

# FIRST LIGHT FESTIVAL

## FESTIVAL REPORT 2023



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





# WELCOME

As our first festival as part of Arts Council England's National Portfolio and with record audiences of 40,000+, First Light Festival 2023 was a milestone for our organisation. New timings followed the cycles of the sun, introducing Saturday Sundown Events at dusk, and extending Sunday's programme long into the afternoon, with our signature dawn celebration inviting hundreds to see in the new light of day together.

The festival weekend opened with a spectacular Welcome to Lowestoft parade, the culmination of months of creative work in the community. Led by two giant puppets, the parade saw school children, community groups and audiences promenade through the town and down to the beach site in their thousands.

Our Noon to Moon festival theme marked the anniversaries of the floods in 1953 and 2013 by looking at our oceans in a galactic context. This imaginative programme of poetry, installations and community projects invited us to see out beyond the watery horizon, and up to a vast sky of stars.

An eclectic mix of first class music filled the beach and gardens with performers from down the street and across the world, while our New Dawn and PlayBreak open callouts saw record numbers of emerging Lowestoft and East Anglian musicians showcased across the weekend.

Our new Power Positive zone worked with key partners from the renewable energy industry while our refreshed Everyone Active zone provided fitness and sports challenges to audiences of all ages.

Overall, 190+ free events and activities had audiences enthralled, from line dancing to live sculpture modelling; from yoga and meditation to author talks and hands-on scientific research activities.

It's hard to fully capture the spirit of a festival as expansive and unique as First Light, though we hope this report gives an insight into our midsummer celebration.

Front page: Crowds flock to South Beach  
| Mykola Romanovsky

This page: Sol, Lowestoft's Spirit of the Sea  
puppet opens the festival | Adam Barnes

# OVERVIEW

A snapshot of 2023's festival in numbers...

BENEFITS	2022 STATS	2023 STATS
Attendees	35,000+	40,000+
Volunteers	116	150
Artists, Facilitators and Performers Involved	448	613
Art Organisations Involved	19	26
Other Organisations Involved	16	31
Links with Schools & Colleges	22	22
Employed Roles Created	7	8
Freelance Roles Created	153	214
Food & Drink Traders	20	31
Artisan & Charity Traders	31	59
Advanced evening event tickets booked	94%	96%



Audiences fill the First Word tent to see world-renowned poet Linton Kwesi Johnson | Mykola Romanovsky



Luke Witcomb



Mykola Romanovsky



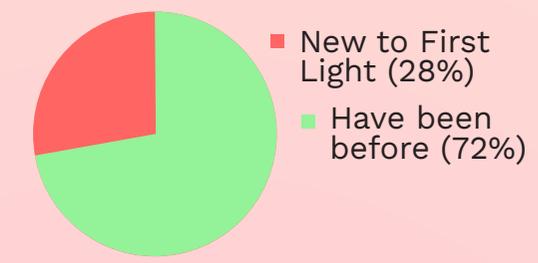
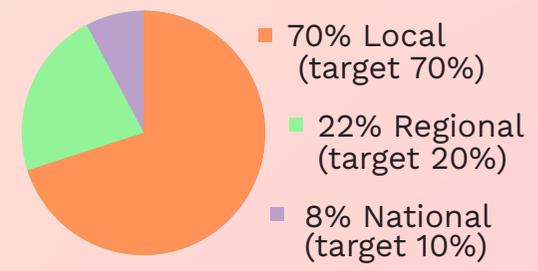
Nick Tipping

# AUDIENCES

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

**40,000+** estimated audiences, **15% increase** on 2022

**93%** audiences said that the quality of the event was either **'very good'** or **'good'**



## MEET OUR AUDIENCE

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

**21% Up Our Street**  
 Conservative and mature households who have a love of the traditional. Nationally, has **lower engagement** in the arts.

**18% Trips & 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.

**14% Home & Heritage**  
 Reasonably comfortably off households, occasional audiences for popular arts, museums and heritage. Nationally, has **medium engagement** in the arts.

# FEEDBACK

‘A unique festival for everyone. My 3rd First Light which brings colour, talent and fun.’ **Audience Member**

‘Fantastic event! Everyone so friendly and efficiently organised!’ **Makers Market Stall Holder**

‘The whole thing was a revelation of how inclusive, diverse, crazy and wonderful an event like that can be - such a spirit about it’ **Speaker, Ideas on the Green**

‘Best volunteering experience we’ve had, and there’s been a few. You’ll be inundated with our colleagues next year’ **Corporate Volunteer**

‘Having lived in Lowestoft all my life it makes me so proud to have it host such a fantastic event.’ **Audience Member**

‘I feel so much more confident as an artist now having performed on the New Dawn Stage... it really made me feel like an important part of the local music community!’ **New Dawn Musician**

‘I thought the flow of people following Farrah would never end - the promenade was packed from pier to pier at one point - it was such a joy to see!’ **Audience Member**

# CULTURAL TOURISM + VISITOR ECONOMY

First Light has a significant economic impact over the festival weekend, as well as making a sustained contribution to the tourism economy of the region.

**£30**

average spend per head at the festival site (up £7 on 2022)

**£20**

average spend per head in Lowestoft town

**£80**

average spend per head on accommodation

**100%**

local hotels and b&bs booked

**69**

independent food stalls, local makers & charity pitches

**1,439**

tickets to add-on events sold

**£47,054**

earned income

**£315,921**

external investment

93% of audiences said the festival was good for Lowestoft's image  
**Audience Agency Survey**

'During the festival there were a lot more customers and our sales went up significantly across the weekend.'  
**Local Cafe Owner**

'We fully support the festival and want it to be a permanent feature on Lowestoft's calendar. Following last year's success of the festival (even with the rain) we are already fully booked for First Light.'  
**Local Hotel Owner, January 2023**



Laurence Edwards' Chthonic Head at dawn | Adam Barnes

'The Festival has caught peoples' imaginations, highlighting the wealth of creative talent right on Suffolk's doorstep. It has become a gateway event, bringing new visitors into the area and goes from strength to strength, taking the visitor economy along with it. This increased visibility showcased attractions, things to do, places to stay, eat and drink in its wake.'

**The Suffolk Coast DMO**

# OUTREACH

Culminating over the festival weekend, our community arts projects run across the year, nurturing creativity in Lowestoft and beyond.

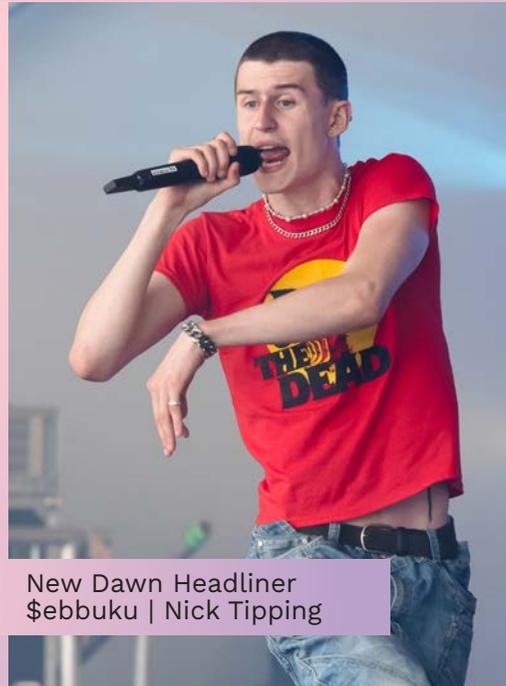
## NEW DAWN

is our annual open callout to young East Anglian musicians to play at First Light. This year we had **71 acts** aged 14-26 apply, of which **32** were chosen to perform across the festival weekend by a panel of music industry experts. Norfolk rapper **\$ebbukku** was selected as this year's New Dawn headliner, playing a prime time slot on our main Sunlight Stage.

Several New Dawn musicians were also invited to **perform with Grammy-nominated Tom McRae** and to join a **New Dawn special on BBC Introducing**.

**5 trainee technical students** assisted our crew over the weekend, providing valuable backstage event experience.

New Dawn will continue to grow as a year-round platform for career and performance opportunities for young creatives.



New Dawn Headliner  
\$ebbukku | Nick Tipping



New Dawn Host, Angelle Joseph  
of BBC Introducing  
| Francesca Bailey

## NOON TO MOON

saw **36 prominent regional artists**, **6 secondary schools** and **4 community groups** creating sculptures inspired by *Tidal Drag*, a new poem by **George Szirtes**. These works were hung in constellations across East Point Pavilion and Kensington Gardens as public planetariums of imaginative new worlds.



High school sculpture  
making session

## PLAYBREAK

is a new programme aimed to spotlight local musical talent at the festival. **49 musicians who live, work or gig regularly in Lowestoft and its surrounds** applied to play, with **8 acts** selected. **The Manifest** were chosen by our expert panel to headline the main stage on Sunday afternoon.



Playbreak artist Lisa  
Redford | Adam Barnes

# CASE STUDY: WELCOME TO LOWESTOFT OPENING PARADE

This year's festival kicked off with a huge parade that celebrated our town, and the animals and people that call this place home. The culmination of months of community workshops and school engagement sessions, the parade was delivered by First Light Festival as part of the nation-wide Hi!Street Fest project with Historic England and Emergency Exit Arts and with support from East Suffolk Council.

The project told the story of two giant puppets: Farrah the a 5-metre high fox, and Sol, Lowestoft's spirit of the sea, which was co-made with the community. Spotlighting the town's two Heritage Actions Zones, the project also included the formation of a new street music Samba band with the Marina Theatre, and a series of banners created by Suffolk Artlink's Brave Artists, a group of artists with learning disabilities. Over 5 months, the project engaged:

**1,500**

schoolchildren &  
140+ staff at in-  
school sessions

**400**

families across  
7 free creative  
workshops

**30**

community groups  
& schools who  
joined in on  
the day

**2,000**

audience members  
watched the  
parade

At the end of Summer, Sol and community representatives from Lowestoft joined participants from other Hi!Street Fest towns in a huge finale in Woolwich, London.

'The parade was absolutely incredible. I couldn't believe how many groups were joining the parade, and the joy it brought to people's faces'

**East Suffolk Council Member**



Community knitters created hundreds of metres of bunting to line the parade route



The project highlighted the independent high streets of Lowestoft



Free community workshops had people of all ages making props in the run up to the event

# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

With themes of flooding and climate impact running through this year's festival programme, we doubled down on our efforts to make the festival as sustainable as possible.



Greater Anglia

Working with our partners at Greater Anglia, train travel to Lowestoft was **up 48%** from 2022's festival weekend & **up 108%** from the previous weekend. **42%** travelled to First Light on foot!



Mykola Romanovsky

**56%** of audiences agreed that the festival **increased their awareness of environmental and climate issues.**



Luke Witcomb

Gideon Mendel's **Drowning World** intervention saw audiences & activist groups engage with the climate emergency through powerful photography.



Mykola Romanovsky

The new **Power Positive** zone introduced the latest renewables technology through hands-on activities.



Mykola Romanovsky

For the first time, **Solar panels** provided green energy for the whole of Kensington Gardens.



Mykola Romanovsky

Our festival brochure was printed with Barnwell Print, Norfolk's first and only **Certified Carbon Balanced Printer.**



Sea Swimmers join in the Welcome to Lowestoft Opening Parade | Luke Witcomb

# MARKETING & DIGITAL

This year's festival saw record numbers reached, with brand recognition significantly raised.

## EMAIL & SOCIAL MEDIA

**62%**

of audiences said they used our Facebook page as a source of information

**40%**

increase in Instagram following from 2022, with 17% Facebook increase

**130%**

increase in email database signups from 2022

**53%**

average email open rate, over double the sector average

## WEBSITE

**10%**

increase in overall use from 2022

**19%**

increase in number of pages visited from 2022

**17%**

increase in organic search from 2022

**14,469**

clicks delivered by digital ads campaign

## PRINT

**20,000**

festival brochures distributed across the East

**17**

local and regional sponsors showcased in brochure ads

**7,500+**

flyers distributed in Lowestoft ahead of event

# PRESS

120+ press features, including 3 Guardian inclusions, print listings in i and Evening Standard, 3 television features, 10 radio interviews and 21 articles in local newspapers.



Guardian: 10 of the best free festivals in the UK, 31.05.23



Beach: First Light festival, Lowestoft, Suffolk

There is two-day party on South beach, Lowestoft, to celebrate the first sunrise of midsummer in the UK's most easterly town. Day one runs from "noon till moon" (12-9.30pm) on the beach, with some "sundown events" around town late into the night. The festival restarts with music and dance at dawn (3.30-5.30am), before day two gets in full swing at 10am (until 4pm). The packed lineup includes comedy from Josie Long, folk music by Eliza



We're already planning for a summer of music

**First Light Festival**  
This mostly free festival celebrating the summer solstice is jam-packed full of events. Expect music, comedy, spoken word and performances, a free communal feast as the sun rises, an accessible programme of talks and activities about climate change, three newly-commissioned works that have been created by schools in the area, a programme of meditation, yoga, breathwork and movement on the seashore, and a special zone for kids that will include storytelling, art and interactive activities. And that really is just the start of the First Light Festival's jam-packed schedule.

Many of First Light Festival's events have come together through collaborations, including with Natural History Museum, Cefas, University of East Anglia, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, and Historic England & Emergency Exit Arts.

**Where?** Lowestoft

**When?** June 17-18

**Who's playing?** Music acts include DJ Paulette, DJ Luke Una, Jembao Groove, Eliza Carthy

**Tickets:** Most events are free, though tickets for some individual events are from £10. Campervan pitches have now sold out, but wild beach camping is still available from £43.42. [firstlightlowestoft.com](http://firstlightlowestoft.com)

Evening Standard: UK festivals 2023

i: 45 free summer festivals



Suffolk Magazine: June 2023



What happens when the chill of our seas turns to a soupy stew? Fragile ecosystems will be destroyed and food sources for wildlife will disappear



Blown-up photographs by the artist Gideon Mendel of people, many of them from the global south, standing amid the floods that had overturned their lives. Photograph: Gideon Mendel

Last weekend, at the very easternmost edge of England, tens of thousands of people of all ages gathered at a beach festival in Lowestoft to celebrate the sea joyously. To dance to trance music and listen to Linton Kwesi Johnson recite his poetry, and to hear marine scientists explain to seven-year-olds exactly why the sea smells the way it does. It was an idyllic scene. From dusk to dawn and back again, everyone was drawn to the vast and glorious element that connects us to the rest of the world.

Guardian: 20.06.23

Guardian: Lowestoft: a faded Suffolk star is reborn, 15.06.23



Suffolk holidays  
Lowestoft: a faded Suffolk star is reborn



First Light Festival will be held in Lowestoft on 17-18 June. Photograph: Mikolaj Romanowski

With new arts venues, pubs and restaurants, fancy beach huts and a restored pier, the UK's most easterly town is getting its mojo back

It's about trying to get people to think about Lowestoft in a different way to look at the beautiful beach as part of the fantastic east coast and not as the end of the line, or a place that has lost industry. It's actually got a lot of potential." Genevieve Christie is passionate about the UK's easternmost town - what she calls "the most



Waitrose Weekend: The Light Fantastic, 15.06.23



# GALLERY



Farrah the Fox, Opening Parade | Mykola Romanovsky



Bollywood Brass Band, Sunlight Stage | Mykola Romanovsky



Street Food, Upper Promenade | Mykola Romanovsky



BSL interpretation, Ideas on the Green | Luke Witcomb



Sunlight Stage Audiences | Mykola Romanovsky



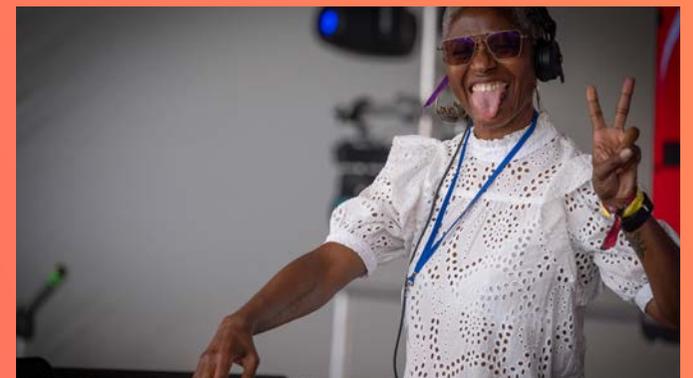
Cefas, Planet Positive Tent | Mykola Romanovsky



Laurence Edwards sculpture live | Mykola Romanovsky



Crowds tuck into the dawn feast | Adam Barnes



Headliner DJ Paulette, Sunlight Stage | Adam Barnes

# GALLERY



Linton Kwesi Johnson, First Word | Mykola Romanovsky



James Meek & Ken Worpole, Ideas Tent | Mykola Romanovsky



Josie Long, First Word | Luke Witcomb



RNLI pass Wellbeing by the Waves | Adam Barnes



Spectacular Man, Gardens Stage | Luke Witcomb



Intergalactic Get Down Silent Disco | Luke Witcomb



Everyone Active Zone | Mykola Romanovsky



Indian Dance Workshop, MoonDance | Mykola Romanovsky



Wild Beach Camping | Mykola Romanovsky

# KEEP IN TOUCH

 [info@firstlightlowestoft.com](mailto:info@firstlightlowestoft.com)

 [firstlightlowestoft.com](http://firstlightlowestoft.com)

 [firstlightlowestoft](https://www.instagram.com/firstlightlowestoft)

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