

IDEAS
TEST



LUTON

LIGHTS

FEBRUARY 2026



 **Funded by
UK Government**

**CREATIVE
AND PEOPLE
PLACES**


ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND
LOTTERY FUNDED

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WHAT WAS LUTON LIGHTS 2026?

- **The Winter Glow:** A community light festival that transformed the streets of Luton, Chatham, in the heart of February
- **The Three-Year Journey:** This was our third edition, evolving from a small trial into a landmark event for the neighbourhood, supported by UK SPF funding
- **The "Glowing" Road:** In the lead-up, residents turned Luton Road into a public gallery by hosting handcrafted artworks in their windows, creating a literal trail of light
- **Grassroots Creativity:** Every piece was homegrown, co-created by neighbours in open community workshops and by students at Luton Primary School
- **Walking Through History:** We didn't just look at art- we lived it! Guided walks led by a local actor fused historical storytelling with contemporary light installations.





WHY WE DID IT

- **Building Trust-** Strengthening our roots in the community and deepening the bond with our local partners.
- **Celebrating Identity-** Putting a spotlight on Luton's unique culture and rich local history.
- **Safe & Vibrant Streets-** Using light to boost safety and environmental awareness while making the area feel alive.
- **Local Impact-** Driving footfall to our brilliant local shops and businesses.
- **Well-being & Belonging-** Creating a space where everyone felt they belonged.
- **Artist Opportunities-** Creating a platform for both amateur and professional local artists to get paid for their craft.

A THEME CHOSEN BY THE COMMUNITY



Community-Led

For the first time, we stepped back and let the community lead. Through social media and polls, the public voted to decide the heart of the 2026 festival

The Winner - "Circus"

We were thrilled with this choice. It was playful, high-energy, and offered massive creative potential for our light installations.

Deep Roots

Beyond the fun, we tapped into history. Medway has a storied past as a home for famous circus figures, a heritage we were proud to celebrate.

Authentic Impact

Because the theme was rooted in Medway's own history, it resonated more than any idea we could have picked ourselves.

The Producer's Take- This was a turning point. Empowering residents to lead made the project feel more authentic and significantly increased the local impact.

WHO DID WE WORK WITH?

Artists:

Xtina Lamb
Hannah Whittaker
Medway PlayLab CIC
Nic Lamont
Matt Barnard
Ellen James
The New York Brass Band
Tyler Austin
Piers Millhill

Partners:

Invicta Social Club
Spotlites Theatre
Luton Library
Luton Primary School
Bowen Motorbike Shop

Plus our wonderful volunteers!



STATS

282 attended the finale event

90 students engaged in workshops activity

33 community members took part in open workshops

27 Residents along Luton Road and 3 businesses hosted artworks

9 Medway based artists were employed

8 Artists from outside Kent worked with us



MOMENTS THAT MADE IT

Lordswood & Walderslade Community Group · 11h ·

Wise people in my [phone.me](#) and my daughters travel down Luton road twice a day and have noticed neon signs in some of the windows saying different sayings, does anyone know what they are for as we are now very invested in finding out. 😂 we have tried Google but no luck unfortunately any ideas ????

11 likes 18 comments

Posts 11h

<https://ideatest.org.uk/projects/current-projects/luton-lights-2026/>

IDEATEST.ORG.UK
LUTON LIGHTS 2026 - Ideatest

Reply 3 likes

· 11h

I see this to and wanted to know what it was about x

Reply 2 likes

A New Record for Luton Road

Our "Window Gallery" grew bigger than ever. We had more residents than any previous year volunteering their homes to host artworks, proving that the appetite for local pride is only growing.

The Bus Test

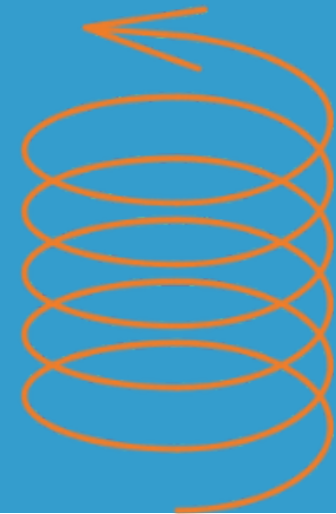
We knew we'd hit the mark when passengers on the 164 and 177 buses were spotting the glow through the windows and heading straight to social media to ask, "What's happening on Luton Road?"

Stopping Traffic

The project didn't just reach those who walked through it; it piqued the curiosity of commuters and passers-by, sparking a digital conversation and putting Luton on the map for the right reasons.

A February Spectacle

We ended the festival with Matt the Juggler and his fire performance. It was a genuine spectacle that brought everyone together and provided some much-needed warmth against the February chill.



KEEPING IT REAL (CHALLENGES)

As an action learning organisation, we aren't afraid to talk about our challenges. We believe the best way to grow is to be open about what we're up against, turning every hurdle into a shared lesson that helps us and our community improve for the next time.

The "No-Show" Factor

While our guided walks were fully booked, we faced the frustration of ticket-holders not turning up on the night. It's a common challenge for free community events, but it meant we had to manage the disappointment of those on the waiting list who could have taken those spots.

Hidden Hurdles at Invicta

Setting up the finale at Invicta Social Club sounded simple until we met the ground. A network of water pipes just below the surface meant we couldn't pin the tent into the ground. We had to pivot quickly to find weighted solutions to keep everything secure.

CHALLENGES CONTINUED



The British February

We knew the risks of a winter festival, but the weather really tested us:
The First Walk: A heavy downpour on our very first guided walk meant our actors and audience had to be incredibly resilient to keep the energy up.

The Finale

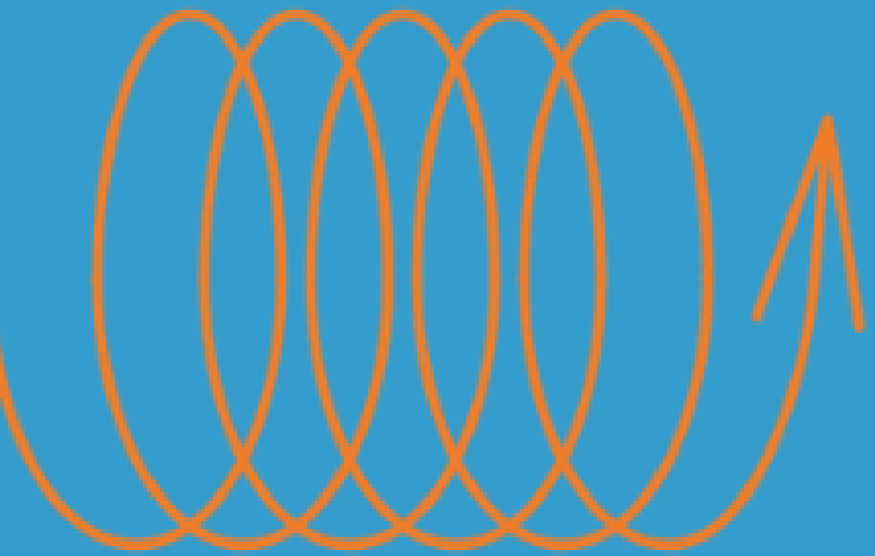
The rain returned for the big finish, making the ground and the slope incredibly slippery.

The Producer's Take

Producing an outdoor event in February is a gamble. You can plan for every technical detail, but you can't plan the weather, you just have to have a brilliant team ready to adapt when the rain starts.



WHAT WE HEARD- THE GOOD STUFF!



“It brings the community together. Definitely keep going with it, it brings everyone together and lifts people’s spirits, especially at this time of year.”

“It’s wonderful to have something so local to where you are, and yeah really good”



“It’s just nice seeing people doing something creative in the community, it’s nice to see”



“It was inspiring to see how much heart and hard work went into making the evening memorable for the whole community. I was genuinely amazed and uplifted. In times that often feel heavy and uncertain, events like this bring back a spark of kindness, connection, and happiness that we all need. You reminded our young people, and many of us adults, too, of the simple joys we sometimes forget to appreciate in this modern, fast-paced world. Thank you for giving our community a moment of warmth, togetherness, and celebration. Your efforts made a real difference and were appreciated.”



THE NOT SO GOOD STUFF

“Great evening, despite the weather. Perhaps the event has outgrown the venue.”

“We came last year and I preferred last year’s to be honest. It was more colourful, there was more entertainment.”

“Quiet space for neurodiverse folk to regulate as can be intense on the senses. Perhaps by the staircase from the carpark?”

“It’s good, but it doesn’t look like there’s as much going on as last year.”





THE PRODUCERS TAKE // HOW TO IMPROVE FOR NEXT YEAR

The British Winter Strategy

We'll be putting in a formal request for drier weather next year!

Lessons from the Slope

Safety first. Our risk assessments will be getting an upgrade to include even more rigorous planning for wet-weather logistics and managing those slippery surfaces. We've learned exactly where the mud likes to settle!

Amping Up the Atmosphere

We want to lean into the sensory experience. Next time, we're looking to incorporate more light-themed music performances to really tie the visual spectacle and the soundscape together.

IMPROVEMENTS CONTINUED

Tackling the No-Show Gap

To make sure no one misses out, we'll be looking at new ways to manage bookings for ticketed events.

The Producer's Goal

Every event is an "Ideas Test." We take the mud and the rain-soaked clipboards from this year and use them to build a smoother, brighter experience for the next one.



WHAT DID WE PROVE?

Luton is a Creative Hub

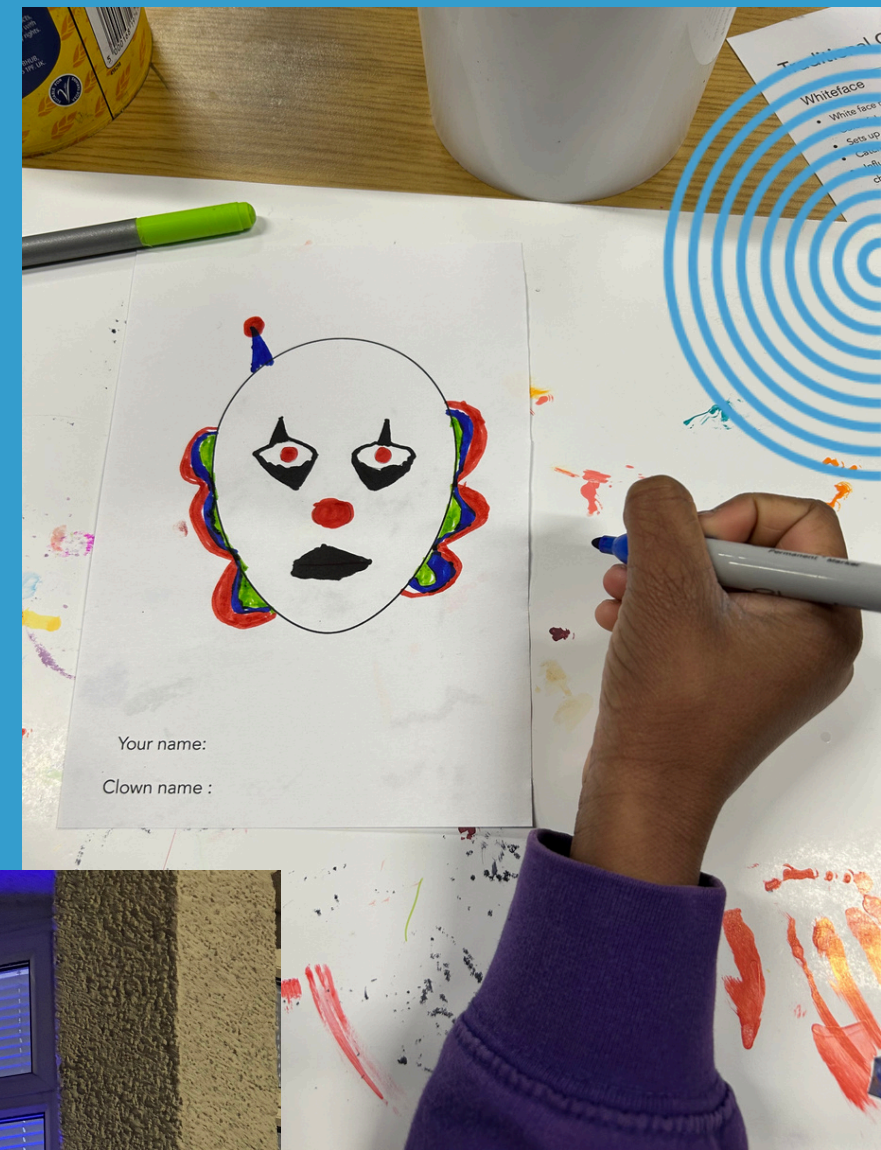
We proved that our residents aren't just spectators, they are creators. From primary school students to neighbours on Luton Road, the high take-up for the window gallery showed a massive appetite for hands-on artistic projects.

The Power of Gathering

The turnout confirmed that people deeply value events that bring the community together. Even in the middle of February, there is a clear desire for shared spaces where neighbours can connect in person.

A Boost for Local Business

We brought new footfall and a fresh audience to the Invicta Social Club. The social club reported an increase in profits of 153.37 % compared to a normal Friday night. By using a local venue as our festival hub, we proved that community arts can drive real interest and support for Chatham's established businesses.



WHAT DID WE PROVE? CONTINUED

A Trusted Partner for Artists

We showed that both amateur and professional artists value collaborating with us. We have built a reputation as a project that supports, commissions, and showcases local talent.

Resilience (and Rain-Proof Fun)

We proved that the people of Luton are tougher than the British weather. Even in a downpour, the community showed up, stayed for the performance, and had fun. A bit of mud didn't dampen the atmosphere.

Luton Lights is a Tradition

With people returning for the third year in a row, we've proved this isn't just a one-off experiment, it is becoming a staple of the local calendar that people look forward to and trust.

MEDWAY'S MYSTIC



MEL
★ THE
MAGNIFICENT

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Looking Ahead to 2027

We are currently applying for funding to bring the festival back in February 2027. We are committed to making this a permanent glow in the Luton calendar.

Deepening our Roots: Our relationship with the residents of Luton Road is the heart of this project. For next year, we are hoping to see even more windows lit up, turning more of the road into a continuous trail of community art.

Bigger, Brighter, Better

We've listened to your feedback. You told us you wanted more, more light installations, more spectacle, and more to explore. We're taking those ideas into our 2027 planning to make the event even more impactful.

Your Voice, Our Vision

The legacy of Luton Lights isn't just about the art we choose, it's about the stories the community wants to tell. We're committed to a festival that is shaped by the people who live here.





WANT TO BE PART OF THE NEXT ONE?

Whether you want to host an artwork in your window, have an idea for an installation, or want to help us out behind the scenes, we'd love to hear from you.

Get in touch:

Amy: amy@ideastest.co.uk

Wayne: wayne@ideastest.co.uk



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