hemingwaydesign and TRAIID opens stores all over the country, inviting charities to work together to sell their best curated stock items to a discerning crowd.

Our first, First Light Charity Supermarket welcomed four regional charities to the Planet Positive zone – the first Charity Super.Mkt ever on the beach! Emmaus Suffolk, Haven Hospices, St Elizabeth Hospice, Families Together Suffolk took part, with retail stands in a marquee. They were joined by Norwich University of the Arts MA Textiles students who created 12 catwalk ‘looks’ for the runway, each day using donated rag bags from the charities. The catwalk was a joyous celebration of sustainable Lowestoft style with 20 diverse members of our community strutting their stuff each day, including a past and the current Mayor of Lowestoft!





‘Inspirational to see unwanted clothes and fabric transformed into an explosion of colour, texture and innovation’. **Audience Member**

‘...loved the crocheted ball gown. The models were certainly enthusiastic and took their roles seriously. Great job charity super.mkt” **Audience Member**



‘I would never have had the guts to do something like this before, thank you so much for including me!’. **Catwalk Model**



‘We had not been part of an event like this before, so had no idea what to expect, but we were blown away by the vibe, organisation, just everything’.

**Emmaus Suffolk**

‘It was very empowering for my two MA students who took part, as well as our community models - who entered into the spirit of it brilliantly’.

**Kevin Freeman, Director of Fashion and Textiles,  
Norwich University of the Arts**



The Walking Men - *Mykola Romanovsky*

# ENVIRONMENTAL

**IMPACT** We take our position on the beach seriously and celebrated our beautiful location with our most environmentally friendly festival yet.

## TRAVEL

Most of the people we surveyed were local to the festival site, with 93% from the East of England region – 62% lived within 15 minutes drive time of the Festival, and 58% of respondents lived within 0–4 miles. 37% of our audiences came on foot, and over 15% came by train, bus or bike. Our travel partner Great Anglia provided an extra late night train which saw a passenger increase of 24% on the previous year.

## WASTE

We welcomed the waste team at East Suffolk Council onto the beach with their Mini MRF (Material Recycling Facility, pron MURF). A fundamental component in household and commercial waste recycling it helped festival goers understand waste management in their region.

## POWER

This year we are excited to report that we used no diesel for the generators against 1732L in 2023. We created 81.4kWh of solar power, over 25% more than we produced last year, and we used all of it to power the marquees on the beach. And we have ambitious plans for 2025.



Planet Positive - *Kate Ellis*

## PHOENIX, DODO, BUTTERFLY

This unique show blends searing drama and insightful debate, through sharing three vividly imagined versions of our future, inviting audiences to explore and discuss the climate crisis in close-up.

## PRINTING

The paper stocks used for our leaflets, posters and brochures were made from recycled materials and vegetable inks. For the majority of our printing, we chose to 'carbon offset', with our contributions going to Woodland UK.



Phoenix, Dodo, Butterfly - *Kate Ellis*

# MARKETING & DIGITAL

## SOCIAL MEDIA & EMAIL

**52%**

Of festival-goers found out about the Festival through Facebook

**27%**

Increase in Instagram following from 2023

**18%**

Increase in Facebook following from 2023

**50%**

Average email open rate

## DIGITAL ADS CAMPAIGN

**139K**

Number of times First Light appeared in Google searches

**35%**

More searches for First Light Festival than in 2023

**34k**

Clicks to the website from organic searches

**13,364**

Clicks to the website from Digital Ads Campaigns

## PRINT & MERCHANDISE

**20,000**

Festival programmes distributed across East Anglia

**17**

Local & regional sponsors showcased in programme

# PARTNERSHIPS

We work in partnership with many valued organisations to help deliver the festival, to produce stimulating lead-in projects and community activities, inspirational performances and thought-provoking presentations and a range of festival zones. Also to help keep the festival safe and to make it as accessible as possible for everyone.

For residencies and opportunities for young musicians, for venue spaces for the Moonlit Soundscape programme, and looking after our artistes.

All these partners contributed in so many ways for First Light Festival – thank you!



Messums Art Hub - *Mykola Romanovsky*



Suffolk Wildlife Trust - *Mykola Romanovsky*



Cefas - *Mykola Romanovsky*

Access Sport, Access to Music, Brighten the Corners, BBC Introducing, Britten Pears Arts, CEFAS, Chaplaincy Collective, Charity Super.Mkt, DanceEast, East Coast College, East Suffolk Council Communities Team, East Suffolk Services, Easterly Artists, Everyone Active, Friends of Kensington Gardens, High Tide, IBTC, Lowestoft Cultural Education Partnership, Lowestoft Mens Shed, Lowestoft Town Council, Lowestoft Town Football Club, Lowestoft Vision, Marina Theatre, Messums East, Moss & Co, Move It Right, National Centre for Writing, Natural History Museum, National Literacy Trust, Norwich University of the Arts, Norwich Astronomical Society, St Peter & St John Church, Scenic Projects, The Seagull Theatre, Smith & Pinching, Suffolk Artlink, Suffolk Kite Flyers, Suffolk Libraries, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, University of East Anglia.

# PRESS

100+ press features, including print & Online listings in The Times, The Guardian and The Observer, plus 3 television features, 5 radio interviews and 35 articles in local newspapers.



10 Unique Places in the UK to savour the summer solstice - Observer Magazine

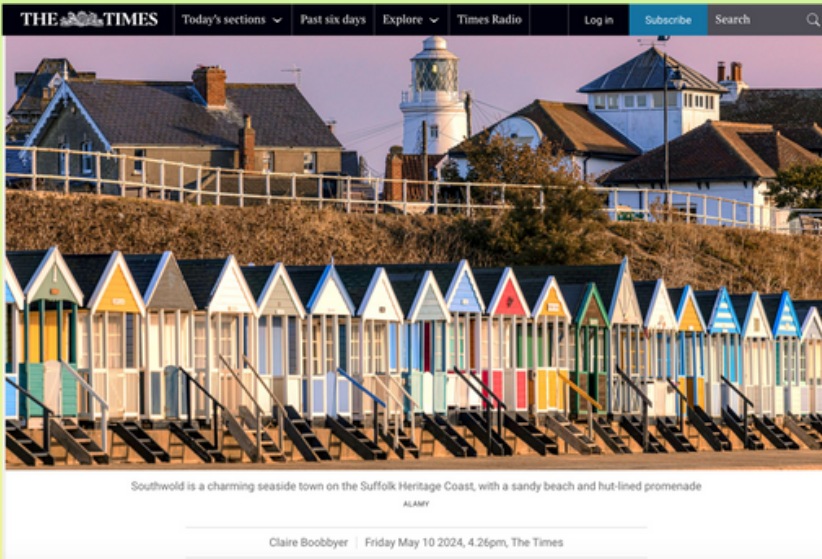


Best places to celebrate the summer solstice - The Observer Travel



Suffolk is not so bold in championing its attractions. Most visitors know it's home to 'Constable Country', that dream-like land of green grass and water meadows on the Essex border where the River Stour slinks through, that so inspired painter John Constable. The marshes and meadows of the Waveney Valley at the northern border of the county are equally bucolic.

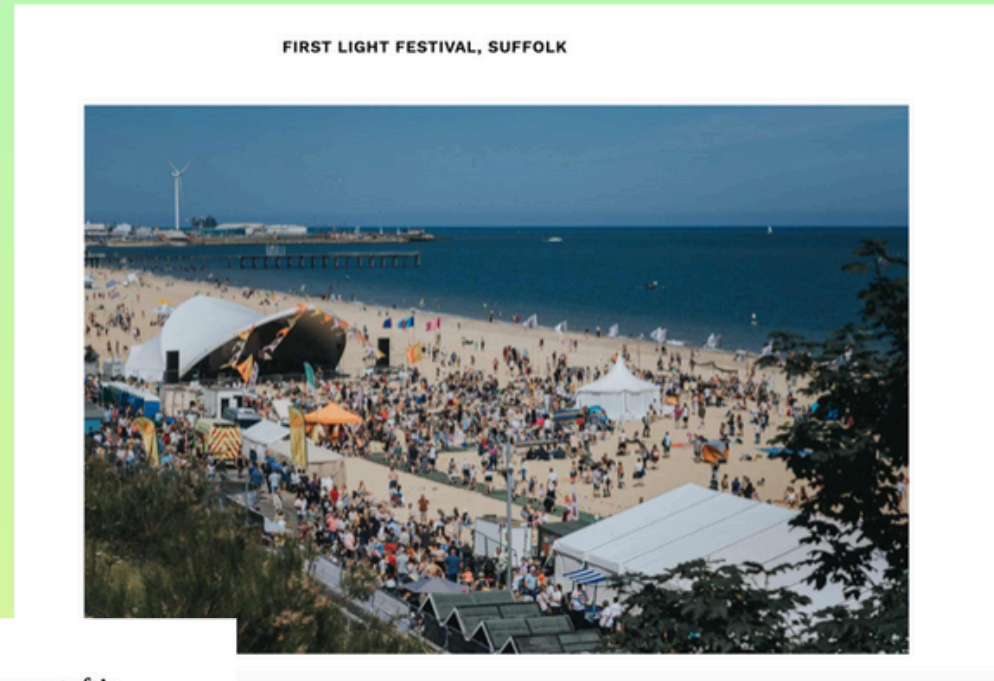
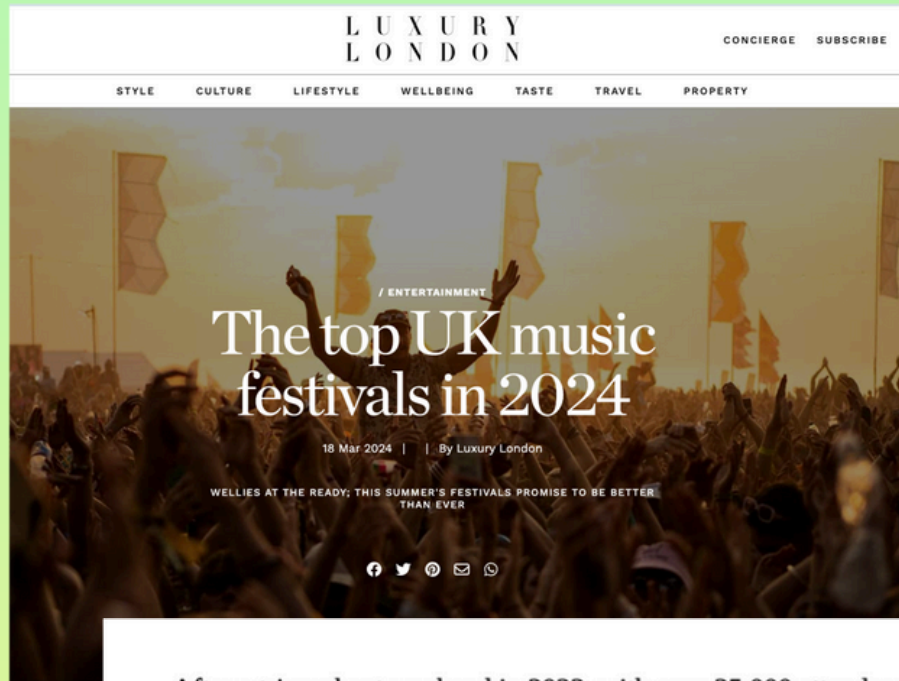
Suffolk is ablaze with festivals: horse racing at Newmarket, music at the renowned Aldeburgh Festival, the much-loved Aldeburgh Food & Drink Festival, longstanding Latitude and the relatively new First Light, the only free festival held on a beach in the UK.



Lowestoft's First Light Festival. The only free [UK](#) festival held on a beach, it celebrates the arts, crafts and science across the June solstice weekend. Exciting international arts festival SPILL livens up multiple venues in Ipswich every autumn. At beautiful Blythburgh church, monthly Evensong is sublime. Live music at the remote community-owned pub The Locks Inn at Geldeston with the silky River Waveney as a summer backdrop is pretty unforgettable as is any performance by Suffolk-based genius wordsmith, poet Luke Wright.

Best places to celebrate the summer solstice  
- The Observer Travel





After a triumphant weekend in 2023, with over 35,000 attendees, Lowestoft's free summer solstice celebration is gearing up to return for 2024. Inspired by Lowestoft's location as the most easterly point in the UK, and therefore the first to receive sunlight, the festival programme has been curated to celebrate the cycles of the sun, with events taking place from sunrise to sundown.

As First Light Festival is the UK's only free beach festival, you can expect a weekend of **yoga**, fresh food, spoken word performances and, of course, music. Showcasing local and emerging talent, and a diverse lineup of East Anglia's foremost DJs, expect performances from award-winning DJ Colleen 'Cosmo' Murphy while over at the comedy and spoken word stages, tune in to comedian Shaparak Khorsandi and spoken word artist Hollie McNish.

22-23 June 2024, South Beach Lowestoft, Suffolk, visit [firstlightlowestoft.com](https://www.firstlightlowestoft.com)

Top UK music festivals in 2024 – Luxury London

# PRESS

## First Light Festival 2024 | Lowestoft | 22-23 June | FREE

Hi Wayne, thanks for taking the time to chat with us. Perhaps you could start by telling us the inspiration behind the **First Light Festival**?

It came out of a **Vision for The Lowestoft seafront** that HemingwayDesign were doing in 2016/2017. We knew that this somewhat forgotten, but wonderful seafront and beach deserved recognition.

What response have you had from the local community in Lowestoft and beyond?

It very quickly became the most loved event in the town and arguably the region. The tens of thousands that attend and the hundred's that play a role are testament to this. Last year we saw record attendance of over 40,000 people which was brilliant to see.



Wayne Hemingway. Image: withlove.studio

First Light is a great, free festival which takes place around the summer solstice every year on Lowestoft Beach. The outdoor festivities on the beach are free and un-ticketed, while a parallel programme of **ticketed events** take place from dusk in nearby venues (including the fab East Point Pavilion). Last year we pitched the To Do List tent in the wild camping area (**requires a reservation**) and rose with the sun on the Sunday morning for a spectacular **dawn programme!**



oft | 22-23 June |

Interview with Wayne Hemingway – To Do List

## INTERVIEW: DESIGNER WAYNE HEMINGWAY ON LOWESTOFT'S FIRST LIGHT FESTIVAL

14/06/2024 · by Stuart Wilson · in interview, festivals

We caught up with the co-founder of First Light Festival **Wayne Hemingway** – designer and placemaker – to talk about rejuvenating Lowestoft, 2024 festival highlights, plans for the summer, and Things To Do in London!

BBC For you Home News Sport Weather iPlayer Sounds

## NEWS

Home Election 2024 InDepth Israel-Gaza war Cost of Living War in Ukraine Climate UK World Business

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### First Light Festival in Lowestoft focuses on female-led line-up

28 April



FIRST LIGHT FESTIVAL

The First Light Festival started in 2019 and attracted 30,000 people over 24 hours

First Light Festival in Lowestoft focuses on female-led line up – BBC Suffolk

**A free arts festival which celebrates the summer solstice in the UK's most easterly town is focussing on female talent this year, it has announced.**

The First Light Festival returns to Lowestoft in Suffolk on 22 and 23 June with outdoor events centred around the south beach and gardens.

It includes a female-led line-up of comedy and poetry, and "formidable" women DJs in the dunes.

Chief executive Genevieve Christie said it encouraged all to get involved.

The theme of north, south, east and west will be threaded through the programme, with "a strong international line-up with a very cosmopolitan flavour", the organisers added.

The festival features local and emerging talent as well as big-name acts, some of which appear at ticketed events, including comedian Shaparak Khorsandi at Seagull Theatre.

A dance tent, deep sea-themed silent disco, daybreak yoga, "planet positive" workshops and street food all feature, with events kicking off with a parade on Saturday morning.

One of the upcoming acts appearing over the weekend has been given the opportunity to also perform at Latitude Festival in July, in the first collaboration between the two Suffolk events.

"We're very excited to be back on Lowestoft's South Beach this June, to celebrate the midsummer with another packed programme inspired by our unique most-easterly location," said Ms Christie.

"We look forward to welcoming everyone to this year's festival and encourage you all to get involved as a volunteer or by taking part in our upcoming community projects."

Last year, its founder, designer Wayne Hemingway, said it was important to hold an arts festival in a town like Lowestoft "that has had a bad rap and difficult times".

"We're very excited to be back on Lowestoft's South Beach this June, to celebrate the midsummer with another packed programme inspired by our unique most-easterly location," said Ms Christie.

"We look forward to welcoming everyone to this year's festival and encourage you all to get involved as a volunteer or by taking part in our upcoming community projects."

Last year, its founder, designer Wayne Hemingway, said it was important to hold an arts festival in a town like Lowestoft "that has had a bad rap and difficult times".

"Culture can mean so much, it can bring hope and creates jobs, and I'm just proud," he added.



Opening Parade - *Mykola Romanovsky*



House of the Rising Sun - *Adam Barnes*



Compere Angelle Joseph - *Adam Barnes*



Comedy 4 Kids - *Mykola Romanovsky*



Moon Dance - *Gavin Butler*



Stormy clouds over the beach - *Gavin Butler*

# GALLERY



Klezmerized on The Gardens Stage - *Adam Barnes*



Festival-goers on the beach - *Adam Barnes*



Sign-along with Jessica - *Adam Barnes*



Hackney Colliery Band - *Adam Barnes*



Dance East - *Mykola Romanovsky*



DJs in the Dunes - *Mykola Romanovsky*



Festival-goers on the beach - *Adam Barnes*



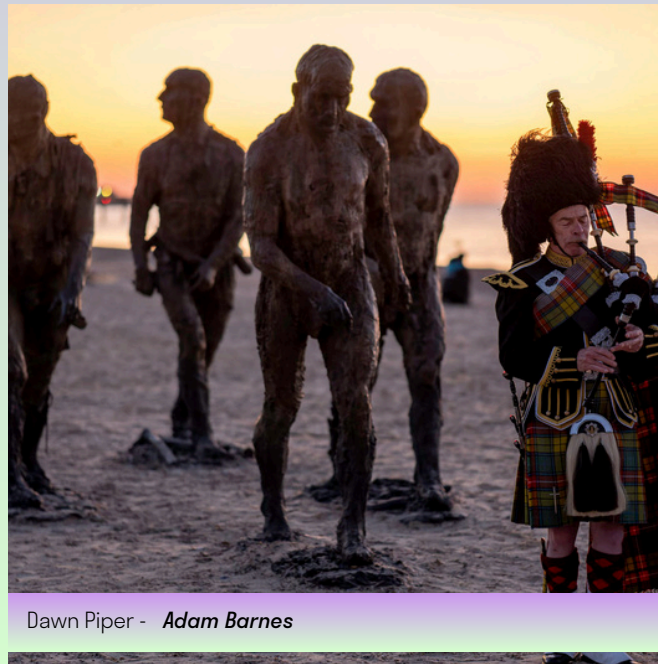
Blue seas at First Light - *Gavin Butler*



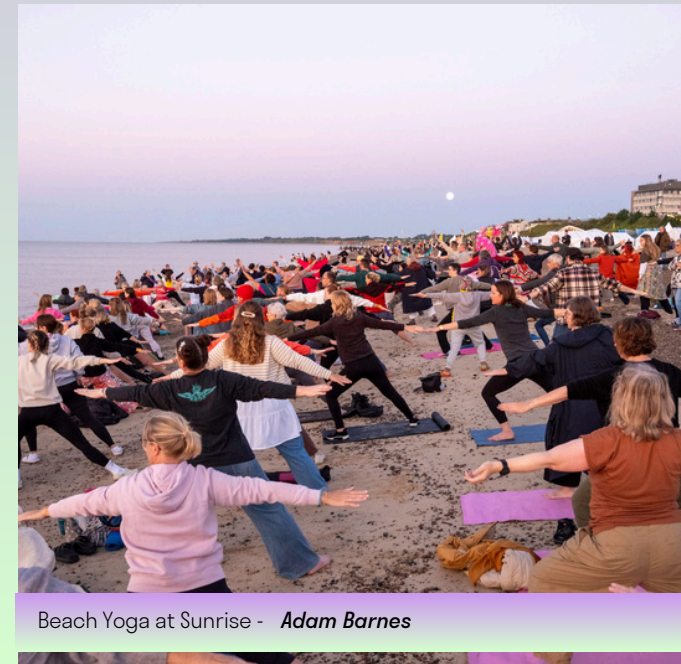
Colleen 'Cosmo' Murphy - *Gavin Butler*



Festival-Goers - *Mykola Romanovsky*



Dawn Piper - *Adam Barnes*



Beach Yoga at Sunrise - *Adam Barnes*

# KEEP IN TOUCH



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DJs in the Dunes - *Mykola Romanovsky*



Festival-goers - *Mykola Romanovsky*



The Festival from above - *Mykola Romanovsky*