Re: Sunrise Film Festival 2025 Report for Lowestoft Town Council

Dear Councillors,
I'm writing to you, in receipt of our annual festival report that is required to be received by Lowestoft Town Council, and your events and communications subcommittee.

This covering letter accompanies the report to outline further the specific support you approved on 10 March 2025 for the 4th Sunrise Film Festival, which took place at the Marina Theatre from 20-25 May 2025.

Your continued generosity and support, through a town council grant of £5,000, enabled our first-ever Industry Forum, which was organised to inspire local young people aged 16-25. Your support helped us to match-fund the guest speakers' costs for this event, with your contribution amounting to £1,500.

It also covered the costs of film screenings throughout the week, with a £750 contribution for the 4th year running. Your support funded our carbon-neutral, FSC-recyclable printed festival programme, amounting to £1,500.

A £750 contribution also supported the educational workshops held over the weekend, with topics focused on documentary filmmaking and the art of creating standout scenes in short filmmaking.

Finally, your grant was supplemented by a £500 contribution towards venue costs, with the Marina Theatre Trust continuing to support a growing grassroots event in the town.

2026 marks the Sunrise Film Festival's exciting 5th anniversary and this year's edition. The 2026 festival closed for submissions, with 1,119 films submitted for consideration. The festival continues to go from strength to strength.

In mid-2024, the festival became a BIFA (British Independent Film Awards) qualifying festival, supporting a new gateway for aspiring and underrepresented filmmakers to have their work considered for prestigious national awards in the independent film industry.

Early this year, with the support of 3 independent filmmakers, we submitted our formal application for BAFTA festival accreditation.

For each edition of the festival, we've been supported by the BFI Film Audience Network funding, distributed in our region via our regional film hub, Film Hub South East.

From April 2026, the BFI's BFI Film Audience Network funding will start a new three-year funding phase, which will include new priorities.

As an established festival, we will reapply for a 3-year multi-year agreement in partnership with the Marina Theatre Trust, with new elements including the exhibition of submitted in-competition independent feature films and music videos, and the continuation of Virtual Reality visual arts projects.

We will intend to reapply to Lowestoft Town Council this year, for a new grant application to support the match-funding of the festival, and support our 5th edition/

Our relationship with the Marina Theatre Trust and its key staff, who contribute to the success of the Sunrise Film Festival, is also a testament to a thriving, ongoing partnership.

This partnership will naturally grow beyond the annual festival, and we will explore opportunities to support year-round audience development at the venue, helping to increase audience numbers for both traditional film screenings and event-cinema screenings.

Please find our 2025 festival Report overleaf.

Yours sincerely,
Joshua Freemantle

Founder / Festival Director

2025 SUNRISE FILM FESTIVAL

BIFA QUALIFYING FESTIVAL

FESTIVAL REPORT

sunrisefilmfestival.co.uk

MARINA THEATRE LOWESTOFT

AT A GLANCE: WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO?

Sunrise Film Festival, based in Lowestoft, Suffolk, was founded in 2021 and in 2026 we are celebrating 5 incredible years screening independent film across overlooked communities.

Across the past 5 years we've had over 5,000 admissions across our annual festivals and year-round activity.

58% of our audience in 2025 were from our local community in Lowestoft's district of East Suffolk.

Our social media has over 8,000 combined followers.

54% of our programme in 2025 was directed by women.

A growing and trusted platform for underrepresented filmmakers in the industry.

F RATED

F-rated is our continued commitment to programme at least 50% of films created by female or non-binary filmmakers.

CREATING IMPACT

Sunrise Film Festival directly supports:

- Increasing access to cultural exhibition in coastal communities.
- Improving wellbeing through creative participation.
- Reaching both regular and infrequent arts audience members in our local community.
- Strengthening reputation of town's largest theatre with the support of the Marina Theatre Trust and Lowestoft Town Council's continued funding.

Place-Based Engagement

88%

More Connected To Arts & Culture

Audience Experience

96%

Good / Excellent

Wellbeing Impact

84%

Positive Impact

SUPPORTING OPPORTUNITIES IN FILM

21 Awards presented to filmmakers

46 Filmmakers supported with speaker slots/Q&As

187 Short films showcased across the festival

191 Screening committee volunteers reviewing films

12 Senior festival programming & curation roles

9 Festival steward volunteers
(supporting local students under 21)

Strongest Age Group 25-40 year olds

With Healthy Engagement With 18-24

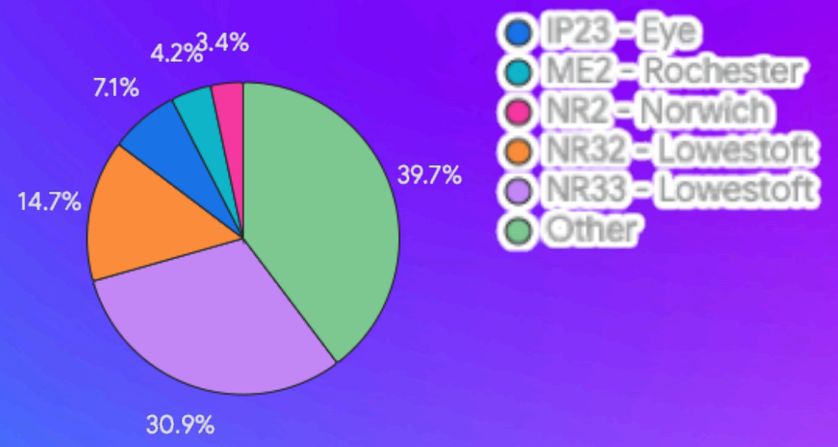
79%
Attended Because The Event Felt Accessible & Welcoming

AUDIENCE REACH & ACCESS

- 62% of attendees travelled by car
- 21% walked to the venue
- 10% used public transport
- 7% used taxis or other means

Over 20% walked to the venue indicating strong hyper-local engagement within the town centre.

72% of audiences booked tickets online, demonstrating effective digital access, while 28% used in-person or phone booking, supporting inclusion for audiences with different access needs.



Audience members and filmmakers also once again travelled to us from across the country including as far as Glasgow and internationally including Germany.

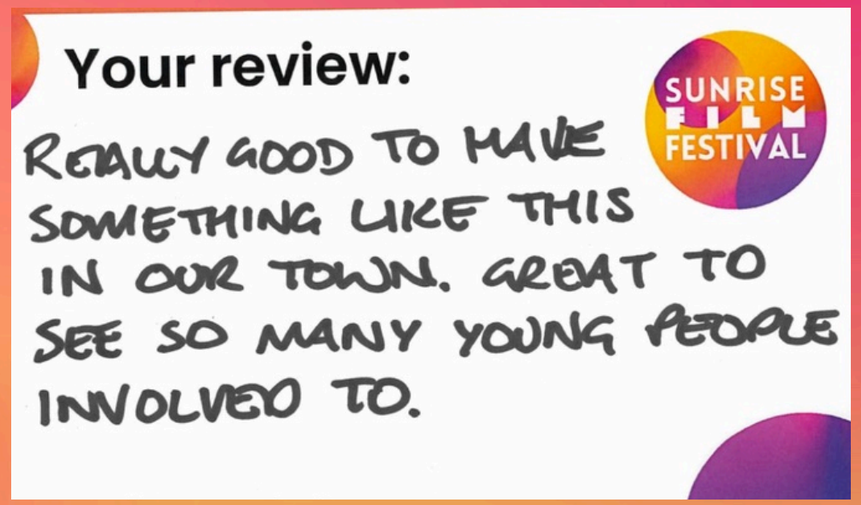
91% of our audiences would recommend the event to others

WELLBEING & SOCIAL IMPACT

The project delivered strong wellbeing outcomes:

- 84% of respondents reported a positive impact on their wellbeing when attending our activities.
- 88% felt more connected to arts and culture in their local area because of Sunrise.

This shows strong feelings of enjoyment, connection, and reduced isolation, supporting evidence that cultural participation in our activities contributes towards improved mental wellbeing and social connection in our community from those who attend.

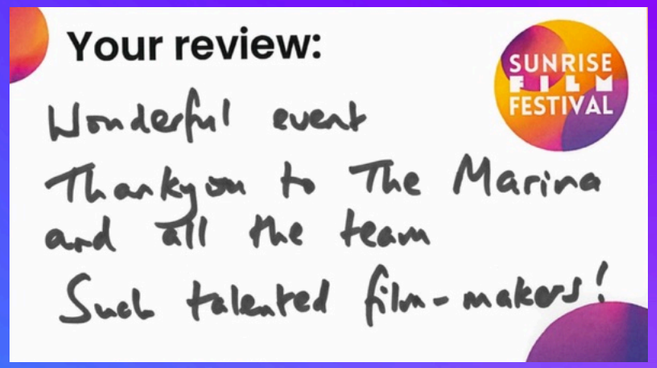


ENGAGEMENT & AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

The strongest drivers of attendance were community-led and informal networks:

- 41% heard about the festival through word of mouth
- 27% via our social media channels
- 18% via venue or organiser websites
- 14% via posters, flyers, or print advertising

Such a strong level of people discovering the festival via word of mouth is positive, but we know that, with a stronger marketing strategy supported by new funding opportunities and a partnership with Greater Anglia to promote sustainable travel to the festival, we could considerably boost engagement and attendance.



How tickets were booked:

- **72% Booked online**
- **28% Booked in person or via phone**

MARKETING - OUR OUTPUT

Social Media

Facebook:
156.6k Post views | 1.8k Interactions (comments & shares)
Instagram:
61.4k Total reach

Website

Total clicks through to booking 3,340
58.6k website impressions

Print

5,000 programmes printed & distributed across the region. Touch points this year beyond Lowestoft included Great Yarmouth, Ipswich, Norwich, Halesworth, Beccles, Southwold & Cambridge.

Signage, Posters & Adverts

2 road signs, 2 large posters in Lowestoft Town Centre, 3 banners, 300 A3 posters & 500 A4 posters, 30 Paste Up Posters, 5 adverts in local magazines

Press

9 different pieces across the BBC, Eastern Daily Press & local radio.

ATTENDANCE

Across the 4 days we saw 3,084 admissions across our film screenings, talks, workshops and dedicated free to access non-ticketed events.

- Our open access micro short showcase saw over 900 admissions.
- Time Travelling With Myself was a local screening attracting 133 admissions.
- Our brand new VR experience had over 300 admissions across the weekend.
- Our first ever industry summit to inspire local young people under 25 had over 100 admissions.
- Our awards ceremony attracted over 250 people ranging from filmmakers from across the UK and interationally, supporters and industry professionals.

It's important to note that our audience numbers remain strong for a regional UK festival, supported in part by the BFI Film Audience Network. Sunrise Film Festival presents an important opportunity for Lowestoft's cultural landscape. It is organised by an entirely volunteer-led team and contributes to the town's wider ambitions.

IMPACT IN COMMUNITY

We know the impact of Sunrise can contribute to our local community and help put Lowestoft on the map as a destination for attendees, encouraging them to support the town beyond our activities.

- Based on the available data we can see at least, 177 people not from the East of England stayed at least one night in Lowestoft and the surrounding area.
- Average spend of attendees whilst in Lowestoft £40.

For future editions of our festival, we will be looking at ways to improve capturing this type of data to better inform how the festival impacts and supports our local community.

"You can really feel the effort that they put in. From their marketing, Q&As, low cost of submission/tickets, friendly faces, range of films selected, events across the festival etc. This was my second year visiting, and first time submitting" - **Amelia Deering**

FILMMAKER REVIEWS

“We were so happy to have been selected to be part of the superb festival programme at Sunrise this year. The team were very responsive, kind and professional, they were also very active on social media which was great! Brilliant festival to have been part of and we will absolutely submit future films for consideration.”
- **Benjamin Verrall**

“Absolutely loved attending Sunrise FF, my team and I felt so grateful for the amount of effort put into the event, it has such a lovely team behind it who were always helpful and considerate to our questions. Brought together extremely talented creators with great networking opportunities. Still talking about this one now, cannot recommend enough! Thank you Sunrise - Time Between Us Team x”
- **Isabella Campbell**

“Thank you for nominating our film " Lavender Whispers" for the "All Kinds of Hearts Award (LGBTQ+ Representation)". All the films screened were incredibly meaningful and the Sunrise team were so passionate. It's amazing to see a festival so driven to platform under-represented groups and filmmakers. Our team are very grateful to have been a part of it!”
- **Blythe Paynter**

“We had a great time. We met amazing people. The festival organisation was 5-star. Very cordial, incredible communication, and above all, they took great care of every detail of the films and directors. We will return every year.”
- **Sergio Moraga**

“A fantastic festival with a diverse range of great shorts covering many genres. So pleased to have been selected as a winner. Thank you to the hard working team who delivered an inclusive and friendly film festival.”
- **Sarah McCluskey**

“Sunrise is an excellent festival, organised with care and heart.”
- **Jake Alden-Falconer**

Festival Founder

Joshua Freemantle

CLOSING SUMMARY

As Sunrise Film Festival continues to grow, it remains rooted in the collective effort, generosity, and belief of the people and organisations that make it possible.

At the heart of Sunrise is our volunteer-led committee, made up of six dedicated volunteer programmers, alongside myself as founder, and our Festival Producer and Lead Programmer. This core team is supported each year by over 180 volunteer pre-selectors and industry judges, whose time, care, and critical insight play a vital role in reviewing films and shaping the final programme. Their contribution is fundamental to maintaining the quality, integrity, and ambition of the festival.

We're incredibly grateful for the continued support of the Marina Theatre Trust, and for the commitment of their staff and volunteers. Access to a professional exhibition venue has been instrumental in strengthening the audience experience and supporting the long-term sustainability and future growth of Sunrise.

Our sincere thanks also go to Lowestoft Town Council for their significant and ongoing funding support. This investment not only enables the delivery of the festival year on year, but also plays a crucial role in strengthening our wider funding applications as match-funding and partnerships. In particular, it has supported our ability to secure funding through Film Hub South East, as part of the BFI Film Audience Network, helping us expand audience reach and deepen engagement across our community.

Sunrise is a testament to what can be achieved through collaboration, volunteer commitment, and belief in the cultural potential of place with genuine grassroots connections.

We look forward to building on this foundation in the years ahead.

SUNRISE FILM FESTIVAL

BIFA
QUALIFYING FESTIVAL

FESTIVAL REPORT

sunrisefilmfestival.co.uk