Cambridge City Council

Cambridge Folk Festival – Future Format

FINAL REPORT and RECOMMENDATIONS

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FINANCIAL INFORMATION REDACTED DUE TO COMMERCIAL SENSITIVITY

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1. Introduction/Brief

1.1 Objectives

Counterculture Partnership LLP was engaged to deliver a comprehensive evaluation of the future format and viability of the Cambridge Folk Festival. The objectives were to:

- Assess and report on the future financial viability of the Festival, identifying the most sustainable operating models.
- Evaluate the Festival's local, national, and international value across economic, social, community, and cultural dimensions.
- Develop future delivery options aligned with the Council's Cultural Strategy, prioritising a cost-neutral business model.
- Analyse audience demographics, engagement, satisfaction levels, and recommend audience development strategies.
- Identify financial efficiencies and opportunities for additional income generation from a range of potential sources.
- Review operational efficiency, including logistics, production, ticketing, and site infrastructure management.
- Provide strategic recommendations regarding the future programming and artist line-up.
- Challenge assumptions and offer a critical, evidence-led perspective to inform decision-making.
- Competitive Benchmarking - comparison with similar folk festivals to highlight strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

1.2 Scope of Work

The scope of this review encompassed:

- Audience and Engagement - Analysis of attendance figures, audience profiles, behaviours, and satisfaction.
- Financial Review - Examination of revenue streams, cost structures, sponsorship activity, and long-term financial sustainability.
- Operational Efficiency - Evaluation of greenfield site logistics, vendor management, accessibility, and overall event infrastructure.
- Marketing and Communications - Review of current branding, promotional strategies, ticketing models, and digital engagement approaches.
- Artist and Programme Review - Assessment of programming strategy, artist selection, and alignment with audience expectations.

- Stakeholder Perspectives - Consultation with internal and external stakeholders, including Council officers, artists, audience members, sponsors, and industry experts.
- Competitive Benchmarking - Comparative analysis with similar festivals to highlight best practices, risks, and opportunities.

2. Executive Summary

The Cambridge Folk Festival (CFF), a cultural institution since 1965 and one of the UK's most prestigious folk events, faces a pivotal moment. Following a significant financial loss in 2024 and increasing pressures from a rapidly evolving live music sector, Cambridge City Council commissioned an in-depth review of the Festival's format and operations. This review spans four critical areas or "Lots"; production infrastructure, programming, marketing and fundraising, and an overarching strategic analysis. The goal - to realign the Festival's identity, operations, and financial model for long-term sustainability and renewed cultural relevance.

A Festival at a Crossroads

While CFF retains a strong legacy, loyal audience base, and a well-regarded brand, it has struggled to adapt to shifting industry dynamics. Operational costs are escalating, rising exponentially year-on-year between 2023 and 2024: this was partly driven by an exceptional spend of £92k on insurance; the underlying increase was 6.2%, and is 34% over 5 years.

Ticket pricing and revenue has not kept pace with this: instead, ticket revenue has declined, driven by broader economic factors and weakening appeal among younger and local audiences. Notably, the numbers of camping tickets and full weekend tickets and their relative contingent revenues have declined dramatically since 2016.

A £300+k deficit in 2024 prompted the decision to pause the Festival in 2025, creating space for this critical reassessment.

Stakeholder consultations, comparative benchmarking with peer festivals, and a rigorous audit of financial and production processes revealed a festival model deeply cherished but increasingly misaligned with its market and fiscal realities.

If the decline in revenues cannot be reversed, the greenfield festival model is not sustainable without significant annual cash support from Cambridge City Council. However, the key recommendation (Option 3) provides a reset and suggests where future investment will need to be focused. This will provide the solid foundations needed for future sustainability and financial resilience. It also evolves the brand and expands the opportunities to dial up the overall festival experience. This option will also be an enabler to developing new audiences, creating a festival feel in the city as well as the ability to engage local business (e.g. pubs) where they too will see a benefit (footfall/financial)

to help activate and extend the reach of CFF before, during and post the festival.

It should be noted that for the purposes of this report a financial review was conducted (Section 9 of this report) to establish indicative costs and income baselines from the 2024 outturn solely for future modelling. There are significant caveats concerning use of the data for any other purpose, as set out in Section 9. Budget models for 2026 Options 1 & 2 and the three-year plan are derived from those baselines, and for 2026 include a factor of 7.43% for inflation since the 2024 festival, based on the compound CPI forecasts for 2025 and 2026, which will need to be considered for revenue as well as costs in planning ticket prices 2026. 2027 and 2028 budget figures are uninflated beyond 2026, for direct comparison.

Should CCC and CFF absolutely want to remain a greenfield festival (Options 1 & 2) then we have laid out the roadmap to give these options the best chances of success. However, these tow options are not without risk. We have investigated and interrogated seven options including moving, urban, hybrid, licensing and mothballing.

1. The Heart of the Festival – Programming and Artistic Direction (Lot 3)

The Festival's artistic offer remains its defining asset, yet recent years have seen a growing disconnect between its programming choices and the evolving tastes and expectations of current and future audiences.

Once renowned for blending folk tradition with cutting-edge discovery, recent line-ups have underrepresented key pillars of the genre, particularly English folk, and lacked the “hot” crossover and mid-tier acts that draw digitally engaged, younger fans. The decline in weekend ticket sales, compared to notable spikes in day ticket sales for specific headline artists, suggests declining trust and buy-in to the festival brand, which is – financially – only partially offset by the draw of headline artists. The absence of a visible artistic lead and a less dynamic programming structure has contributed to a loss of momentum.

- Establishing a clearer artistic vision rooted in folk and roots traditions while embracing innovation and genre fusion.
- Adopting a stage model where Stage 1 anchors core folk headliners, Stage 2 focuses on emerging talent and crossover appeal; and Stage 3 becomes a space for community, comedy, and family programming.

- Enhancing the “artist growth journey” ethos, nurturing musicians from early-stage performances to headline slots, thus reinforcing CFF’s legacy as a place of musical discovery.

Strategically curated, this programming approach can both preserve the Festival’s soul and widen its reach.

2. The Festival’s Voice – Marketing, Fundraising & Audience Development (Lot 4)

The CFF brand is one of its strongest cultural and indeed latent commercial assets - inclusive, heritage-rich, and warmly communal. But the brand’s voice, digital presence, and marketing systems have not evolved in step with the expectations of today’s audiences or the competitive realities of the festival sector.

The current marketing approach lacks cohesion, creative direction, and data-informed targeting. The Festival website and CRM system (Spektrix) are underutilised, audience segmentation is outdated, and marketing efforts are overly reliant on tradition rather than audience insight. The withdrawal of the BBC Radio 2 broadcast partnership has also left a gap in national visibility.

- Audience Segmentation - Introduce a data-led strategy aligned with The Audience Agency’s Audience Spectrum framework, mapping personas such as "Heritage Loyalists", "Folk Families", "Music Discoverers", and "Local First-Timers".
- Digital Modernisation - Invest in refreshed branding, dynamic content, and personalised campaign paths, especially via short-form video and Spotify integration to appeal to Gen Z and millennial fans.
- Sponsorship & Fundraising - Develop a dedicated commercial partnerships function, explore “Friends of CFF” philanthropy, and monetise premium experiences through experiential sponsorships and tiered ticketing offers.

This revitalised marketing approach would both honour the Festival’s values and reposition it for contemporary engagement.

3. The Festival’s Body – Production Infrastructure & Operational Efficiency (Lot 2)

Production quality at CFF has historically been exceptional but has become increasingly costly, contributing to the unsustainable financial model. There are not *significant* efficiency savings to be made in the current economic climate without altering key site specifications: reducing the scale of ancillary stages and of the campsite offers.

The significant decline in festival goers opting for camping with weekend tickets results in the current two-site setup spanning Cherry Hinton Hall and Coldhams Common proving inefficient. Operating Coldhams Common alone incurs costs near £100,000; following average 9.2% decline year on year in the volume of camping/mobile home sales since 2016, the Festival is only generating £33,000 in Coldhams related additional camping/vehicle income in 2024. At 2024 attendance levels, the Cherry Hinton Hall site could potentially have accommodated all weekend campers, if they used different camping behaviours.

Some efficiency savings would result from reviewing long-term supplier contracts, the relatively high number of cabins, and insufficient focus on infrastructure rationalisation.

- Transitioning to a **single-site model** at Cherry Hinton Hall with a maximum practical capacity of 12,000, with provision for 1400 tents and 50 vehicles, allowing for 7,500–10,000 ticket sales after staff, artist, and trader allocations.
- **Rethinking procurement** (all Options) – Ensure rigorous competitive tendering with open negotiation (including a best and final price stage and welcoming offers of substitutability on specification), vary staging and infrastructure specs by stage and function, and reduce reliance on premium toilets, cabins, and fencing where possible. Our experience within the events and festivals sector indicates that standard local authority procurement systems are often not designed to accommodate the unique requirements involved in sourcing specialist festival staging and equipment.
  While councils rightly prioritise value for money, traditional procurement parameters such as lowest cost or broad framework agreements these may not always result in the best outcomes in this context. Achieving genuine value for money requires an understanding of the nuances and technical demands of festival infrastructure, including safety, quality, and delivery reliability. Without this sector-specific expertise, there is a risk that procurement decisions could favour initial cost over long-term performance and event success. Long term contracts and SLAs could mean that access to latest technology is more difficult to access especially in terms of power consumption and carbon footprint.
- **Site strategy optimisation** - Engage a site layout specialist to explore more efficient campsite and production configurations particularly regarding camper vans, glamping, and vehicle access.

These adjustments are designed not only to reduce cost but to preserve audience experience and enhance the site's intimacy and charm

4. Strategic Alignment and Future Viability – An Integrated Vision (Lot 1)

Synthesising findings from all other Lots, the overarching recommendation is that option 3 provides the best way to ensure CFF survives and is a recalibrated model that allows CFF to retain its heritage while becoming more agile, audience-aligned, and financially resilient. Should CFF retain the opinion then options 1 & 2 will provide the roadmap to navigate attempting to preserve a greenfield festival against prevailing conditions.

Maintaining the greenfield model is still very high risk: there is not a lot of cost to take out and its future stability and success relies on reversing the decline in ticket sales and income. The Option 3 model, whilst requiring start up investment, is far more risk-controllable in an uncertain future.

The greenfield model includes:

- A streamlined site and infrastructure footprint focused on Cherry Hinton Hall.
- Capacity scenarios between 7,500 and 12,000 attendees, avoiding costly licensing thresholds beyond 15,000.
- A "festival within a festival" model—with different programming styles and demographics targeted per stage.
- Renewed investment in marketing, digital transformation, community outreach, and ticketing strategies and is reflected in the suggested indicative budget
- A five-year business plan anchored in cost neutrality, revenue diversification, and the Council's strategic cultural objectives

The Cambridge Folk Festival is at a critical juncture. While its heritage, atmosphere, and loyal community remain unmatched, these strengths must now be supported by a bold, strategic reimagining of its delivery.

If the Festival embraces reform, refreshing its artistic vision, and building deeper audience connections, with such streamlining of infrastructure as is realistically attainable, it can emerge from this pause reinvigorated as a greenfield festival. Not as a scaled-down version of its former self, but as a revitalised cultural beacon.

3. Capacity Model

We propose a business model which enables a quality and unique offering which gives each stage a clear CFF identity and manages financial capability with a set capacity. A capacity model approach for 2026 at Cherry Hinton Hall will work with the festival strengths as well as increasing its appeal to a wider demographic. So CFF can maintain its important legacy the key is to work with that and reimagine the site to fit its audience and ticket sales.

This model works on estimated audience expectation of 7,500 to 10,000 or CFF can use the costing basis to look at a 12,000-capacity model. After 15,000 capacity there are different legal requirements which have a financial implication so we would recommend working to that maximum capacity model. Prior to a more specific calculation, a prudent reserve from that capacity for staff, trader, artist and free under 5 tickets would be 2999, indicating a saleable capacity of 12,000 in the first instance for the Cherry Hinton Hall site. For illustration, in 2024 the peak total number of ticket holders was on Friday, totalling 7358 including 219 under-5 free ticket holders: 7139 paid ticket holders.

We understand that CFF has in the past been based solely on the Cherry Hinton Hall site and potentially that footprint could be used as a basis for remodelling and working infrastructure recommendations and changes to apply to that financial model as we have laid out in later sections. We have investigated key costings provided and created a model to reflect the recommended changes. Site infrastructure would be determined using the following criteria:

- Stage audience capacity. This determines the number of stages within the set capacity budget.
- Projected ticket sales revenue. This will determine budgets across each and every department of the festival.
- Number of stages for each capacity. This model will require eliminating staging and site infrastructure to reflect a smaller capacity event. This model ensures a quality experience for the audience as each capacity reflects the needs of the audience attending. For a 7,500 – 15,000 capacity festival we would propose costing for a main stage, a potentially reduced size Stage 2 and Stage 3 as a small marquee.
- This model assumes a competitive pricing procurement processes. It assumes a reduction of staging and subsidiary infrastructure. Reducing the site footprint to a single site to reflect the festival capacity will reduce costs on fencing, security, toilets, cabins, trackway and all site infrastructure will be

costed based on capacity attendance and camping and parking capacity basis.

- Programme timings for each stage. Each stage would be timed to allow the audience to move freely across the site. Each running order would have 45 minute changeovers. Increasing changeover times reduces the artist bill on each stage and potentially allows for artists to play extended 'special' sets especially for CFF. This will give the audience maximum opportunity to see artists and thus enhance their experience. This also ensures quality programming and no fillers or favours on the bills. For example, 8 quality acts per day on each of the Main Stage and Stage 2. The three headliners for each stage should be folk, roots and crossover and each of those acts should appeal to different demographics e.g. a big folk headliner on Saturday night on the Main Stage and the headliner on Stage 2 would be a crossover music artist appealing to a younger demographic.
- Stage 3 would be programmed with family entertainment e.g. comedy, Folk Idol from 11am – 4pm and from 4.30pm Stage 3 will be hosted by a partner or local folk and roots promoters. Each day we propose a different host for the evening slots.
- Campsite capacity required based on data on local attendees, day sales, GA weekend tickets, premium tickets (including camping), mobile vehicle data. The campsite areas required can be assessed from data.
- Beyond capacity at Cherry Hinton Hall, campsite provision could be put out for tender for live in vehicles, glamping, VIP camping and a profit share deal determined in strong favour of CFF.
- The above data estimated will determine a set figure of space required to be secured for mobile vehicles. This is a set figure of the number of mobile vehicle passes for sale. The price for a mobile vehicle will be premium yet competitive.
- Partnership deals with local hotels will determine recommended hotels recommended on the CFF website.

4. SWOT

Strengths

- Cambridge Folk Festival historic legacy and position in the market. It is the foremost folk festival in England.
- Beautiful location – the Cherry Hinton Hall site, and the city of Cambridge itself. Cambridge City Council owns the site, and Coldhams Common, and therefore doesn't have the same estate costs as some comparator greenfield festival operators are required to meet.
- Atmosphere of inclusivity, community, pride and connection fostered by both staff and audience.
- Legacy of acts from emerging to headliner status trajectory.
- Core community of fans and audience.
- Local attraction and economic benefit to local area.
- Existing attendee base and loyalty.
- Audience satisfaction.

Weaknesses

- Coldhams Common campsite costs are subsidised from general admissions income: site camping costs are uncompetitive versus local camping offer, however there is no capacity in the local camping offer.
- Reduced infrastructure purchasing power compared to some comparator festival operators running multiple events, partly arising from the process for supplier procurement.
- Tradition of well-resourced site infrastructure that is difficult to reverse
- High staffing costs compared to comparator folk festivals: lack of significant volunteer input in e.g. stewarding roles.
- Relatively low proportion of non-ticket & trader income from, e.g. festival merchandise; sponsorship, advertising, and commercial partnerships; VIP packages; artistic funding.
- Overall, the proportion of direct artistic spend to overall costs (2023 23%, 2024 22%) is slightly below comparator festivals (25 – 30% commercial sector, 30+% where significant voluntary input).
- Loss of BBC broadcasting partnership has reduced profile in recent years.
- Recent issues indicate the need to strengthen the executive producer function at the centre of financially informed planning.
- Recent issues also indicate the need to strengthen clear communications with audiences.
- Recent lack of continuity and visibility of artistic leadership role.

- Lack of clear commercial partnerships role.
- Year-round digital engagement and sense of community is largely undeveloped compared to comparators
- Recent programming has under-represented English folk music within the overall mix and has lacked “hot” folk and roots acts. Especially missing emerging and mid-range acts being played on Radio 2.
- Narrow of demographic appeal.
- Lack of mechanism for individual donors / philanthropic giving.

Opportunities

- Key Industry affiliations e.g. BBC Folk Awards, music NPOs.
- Premium ticket income, including area hosted by sponsor who absorbs all costs of VIP area.
- Business development.
- New revenue streams.
- Partnership possibilities e.g. Adnams, Craft Beers.
- Content reimagining potential.
- Sponsor relationship growth.
- Community building opportunities.
- New audience segments.
- Innovation possibilities e.g. new event format.

Threats

- General economic climate: operational cost increases and the cost-of-living crisis.
- Market conditions e.g. ticket price competition.
- Competition of festival date saturation.
- New competitor offerings.
- Industry changes.

PEST Analysis	
External Factors	**Potential Impacts/Considerations for CFF**
Political	**Arts & culture policy uncertainty -** *Fluctuations in central and local government funding for arts (including post-pandemic recovery schemes) directly impact festival viability.* ***Brexit implications*** - *Ongoing challenges related to cross-border mobility for artists and crew, increased visa and logistics costs, and barriers to programming international acts.* **Local authority engagement** - *The festival is owned and supported by Cambridge City Council. Council priorities—especially around cost neutrality, inclusion, and sustainability—will heavily shape future delivery models.* **Cultural strategy alignment** - *There is an opportunity to reinforce the Festival's value within the City's cultural infrastructure and compact, especially around community engagement, tourism, and cultural regeneration.*
Economic	**Rising production and infrastructure costs** - *Inflation across supply chains, energy, insurance, and artist fees continues to drive up operational costs (reflected in the c. £390K loss in 2024).* **Audience affordability pressures** - *The cost-of-living crisis is limiting discretionary spend on festival attendance, particularly among younger audiences and families.* **Festival market volatility** - *At least 72 UK festivals cancelled or postponed in 2024. Larger events with diversified income or public support fared better.* **Need for commercial partnerships** - *Diversifying revenue (sponsorships, brand activations, VIP experiences, etc.) is increasingly important for financial sustainability.*
Social	**Ageing core audience** - *A significant proportion of CFF's current attendees are aged 55+, which is a loyal but time-sensitive group. Audience renewal is essential.*

	Evolving audience preferences - *Audiences are increasingly seeking broader experiences—comedy, wellness, food, and family activities—not just music.* **Community expectation** - *As a long-standing local institution, the Festival holds civic and cultural significance for Cambridge residents, artists, and local partners.* **Accessibility and inclusion** - *Growing expectations for inclusive, family-friendly, and culturally representative programming must be addressed.*
Technological	**Digital engagement and ticketing** - *Increasing reliance on digital channels for marketing, ticketing, and audience communication. Competitors use dynamic ticketing, tiered pricing, and loyalty offers more effectively.* **Data and CRM use** - *CFF has potential to make better use of audience data for targeted marketing, experience personalisation, and long-term loyalty building.* **Production tech evolution** - *Advances in staging, lighting, and audio systems raise audience expectations but also present cost and skill implications.* **Sustainability tech** - *Greener infrastructure (e.g., solar power, waste monitoring, smart logistics) is becoming a baseline expectation among both funders and attendees.*

5. Industry Overview – Trends and Challenges

5.1 Market Overview

The UK music industry continues to represent a significant cultural and economic asset. According to the **House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee Report (May 2024)**:

- The UK remains one of only three net exporters of music globally and ranks second only to the United States in global music industry performance.
- In 2022, the core music industry contributed £6.7 billion to the UK economy in Gross Value Added (GVA), encompassing activities such as composition, recording, live performance, and artist brand development.
- Music exports alone generated £4 billion, and the sector directly employed approximately 210,000 individuals across creative, technical, and support roles.
- Beyond direct employment, the sector stimulates wider economic activity in broadcasting, music education, hospitality, security, and media services.

Live music has demonstrated resilience despite recent global challenges. According to LIVE (Live Music Industry Venues and Entertainment), the live music sector contributed £5.2 billion GVA in 2022, supporting 228,000 full and part-time jobs. Attendance figures across festivals and concerts reached a record 37 million in 2022, including 14.4 million music tourists (13.3 million domestic, 1.1 million international).

These figures underline the critical role that festivals like Cambridge Folk Festival play not only in sustaining cultural life but also in delivering significant economic and employment benefits locally and nationally.

5.2 Post-Pandemic Challenges and Cost Pressures

The festival and live events sector is still recovering from the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This recovery is complicated by a range of new economic challenges -

- **Rising Costs.** Operational costs have risen sharply, driven by inflation in goods and services, supply chain disruption, and significantly higher artist fees as performers seek to recoup pandemic-related income losses.
- **Supply Chain Disruption.** Procurement of equipment, staging, and temporary infrastructure faces higher prices and longer lead times, exacerbated by global and domestic logistical challenges.

- **Artist Fee Inflation.** Competition for headline artists has increased, leading to further pressure on programming budgets, especially for mid-sized festivals.
- **Brexit Impacts.** The UK's exit from the European Union has introduced complexities in securing international artists, additional visa and customs requirements, and barriers to labour mobility for technical and support staff.
- **Fuel and Energy Costs.** Rising energy prices and the increased fuel duty implemented in April 2022 have directly impacted transportation, generator hire, and general logistics costs for festivals.
- **VAT Pressures.** VAT rates on ticket sales in the UK are relatively high compared to competitor markets (e.g., some EU countries offer reduced cultural VAT rates), further squeezing margins.
- **Demand Factors ("Fear of Missing Out" Phenomenon).** Post-lockdown, there was an initial surge in demand for live events, leading to premium pricing. However, cost of living pressures are now tempering consumer willingness to pay elevated ticket prices.

As a consequence of these factors, many festivals — particularly smaller and independent ones — are facing extreme financial pressure. According to the Association of Independent Festivals (AIF), 72 UK festivals were cancelled or postponed in 2024 alone, citing unsustainable costs and reduced audience spending confidence.

5.3 Evolving Audience Demographics

Audience behaviours are shifting, presenting both risks and opportunities -

- **Ageing Core Audience.** A growing proportion of festivalgoers are aged 55+, with this demographic increasingly important to the live music economy. While affluent, this audience is also time-sensitive and demands high service and experiential quality.
- **Younger Audiences.** Engaging the 18–45 demographic requires a renewed focus on programming relevance, digital marketing, and pricing accessibility. Platforms like Spotify, TikTok, and BBC Introducing shape musical discovery patterns for this group.
- **Local vs. National Attendance.** Although Cambridge Folk Festival has traditionally drawn from national audiences, there is significant untapped potential in growing its local engagement and first-time attendee market.

Recent studies also indicate that 44% of UK music fans are attending fewer festivals in 2024 due to affordability concerns. Flexibility in ticketing, value-driven offers (e.g., bundled family packages), and creative engagement will be vital to sustain and diversify attendance.

5.4 Competitive Landscape

Competition in the summer festival market has intensified, with new entrants and established festivals competing for overlapping audiences and artist rosters -

- **Growth of Celtic and Roots Festivals.** Events such as Celtic Connections and Manchester Folk Festival have expanded, drawing from the same folk and roots audience as Cambridge Folk Festival.
- **Genre Convergence.** Festivals like Latitude, Green Man, and End of the Road increasingly blur genre lines, combining folk, indie, electronic, and comedy to appeal to wider demographics.
- **Country Music Boom.** The rise of country music festivals (e.g., Country to Country) has created additional competition for roots-influenced programming.
- **Local Competition.** Festivals within the East of England region and South East, such as Latitude, offer large-scale arts and music experiences, competing for family and middle-aged audience segments.

Against this backdrop, maintaining a distinctive programming identity — while evolving to appeal to broader and younger audiences — is critical for Cambridge Folk Festival's future competitiveness.

5.5 Innovation and Sustainability Trends

Progressive festivals are increasingly embracing innovation and sustainability as differentiators -

- **Technology Adoption.** Contactless ticketing, mobile apps, RFID wristbands, and cashless transactions are becoming industry standards, enhancing customer experience and providing valuable data insights.
- **Sustainability Initiatives.** Environmentally responsible practices are now expected by audiences, sponsors, and local authorities. Leading festivals promote green travel incentives, ban single-use plastics, and commit to net-zero emission targets.
- **Partnership Innovation.** Forward-looking festivals seek strategic brand partnerships that enhance the festival experience (e.g., exclusive lounges, themed stages, wellness areas) rather than traditional sponsorship models focused only on logo placement.

5.6 Strategic Implications for Cambridge Folk Festival

The Cambridge Folk Festival must adapt to this complex environment by;

- **Evolving its programming** to combine folk traditions with contemporary cross-genre appeal, while preserving its core identity.
- **Managing financial pressures** through scaled site models, procurement efficiency, and targeted audience growth.
- **Leveraging audience data** to build segmented, year-round engagement strategies.
- **Investing in digital and sustainability initiatives** to remain relevant to audiences and attractive to funders and sponsors.
- **Strengthening its community roots** while reclaiming its position as a leading national and international destination for folk and roots music discovery.

By navigating these challenges proactively, Cambridge Folk Festival can secure long-term resilience, cultural leadership, and continued economic and social contribution to Cambridge and beyond.

6. Stakeholder Consultation

Given the confidentiality and sensitivity around CFF's future, extensive consultation with wider industry stakeholders was necessarily limited.

Some correspondence from other festival lead officers and a PR associate was also provided, and the consultant team were able to draw on their own extensive expertise and pre-existing knowledge of comparator festivals and the broader cultural landscape.

Consultations were held with the following stakeholders;

Staff Team

Frances Alderton
James Page
Hazel Beale
Andrew Keightley
Ollie Tome-Fernandez
Amie Hoyland

2024 Programme Consultant

Lisa Schwartz

7. Competitive Benchmarking

7.1 Overview

To contextualise Cambridge Folk Festival's position within the UK's folk and roots festival landscape, we benchmark it against the following peer events;

- **Shrewsbury Folk Festival**
- **Moseley Folk & Arts Festival**
- **FolkEast**
- **Latitude Festival**
- **Wickham Festival**
- **Fairport's Cropredy Convention**
- **Green Man Festival**
- **Manchester Folk Festival**

These festivals have been selected based on similarities in genre focus, audience demographics, scale, and cultural significance.

Festival	Attendance	Weekend	Weekend with camping	Weekend hotel package	Concession	Concession with camping	Family	Family with camping	VIP	Day ticket	Family day ticket
Shrewsbury Folk Festival	7,000	£210.62	£246.85		£235.46	£199.24	£510.25	£575.46			
Green Man	25,000										
Moseley Folk & Arts Festival	6,000	£163		£561.35			£343		£109 extra	£62-65	£155-162
FolkEast		£180	£205 tent £220 car & tent £220 small caravan £240 large caravan		£170	£195 tent £210 car & tent £210 small caravan £230 large caravan	£515			£80	£195
Latitude Festival	35,000	£308							£197.50 extra	£110	
Wickham Festival	7,000	£240 (earlybird)	£40 extra tent £80 extra caravan						£100 extra	£60 Thurs £80 Fri/Sat/Sun	

Fairport Convention	20,000	£220	£280								

Notes

Green Man Festival - no pricing information as sold out.
Manchester Folk Festival - £16.50-30.80 per show.

7.2 Programming and Artistic Direction

- Cambridge Folk Festival - Offers a blend of traditional and contemporary folk, roots, and Americana. Notable for featuring both established artists and emerging talent, with dedicated stage (2) for new performers and Stage 3 for experience entertainment.
- Shrewsbury Folk Festival - Emphasizes a mix of traditional and contemporary folk, with a strong dance component and international acts.
- Moseley Folk & Arts Festival - Balances traditional and contemporary folk music with arts programming, including comedy, spoken word, and workshops.
- FolkEast - Focuses on traditional English folk music, with an emphasis on community and heritage.
- Latitude Festival - Presents a diverse lineup that includes folk, indie, and electronic music, and significant arts offer appealing to a wide audience.
- Wickham Festival - Features a broad range of genres, including folk, rock, and world music, catering to a diverse audience.
- Fairport's Cropredy Convention - Centres around Fairport Convention's performances, with a lineup that includes a variety of folk and rock artists.
- Green Man Festival - Known for its eclectic lineup, blending folk, indie, and alternative music, often featuring critically acclaimed artists.
- Manchester Folk Festival - Focuses on English folk and acoustic music, with an emphasis on new and emerging artists.

What this means for CFF - CFF's programming is diverse within the folk genre, balancing tradition with contemporary influences. However, festivals like Green Man and Latitude have expanded their programming to include a wider range of genres, attracting broader audiences. And therefore becoming more direct competition.

7.3 Financial and Operational Considerations

- Cambridge Folk Festival - Faced a significant financial loss of c.£390,000 in 2024, leading to a fallow year in 2025 to reassess and restructure.
- Shrewsbury Folk Festival - Operates with a sustainable model, balancing ticket sales with sponsorship and community support.
- Moseley Folk & Arts Festival - Maintains financial sustainability through a combination of ticket sales, community support, and diversified programming.
- FolkEast - Relies on a dedicated volunteer base and community engagement to manage costs and operations.

- Latitude Festival - Backed by a major promoter, benefiting from economies of scale and extensive sponsorship.
- Wickham Festival - Operates with a lean model, focusing on cost-effective programming and community involvement.
- Fairport's Cropredy Convention - Sustains operations through a loyal fan base and consistent programming.
- Green Man Festival - As an independent festival, it has developed a strong brand and loyal following, contributing to its financial stability.
- Manchester Folk Festival - Operates with support from Arts Council England and local partnerships, focusing on emerging talent.

What this means for CFF - Financial sustainability is a common challenge across festivals. Cambridge Folk Festival's recent financial loss underscores the need for a reassessment of its operational model to ensure long-term viability and detailed expert ongoing financial management.

7.4 Audience Engagement and Experience

- Cambridge Folk Festival - Offers a family-friendly environment with workshops, children's activities, and a focus on community engagement.
- Shrewsbury Folk Festival - Provides extensive dance programs, youth workshops, and a family-friendly atmosphere.
- Moseley Folk & Arts Festival - Engages audiences through arts programming, workshops, and a relaxed setting.
- FolkEast - Emphasizes community involvement, with participatory events and a focus on traditional crafts.
- Latitude Festival - Enhances audience experience with arts installations, literature, and science areas.
- Wickham Festival - Known for its relaxed atmosphere and family-friendly environment.
- Fairport's Cropredy Convention - Offers a communal experience centred around music and tradition.
- Green Man Festival - Provides a holistic experience with music, arts, science, and wellness activities.
- Manchester Folk Festival - Offers intimate performances and opportunities for audience interaction with artists.

What this means for CFF - Cambridge Folk Festival's commitment to community and family engagement aligns with trends in audience expectations. However, incorporating broader arts and wellness programming could enhance the overall experience.

8. Audience & Engagement

Our research and consultations offer a rich tapestry of both qualitative and quantitative insights that help shape a clearer understanding of the current and potential audience landscape. These findings highlight both long-standing strengths and emerging challenges, painting a picture of a dynamic but evolving audience base.

A key feature of the current audience is its loyalty - many attendees have supported the organisation for decades, with a significant proportion aged 60 and above. This ageing committed audience is frequently cited as both a vital strength and a sustainability concern. Their consistent support underscores a deeply rooted cultural attachment, but it also raises questions about future growth and generational renewal.

Conversely, the data also points to untapped opportunities, particularly within the local Cambridge community. Despite proximity, this group remains under-engaged, especially in relation to community-based schemes and local ticket discounts. The potential to better connect with this audience through targeted pricing strategies and enhanced CRM (Customer Relationship Management) approaches stands out as a clear avenue for development.

There is a visible intention to diversify and rejuvenate the audience profile. This includes attracting younger demographics through new programming initiatives such as family-focused activities, comedy offerings, and a reimagined version of the "Den" - a space historically used for more contemporary or youth-oriented programming. Yet, despite these efforts, certain gaps remain. Notably, the organisation has struggled to capture the interest of emerging music fans - particularly those who discover artists through platforms like BBC Introducing or Radio 2. This signals a disconnect between the programming offer and the listening habits of a younger, more digitally savvy generation.

8.1 Understanding Audience Spectrum – Strategic Insight for Cambridge Folk Festival

Audience Spectrum gives CFF a shared language, a national benchmark, and a framework for targeted growth. It supports everything from programming to partnerships and will be essential for:

- Securing future investment and funding.
- Attracting younger and more diverse audiences.

- Developing year-round audience engagement strategies.

Overlaying CFF's unique audience profiles with Audience Spectrum ensures that future decisions are not only rooted in community insight but also aligned with national best practice and evidence-based models.

What is Audience Spectrum?

The Audience Spectrum is a nationally recognised audience segmentation model developed by The Audience Agency. It classifies the entire UK adult population into distinct segments based on:

- Cultural engagement (frequency and type of attendance).
- Socio-demographics (age, income, education, life stage).
- Lifestyle factors (media habits, interests, values).

It draws from national survey data (including Taking Part and Active Lives), fused with proprietary behavioural and attitudinal datasets. Updated in 2022, it helps organisations understand not only who attends, but also why, how often, and what they value.

Audience Spectrum is used by over 1,000 UK arts and heritage organisations, including Arts Council England NPOs, theatres, museums, and festivals, to support:

- Audience development.
- CRM segmentation.
- Marketing campaign targeting.
- Programme planning.
- Funding bids and evaluation.

Why is Audience Spectrum Important for CFF?

The Cambridge Folk Festival is at a pivotal moment in its evolution. With an ageing but loyal core audience and an urgent need to grow, diversify, and modernise its base, CFF must take a data-led approach to understanding and engaging audiences.

Audience Spectrum provides a strategic framework for this. It enables CFF to:

- Profile existing attendees accurately using Spektrix data matched to Audience Spectrum segments.
- Identify gaps in audience reach — e.g. younger, ethnically diverse, urban groups.

- Target new audiences more effectively with tailored marketing campaigns.
- Benchmark against national and sector trends, including other music festivals.
- Evidence audience development for funders and sponsors.

By overlaying Audience Spectrum segments onto CFF's existing behavioural personas (like "Heritage Loyalist" or "Folk Family"), the Festival can combine qualitative understanding with national quantitative benchmarks — ensuring a more robust and fundable strategy.

How We Have Mapped CFF's Audience Personas to Audience Spectrum

In developing the marketing strategy (See Section 11), we began by building audience personas based on:

- Existing CFF audience insight (reports, ticketing data, surveys).
- Observed behaviours (first-timer, premium buyer, day attendee).
- Festival team experience and stakeholder consultation.

We then aligned each persona with the most relevant Audience Spectrum segments, as follows:

CFF Persona	Description	Audience Spectrum Equivalent	Why It Fits
Heritage Loyalist	Older, long-time attendee, tradition-valuing	Home & Heritage	Older, rural/suburban, loyal arts engagers who prefer established formats
Folk Family	Parents with children, attending for value and shared experience	Dormitory Dependables	Comfortable families in suburbs/small towns, risk-averse but engaged
Music Discoverer	Younger (18–35), follows new music,	Experience Seekers	Digitally savvy, adventurous,

	attends multiple festivals		socially influenced and curious
Cultural Explorer	Middle-aged, arts-curious, premium-focused	Commuterland Culturebuffs	Affluent, educated professionals, frequent arts consumers
Local First-Timer	Cambridge resident, trialling the festival	Mixed – Kaleidoscope Creativity, Facebook Families, or Commuterland Culturebuffs	Dependent on local demographics and digital behaviours, needs geo + psychographic targeting

This mapping is not rigid but flexible and behavioural, recognising that motivations evolve. A first-time attendee could become a repeat buyer. A Folk Family could also be part of Home & Heritage if they age into that segment.

By integrating both approaches, persona storytelling and Audience Spectrum classification, CFF can build out:

- CRM segmentation in Spektrix that reflects both what people do and why.
- Targeted marketing messages that are relevant and resonate emotionally and practically.
- Campaign targeting based on postcode-linked Audience Spectrum data.
- Evaluation metrics that track reach and growth among underserved segments.

Together, these insights allow us to identify key behavioural and demographic audience clusters, each with distinct needs, expectations, and potential growth value:

- Heritage Loyalists – Long-term supporters, many of whom are 60+, who value tradition and continuity.
- Local First-Timers – Cambridge residents, often drawn by discounted tickets, testing the waters of engagement.
- Folk Families – Multigenerational attendees attracted by a safe, welcoming, and atmospheric experience.

- Cultural Explorers – Arts-inclined individuals who are curious but not yet actively engaged.
- Music Discoverers – Younger fans who follow new and niche acts, often outside the mainstream, and connect through digital platforms.

By understanding these segments in more detail, CFF can better design strategies to retain core audiences while simultaneously growing and diversifying the base for long-term resilience.

8.2 Audience Overview (Current Snapshot)

Attendance Numbers

- Peak attendance in recent years c. 7500.
- Last Festival Ticket Sales 11,001: peak attendance Friday, 7358.
- New capacity models being scoped to align with budget and infrastructure realities.

Core Demographics

- Loyal “Heritage” Base aged 60+, many of whom are long-time returnees.
- Festival has multi-generational recognition, with some younger family members attending with older generations.
- Skewed toward middle- to upper-income audience with high brand loyalty but declining long-term growth potential.

Geography

- Local/regional audience from Cambridge and East of England.
- Secondary catchment includes London and South East.
- Limited national or international draw in current form (especially post-Radio 2).

Musical Preferences

- Traditional folk and acoustic sounds appreciated.
- Audience values musicianship, storytelling, and cultural authenticity.
- CFF once had a reputation for introducing future stars but recently has lacked emerging/mid-tier acts.
- Some audience resistance to change — but evidence shows openness to ‘roots’ crossover if aligned with festival ethos.
- Audience Segmentation (Proposed Personas).

Segment	Description	Opportunity
The Heritage Loyalist	60+, long-term attendee, stays onsite, buys early	Preserve connection, create exclusive "Legacy Lounge" or alumni programme
The Folk Family	Parents with children, attending for community, camping, and activities	Expand family zone, children's programme, promote "Festival as Family Holiday"
The Cultural Explorer	30s-50s, well-travelled, arts-curious, possibly not folk-first	Engage with crossover acts, comedy, storytelling, workshops, premium offers
The Music Discoverer	18–35, loves new sounds, attends other festivals (e.g., Green Man, End of the Road)	Target with emerging acts, BBC Introducing, Spotify integrations, youth pricing
The Local First-Timer	Cambridge area resident, possibly younger, has never been	Use discounted Thursday/Friday tickets, partner with local influencers/schools

9. Financial Review

Purpose of Review

Cambridge City Council had already produced a high-level strategic financial review (**MFW Presentation** [Folk Festival Financial Analysis 2016 – 2024]) which clearly analyses the pattern of increasing costs and declining sales. This review has not been replicated.

A Financial Review of the 2024 festival was undertaken on a more operational basis to establish a costs and income baseline for future modelling; this included examining notable variances from the 2023 figures supplied. The resultant data was also used for consideration of proportionality, and value comparison.

As the festival is not a standalone organisation it does not produce audited accounts that solely and comprehensively account for the festival's income and expenditure. The festival is operated by Cambridge City Council and festival related transactions are recorded on its accounting system, with each transaction assigned to a nominal (T1) code under the Folk Festival cost centre, 1262.

Documents

The following documents were provided for review:

- Powerpoint **MFW Presentation** (Folk Festival Financial Analysis 2016 - 2024)
- Spreadsheet **Budget 2024 FINAL** which included comparable figures for 2023, and which is aligned with the nominal structure of the accounting system.
- Spreadsheet **CFF Running Order and Artist Fees**
- Spektrix ticketing system **Sales Reports** from for all ticket types including car parking and camping
- Numerous documents provided by the Production Manager, including spreadsheet **CFF 2024. Stage Area Costs** and pdf **CFF 2024. Satellite Site's Production Costs**, as well as costed stewarding and security schedules; and detailed infrastructure supplier specifications, costed quotes and contracts.

Observations and Process

Initial observations indicated several discrepancies between amounts recorded in the Budget 2024 FINAL document column titled **2024 Actual**, and data from other sources, including Spektrix. In most cases, the client verified that the other sources were accurate, and that the 2024 Actual figures had been estimates. For the purpose of the baseline the verified alternative figure was substituted. For line items where there were no other sources for comparison, data included several items where the figure derived from a formula of the 2023 Actual data multiplied by a factor of 1.06; this data was adopted.

Where more granular data was available, the lines in the budget spreadsheet were split, so that as far as possible each line was attributed three further analysis categories: WHAT, WHERE, WHO, i.e. description, location (specific stage/activity, or specific site, or no location), and the budget controller.

From this, a baseline was established for future cost modelling. **This method produces an underlying deficit for the 2024 festival purely for planning purposes: it is not an audit or accountancy figure, nor an official outturn, and should not be considered or published as such: it is solely a "best estimate" baseline planning figure for using like for like, line by line planning for future events.**

Baseline

[redacted]		2024 ACTUAL	
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SURPLUS / DEFICIT		-£398,607	

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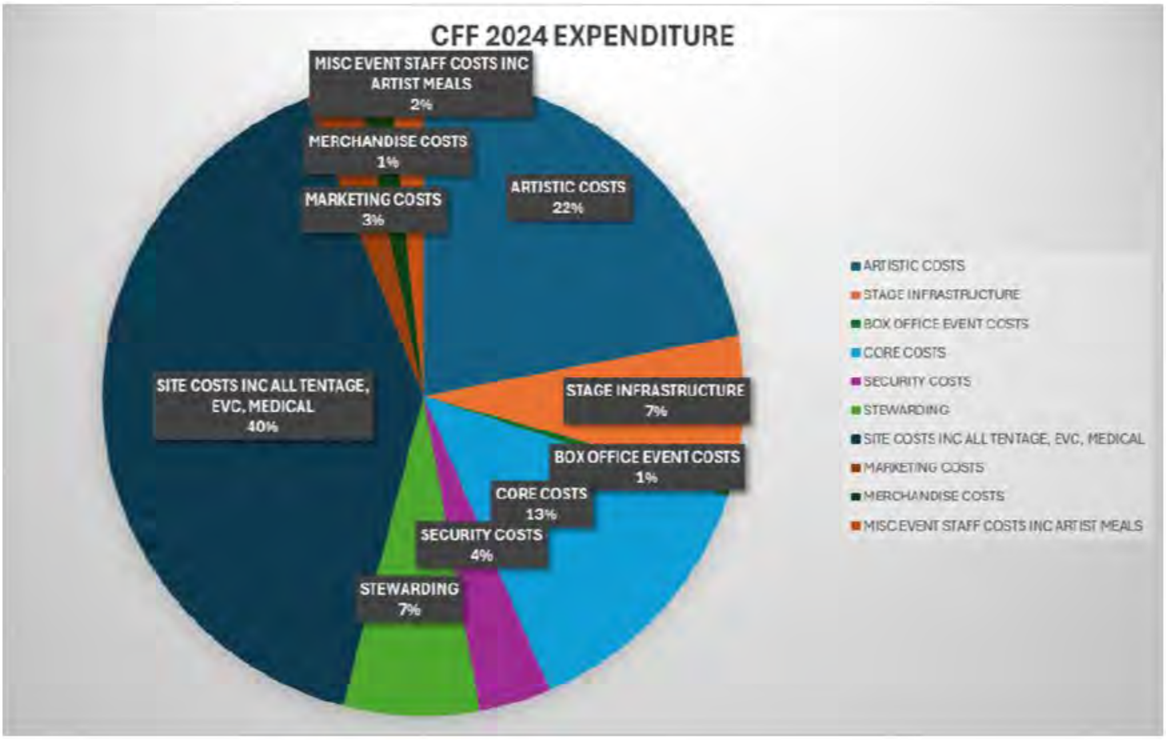


Notable variances to 2023

- £183,000 reduction in admissions income.
- £10,000 reduction in bar concession income.
- £92,000 additional spend on insurance.
- £34,000 additional spend on fence stewards: this included £30k of additional spend on out-sourced stewarding that had not featured in 2023 Actuals; there was not a commensurate reduction in directly engaged steward costs, however: these increased by over 7%.
- £6,500 additional spend on Children's Area artist fees.

Conclusions

- Overall costs increased 11.5% year on year, and income decreased by 13.1%.
- Underlying cost increase, adjusting for the exceptional insurance item, was 6.2%. Consumer price inflation in the 12 months to July 2024 was 3.7%.

Revenue from camping and vehicle pass sales for Coldhams Common (£33k) are considerably lower than the infrastructure, staffing and services costs of operating Coldhams Common (c.£100k), which is therefore in effect being subsidised from admissions revenue to the main Cherry Hinton Hall festival site. If these festivalgoers were accommodated elsewhere – either as additional campers at Cherry Hinton

Hall, hotels, or third-party caravan sites, it would represent a considerable cost-reduction, even if some services at Cherry Hinton Hall required augmenting to accommodate the additional numbers.

It emerged from consultation with the staff team that the named budget holder on the Budget 2024 Final document is no longer in post, and that it had not been clear who had responsibility in the interim for maintaining day to day budgetary records and forecasts, in a recognised Executive Producer role or similar. This is an acknowledged area for improving process and control.

10. Operational Efficiency

A review of the production and operational plans for 2024 was undertaken alongside the financial review data. This included a review of documents, a discursive meeting with the Production Manager and Counterculture Associates Luke Fitzmaurice of LFX Events, and Adam Slough of JSL Productions, both highly experienced event site managers and producers, plus a follow up meeting and correspondence primarily concerning validation of 2024 financial actuals.

Documents

Documents reviewed included;

- The 2024 Management Control Document (redacted) and Risk Assessments
- Premises Licence for Cherry Hinton Hall
- Site Plans including 2014 plan, Coldhams Common and Netherhall School car park.
- CFF 2024. Stage Area Costs
- CFF 2024. Satellite Site's Production Costs
- Costed stewarding and security schedules
- Detailed infrastructure supplier specifications, costed quotes and contracts

Appraisal

The infrastructure specifications are of a high standard, both backstage and for the public. This has historically been the case for the festival for several decades, and it has become expected – a tradition. It can be difficult to reverse, culturally.

For the specifications and suppliers being used, prices are not unrealistic. Some contracts are quite long-term, and others are with long-term incumbents: better value could be obtained from suppliers by more frequent challenge and competition, but this is constrained by role capacity and statutory procurement process. Our experience within the events and festivals sector indicates that standard local authority procurement systems are often not designed to accommodate the unique requirements involved in sourcing specialist festival staging and equipment.

While councils rightly prioritise value for money, traditional procurement parameters such as lowest cost or broad framework agreements these may not always result in the best outcomes in this context. Achieving genuine value for money requires an understanding of the nuances and technical demands of festival infrastructure, including safety, quality, and delivery reliability. Without this sector-specific expertise, there is a risk that procurement decisions could favour initial cost over long-term performance and event success.

The addition of a best and final price stage for procurement and the ability of a prospective supplier to offer and alternative (and more economical) specification would drive improved value for money.

Several members of the Festival Team identified the operating costs of Coldhams Common as the one expenditure cost-saving that could easily be implemented if instructed to do so. The provision at Coldhams Common is for live-in vehicles / caravans, and tent camping: the facilities include on-site parking; showers; catering; family campsite entertainment; floor-singers' stage; late night bar; craft stalls; free regular buses to the main site; a nearby local swimming pool. The facility to pitch tents near to parked cars was described as a "a dispensation" – it is highly unusual in most greenfield festival offers and is usually precluded because of the risk assessment process, as a reasonably practicable control for the elimination of a relatively significant risk. This dispensation can be assumed to be an attractive proposition to some attenders, who consider the convenience of vehicle proximity and lower cost per tent than at CHH outweighs the inconvenience of needing to use the shuttle bus service to the festival site.

Members of the Festival Team had determined, in correspondence with the former Festival Manager, that the theoretical maximum tent capacity at Cherry Hinton Hall is 1400, and that therefore in theory there had been sufficient residual capacity in 2024 for all 334 Coldhams tent pitches sold to be accommodated at Cherry Hinton Hall, in addition to the 782 pitches sold for Cherry Hinton Hall: 782 + 334 = 1116.

1400 is a reasonable capacity estimate based on the site plan dimensions: the Purple Guide to Health, Safety and Welfare at Outdoor Events provides the guidance of camping density between 476 to 543 tents per hectare (18.4m^2 – 21m^2 per tent), with an average occupancy of 2 to 2.4 persons per tent (the 2024 CFF average tent and vehicle capacity was 1.87) From the site plans, CFF tent density is lower than this on a purely mathematical basis, average between 350 to 400 tents per hectare (25m^2 – 28.6m^2 per tent), which gives a comfortable spatial "feel" to the campsite. There appears to be the scope to increase the tent capacity slightly, but this would require detailed site topographical and fire lane planning.

It follows theoretically that nearly all the *occupants* of the 300 vehicles at Coldhams could also have been accommodated at CHH if they had been tent users. That would have required considerable behavioural change, however. Consideration of whether

Coldhams vehicles could be accommodated at CHH is determined by several factors: formulaically, the Purple Guide indicates allocating $49m^2$ per vehicle pitch, around twice the area occupied by a CHH tent (and in practice multiples thereof for larger vehicles) but with additional consideration required for access routes. The Festival Team have concerns that the Coldhams vehicles could not be relocated to CHH too as at Coldhams they have historically had access to showers and sanitary disposal that might not be replicable at CHH.

If the preference is to continue as a greenfield event, the Festival Team should review two key areas,

- A site visit to consider site layout options to maximise the potential for the optimum mix of camping, vehicles, glamping, and arena, all versus revenue. Whereas some of this can be calculated from area maps it is necessarily informed by ground conditions, services, sightlines, and lived experience of the space.
- A line-by-line constructive challenge review of the subsequent specification for infrastructure, with a view to making cost reductions by varying requirements and/or suppliers.

The review might best be enabled by engaging practical onsite short-term support from a site management specialist, to assist in determining the terrain- and facility-specific optimum camping and vehicle accommodation allocations, and in the constructive challenge of infrastructure specifications, for example:

- There are a lot of cabins for an event of this scale, and replacing some cabins with tentage can produce 40-50% savings. Dressing Rooms – certainly other than Stage 1 – could be 3m clearspan marquees from a local company. A single secure lockup can serve all but major artists.
- Toilet cost per attendee is very high: the specification is nearly all premium trailers. Are there areas where more affordable options can reasonably be used?
- Fencing / Trackway / trackmat: the spend is high for an event of this scale; this has been contextualised by the propensity for flooding in areas of the site, and the strong history of being able to cope without cancellation in extreme weather years. Are there other solutions?
- AdLib are an outstanding company and Stage 1 needs this standard of provision. For the other stages, especially if scaled down in any future option, is there a cost benefit to using, e.g. Pearce?
- There is a potential cost benefit in using alternative structures that could accommodate the smaller stages.

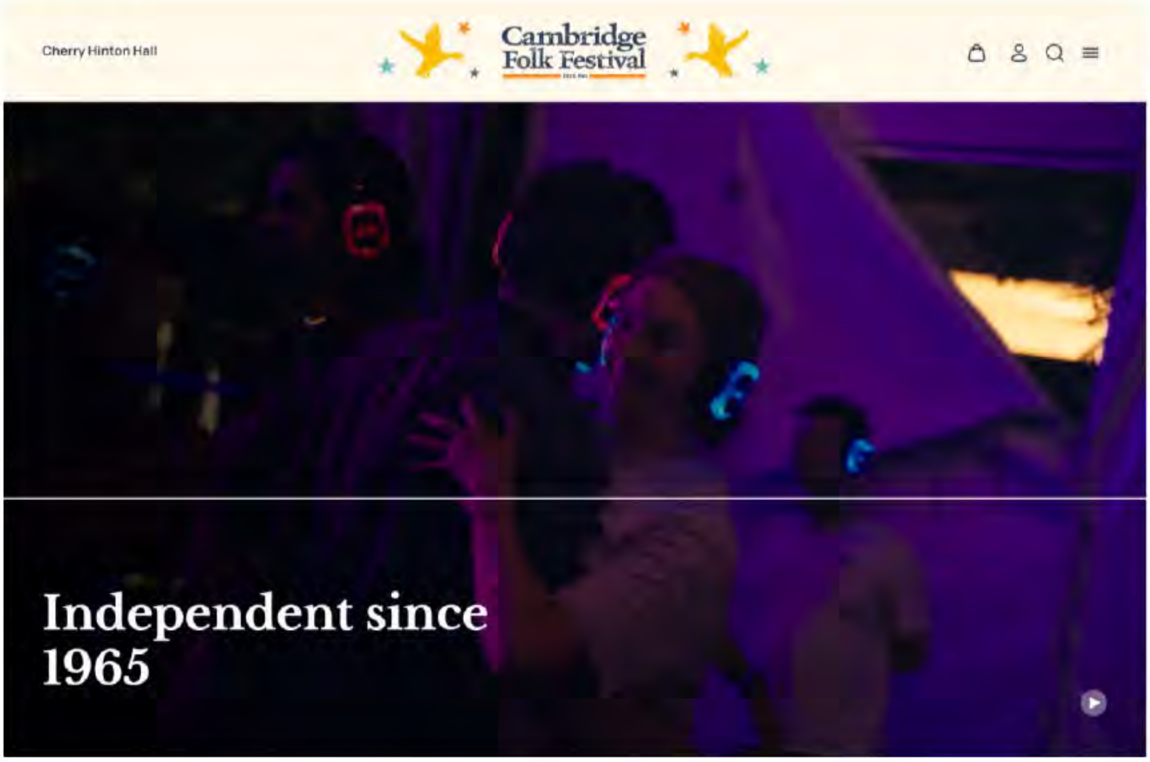
For the purpose of modelling Options 1 & 2 In the recommendations of this report, no significant adjustments have been made to the unit cost basis of infrastructure: *i.e.* where for example a stage is removed from the plan, the cost of its infrastructure staffing and programme is deducted, but other than assuming c. £2000 savings from rebalancing cabin and tentage requirements no significant changes have been assumed to the cost basis of provision for all remaining infrastructure elements.

11. Marketing & Communications

11.1 Current Marketing Plans and Approach

Branding

<u>Website</u>



The website landing page features the logo at the top, the site (Cherry Hinton Hall) and the strapline - 'Independent since 1965'.

The 'About Us' section states:
"'The long, star-studded list of incredibly talented musicians who played revellers through their weekend in the grounds of Cherry Hinton Hall only scratches the surface of what the event offers to festivalgoers.' Evening Standard

Held each year since 1965, the award-winning Cambridge Folk Festival is one of the longest running and most cherished music festivals in the world, attracting nearly fourteen thousand people, many of whom return year after year. Multiple generations have grown up on these festival grounds and we are proud to continue the tradition.

Cambridge is known for presenting superstars and rising stars from across the globe and our own back garden, stretching the boundaries of what is commonly thought of as 'Folk' music. But it is also a place where everyone is welcome and where there are no strangers, just friends you've not yet met.

Music and merriment lie just 15 minutes from Cambridge City Centre in Cherry Hinton Hall Park - a gorgeous setting filled with lush trees and greenery and a lovely duck pond. There, you can relax and enjoy the sounds of world class musicians, sample food and drink from our fabulous caterers and participate in our wellness workshops. There is something wonderful on offer for the entire family and it's positively magical!

A big part of the Festival's ethos is to celebrate and nurture emerging talent and to provide a pathway for artists to 'grow with us' from Stage 3 to the Main Stage. There is also The Hub, a special area for young musicians to take part in workshops, sessions and to perform providing a brand-new generation of musicians with opportunities to hone their craft.

"Come for the day or stay for the entire weekend and celebrate summer with us. Let's make beautiful memories together!"

Cambridge Folk Festival's positioning focuses on its historical legacy, programming world famous acts as well as its ethos of supporting emerging artists, and the Cherry Hinton site.

Brand Identity Overview

Current Positioning

- **Heritage-Centric** - Emphasises its history ("Independent since 1965"), longstanding traditions, and legacy of globally respected artists.
- **Inclusive & Warm** - "No strangers, just friends you haven't met yet" signals community, togetherness, and friendliness.
- **Family-Friendly & Nature-Oriented** - Strong references to Cherry Hinton Hall Park (trees, pond, ducks) suggest a serene, wholesome, green environment.

Key Messaging Elements

- Legacy - longevity, tradition, credibility

- Community - multigenerational, local pride, inclusive spirit
- Discovery - emerging talent, artist growth (Stage 3 to Main Stage)
- Setting - a hidden oasis, close to the city but a world apart

Strengths of the Current Branding

Area	Positive Elements
Visual Identity	Distinct logo with heritage feel; nature-oriented visuals of Cherry Hinton
Tone of Voice	Warm, poetic, inclusive and non-corporate tone ("beautiful memories together")
Narrative Consistency	Clear throughline of community, family, folk roots, and loyalty
Cultural Authenticity	Emphasis on tradition and emerging talent creates authenticity and musical integrity
Festival Ethos	"Grow with us" journey from Stage 3 to headline slots reflects deep artist-audience connection

Branding Weaknesses & Gaps

Issue	Details
Outdated Design Language	Visual design, while nostalgic, feels **dated** compared to more modern or playful competitor festivals (e.g. Green Man, Latitude, End of the Road)
Limited Visual Appeal for Younger Audiences	The brand doesn't speak clearly to 18–35's interested in genre fusion, sustainability, or Instagram-worthy experiences
No Cohesive Visual System Across Channels	Lack of consistent colour schemes, fonts, or graphic assets between website, social media, and print

No Campaign Identity Year-to-Year	Unlike Glastonbury or Green Man, CFF doesn't appear to use a **seasonal identity** to build anticipation (e.g. themes, colourways, taglines)
No Distinct Festival "Experience" Branding	Visual identity doesn't capture the uniqueness of the experience—music, nature, food, community, family activities, etc.

Website Review (User Interface (UI), User Experience (UX) and Content)

Overall UX & Navigation

UX Area	Assessment
Homepage	Functional but not immersive. Text-heavy. The emotional and atmospheric elements of the festival are described rather than shown.
Navigation	Usable but not intuitive. Festivalgoers need easier access to key info - tickets, line-up, accommodation, getting there.
Visual Media	Lacks high-impact video, animated content, or dynamic photo galleries that convey excitement or FOMO.
Mobile Experience	Adequate, but not fully optimised — slower load times, some inconsistencies in button spacing and formatting.
Booking Journey	Ticketing info is clear, but process could be **more visual and emotionally persuasive** (e.g., "Choose your vibe" path - family, VIP, first-timer).

It has been noted that the limited information on the website is partly due to the standard festival not running this year and this review being currently undertaken.

Content Review

Content Area	Strength	Gaps
About Us	Heartfelt, authentic copy	Too static. Doesn't evolve year-to-year

Artist Line-Up	Rich history, name drops	Missing artist highlights, Spotify links, video embeds
Accessibility Info	Clear and inclusive	Could benefit from a **dedicated accessibility video tour**
Family & Community Info	Mentioned in passing	Needs a dedicated section - "Festival for Families" or "Our Community"
Food, Wellness, Activities		

11.2 Review of Current Marketing Strategy

Review of Current Marketing Strategy

CFF has a strong and respected brand underpinned by heritage, community, and location. However, its **marketing approach lacks ambition, coherence and innovation**, and it is underperforming in multiple strategic areas -

- **Outdated CRM Practices -** The customer database (Spektrix) hasn't been deduped in five years. Tagging and segmentation features are underutilised, limiting data-driven marketing.
- **Audience Insight Gap -** No current use of artform classifiers, profiling tools (e.g. Audience Agency segmentation), or cross-platform audience insights (e.g. with The Junction).
- **Digital & Campaign Shortfalls -** Campaigns lack timeliness and integration. No strategic nurturing of VIP/friends schemes or donor funnels.
- **Audience Development Weaknesses -** There's no clear strategy to attract new audiences (especially younger ones). Premium tickets, community engagement models, and targeted offers remain underused.
- **Brand Positioning -** "Folk" isn't the problem—audiences understand and respect the term. It remains a powerful anchor when presented inclusively (e.g. folk & roots, crossover acts).
- **Promotional Partnerships -** The loss of BBC Radio 2 as a broadcast partner is significant. This has impacted national visibility and credibility.

Sponsorship – Where It Stands

CFF lacks a coherent commercial sponsorship and fundraising strategy:

- No dedicated commercial development role to drive long terms partnerships. A role exists but without the necessary accurate data this is difficult to close

- Untapped potential with local brands (e.g. local businesses local breweries, hotels). Local hotel Turing Locke sponsored The Den in 2024. Local Milton brewery provide beer.
- No advertising strategy to drive revenue – on site, or perimeter advertising for instance (some ticket ad space has been sold in the past)
- Pouring rights and food concessions lack strategic monetisation.
- No philanthropic fundraising vehicle (though a "Friends of CFF" Trust is proposed).
- Sponsorship integrations are not experience-led or well-leveraged.

Ticket pricing 2024

Ticket	Customer	Price
Weekend	Standard	£230
Thursday	Standard	£35
Friday/Saturday/Sunday	Standard	£89
Weekend	Cambridge City Resident	£196
Friday	Cambridge City Resident	£60
Weekend	Cambridge City Resident Disabled Access	£147
Friday	Cambridge City Resident Disabled Access	£45
Weekend	Cambridge City Resident Personal Assistant	£49
Friday	Cambridge City Resident Personal Assistant	£15
Weekend	Premium	£395

Car parking weekend		£20
Car parking day		£6
Cherry Hinton Caravan		£145
Cherry Hinton Caravan	Disabled	£107
Coldham's Common Large Caravan		£95
Coldham's Common Small Caravan		£65
Cherry Hinton tent		£75
Coldham's Common Tent		£55

Audience Analysis

The documents provided offer a rich tapestry of both qualitative and quantitative insights that help shape a clearer understanding of the current and potential audience landscape. These findings highlight both long-standing strengths and emerging challenges, painting a picture of a dynamic but evolving audience base.

A key feature of the current audience is its loyalty - many attendees have supported the organisation for decades, with a significant proportion aged 60 and above. This ageing committed audience is frequently cited as both a vital strength and a sustainability concern. Their consistent support underscores a deeply rooted cultural attachment, but it also raises questions about future growth and generational renewal.

Conversely, the data also points to untapped opportunities, particularly within the local Cambridge community. Despite proximity, this group remains under-engaged, especially in relation to community-based schemes and local ticket discounts. The potential to better connect with this audience through targeted pricing strategies and enhanced CRM (Customer Relationship Management) approaches stands out as a clear avenue for development.

There is a visible intention to diversify and rejuvenate the audience profile. This includes attracting younger demographics through new programming initiatives such as family-focused activities, comedy offerings, and a reimagined version of the "Den" - a space historically used for more contemporary or youth-oriented programming. Yet, despite these efforts, certain gaps remain. Notably, the organisation has struggled to capture the interest of emerging music fans - particularly those who discover artists through platforms like BBC Introducing or Radio 2. This signals a disconnect between the programming offer and the listening habits of a younger, more digitally savvy generation.

Together, these insights allow us to identify key behavioural and demographic audience clusters, each with distinct needs, expectations, and potential growth value;

- **Heritage Loyalists** – Long-term supporters, many of whom are 60+, who value tradition and continuity.
- **Local First-Timers** – Cambridge residents, often drawn by discounted tickets, testing the waters of engagement.
- **Folk Families** – Multigenerational attendees attracted by a safe, welcoming, and atmospheric experience.
- **Cultural Explorers** – Arts-inclined individuals who are curious but not yet actively engaged.
- **Music Discoverers** – Younger fans who follow new and niche acts, often outside the mainstream, and connect through digital platforms.

By understanding these segments in more detail, CFF can better design strategies to retain core audiences while simultaneously growing and diversifying the base for long-term resilience.

Audience Overview (Current Snapshot)

Attendance Numbers

- Peak recent attendance c. **7500.**
- Tickets Sales 2023 11001.
- New capacity models being scoped at **7,500 or 12,000** to align with budget and infrastructure realities.

Core Demographics

- Loyal "Heritage" Base aged 60+, many of whom are long-time returnees.
- Festival has multi-generational recognition, with some younger family members attending with older generations.
- Skewed toward middle- to upper-income audience with high brand loyalty but declining long-term growth potential.

Geography

- Local/regional audience from Cambridge and East of England.
- Secondary catchment includes London and South East.
- Limited national or international draw in current form (especially post-Radio 2).

Musical Preferences

- Traditional folk and acoustic sounds appreciated.
- Audience values **musicianship, storytelling, and cultural authenticity.**
- CFF once had a reputation for introducing future stars but **recently has lacked emerging/mid-tier acts.**
- Some audience resistance to change but evidence shows **openness to 'roots' crossover** if aligned with festival ethos.
- Audience Segmentation (Proposed Personas).

Segment	Description	Opportunity
The Heritage Loyalist	60+, long-term attendee, stays onsite, buys early	Preserve connection, create exclusive "Legacy Lounge" or alumni programme
The Folk Family	Parents with children, attending for community, camping, and activities	Expand family zone, children's programme, promote "Festival as Family Holiday"
The Cultural Explorer	30s-50s, well-travelled, arts-curious, possibly not folk-first	Engage with crossover acts, comedy, storytelling, workshops, premium offers
The Music Discoverer	18–35, loves new sounds, attends other festivals (e.g., Green Man, End of the Road)	Target with emerging acts, BBC Introducing, Spotify integrations, youth pricing
The Local First-Timer	Cambridge area resident, possibly younger, has never been	Use discounted Thursday/Friday tickets, partner with local influencers/schools

Audience Behaviour (Based on Insight & Assumptions)

Behaviour	Notes

Ticket Buying	Strong early uptake from legacy audience; younger/new audiences tend to buy later. No timed urgency strategy currently in place.
Engagement	Community feel is strong onsite, but **weak year-round engagement** via email, social, or content
Spending Patterns	Heritage audience leans premium (VIP tix, bar spend). Younger visitors need value-focused offers
Booking Drivers	Line-up (especially headliners) is key for younger and mid-tier audiences. Older audiences often book based on tradition and experience

Gaps & Challenges

- **Ageing Core Audience** - While loyal, they cannot sustain long-term viability.
- **Low Awareness Among Youth** - Younger music fans and families don't see CFF as for them
- **Limited Audience Profiling** - No usage of artform segmentations like Audience Agency's Culture Segments
- **Minimal Use of CRM for Segmented Engagement** - No targeting by interest, age, or booking behaviour
- **Under-leveraged First-Time Buyer Insights** - No retargeting strategy or welcome journey for new attendees

11.3 Recommendations for Future Strategy

Objective

To revitalise the Cambridge Folk Festival by modernising its marketing approach, strengthening its community connection, diversifying its audience, and reestablishing its position as a flagship UK music festival: this applies equally whether the decision is taken to continue with the festival primarily as a greenfield event, or whether the festival is reimagined as an urban event, using the city's existing venue and architectural assets. This strategy blends heritage with innovation, leveraging CFF's rich legacy while addressing gaps in audience engagement, branding, digital experience, and sponsorship.

It should be noted that investment will be required in CFF future marketing efforts particularly in attracting high spending VIP ticket purchases. This should be a key consideration in partnership and sponsorship selections.

Engaging New Audiences – Gen Z and Millennials Marketing Insights and Music and Festival Engagement

Marketing to Gen Z and Millennials through music and festivals means going beyond promotion, it requires embedding your brand into their culture**,** values, and digital lives. The more nuanced your insights, the more likely the CFF brand is to earn **attention, advocacy, and trust** from this influential generations.

Who is Gen Z?

Age in 2025 - 13–28 years old (obviously we will be targeting over 18's.

Born roughly between 1997 and 2012, Gen Z is the first fully digital-native generation. They are **hyper-connected**, **socially conscious**, and highly **individualistic**, yet they crave community and experiences that offer **authenticity** and **belonging**. Their decisions are shaped by values, peer influence, and **cultural alignment** more than traditional advertising.

Key Marketing Traits of Gen Z

- **Meaningful Experience Over Ownership** - Gen Z prioritises **memorable experiences** over material goods - making music festivals a cultural sweet spot.
- **Short Attention Spans, High Engagement -** While they scroll fast, Gen Z deeply engages with content that resonates. Short-form video (e.g., TikTok, Reels) is crucial.
- **Identity-Driven Consumption** - Music is both a personal expression and a community-builder. Brands that align with Gen Z's self-image or values can earn loyalty.
- **Sceptical of Brands, Drawn to Purpose** - They expect transparency, inclusivity, and social responsibility. Performative marketing is quickly called out.

Music & Festivals: Behavioural Insights

Music Consumption

- **Streaming-Centric** - Spotify, Apple Music, and TikTok are primary sources of discovery.
- **Algorithm-Informed Tastes** - Gen Z blends genres, influenced more by moods and playlists than artists alone.
- **Peer-Curated Culture** - User-generated playlists and TikTok virality heavily influence what's popular.

Festival Behaviour:

- **Social Currency** - Festivals are status events—driven by **Instagrammability**, FOMO, and cultural relevance.
- **DIY Aesthetics & Self-Branding** - Attendees craft outfits, content, and online personas tailored to festival experiences.
- **Values Led Attendance** - Eco-conscious, diverse, and inclusive festivals hold more appeal.
- **Pre and Post Engagement** - The festival experience begins with the **line-up drop** and continues with **content sharing** long after.

How Keen Insights Drive Strategy

- **Data-Driven Personas** - Social listening, sentiment analysis, and behavioural tracking help brands pinpoint micro-trends and subcultures (e.g. indie sleaze revival, cottagecore, rave fashion).
- **Influencer Integration** - Nano-and micro-influencers resonate more than celebrities, offering authenticity and niche reach.
- **Experience Marketing** - Branded activations at festivals that are interactive, story-worthy, and values-aligned can turn consumers into advocates.
- **Personalisation at Scale** - Leveraging AI and data to offer music suggestions, merchandise, or festival perks tailored to individual preferences boosts engagement.

Who Are Millennials?

Age in 2025: 29–44 years old

Born roughly between **1981 and 1996**, Millennials are the first generation to come of age during the internet boom. They bridge the gap between analogue and digital, and value both innovation and nostalgia. Their music and festival behaviours are shaped by personal growth, shared experiences, and social awareness.

Key Marketing Traits of Millennials

- **Experience-Led Living** – Millennials value cultural, musical, and travel experiences to define identity and fulfilment.
- **Digitally Immersed but Discerning** – Comfortable with digital platforms, they favour content that informs, entertains, or connects emotionally.
- **Community & Connection** – While individualistic, they also seek connection through shared interests and values.
- **Cause-Oriented Consumers** – Ethical, transparent, and inclusive brand behaviour is expected, not optional.

Music & Festivals: Behavioural Insights (Millennials)

Music Consumption

- **Streaming-Era Pioneers** – Early adopters of Spotify, Apple Music, and Bandcamp. Playlists and podcast-style storytelling are valued.
- **Mood & Memory-Driven Listening** – Music is linked to lifestyle and nostalgia, often organised by life moments or emotional tone.
- **Artist Loyalty** – Millennials show stronger loyalty to artists and genres compared to Gen Z's more fluid tastes.

Festival Behaviour

- **Experience-Driven Attendance** – Festivals are immersive and intentional – a blend of music, culture, and comfort.
- **Less FOMO, More Fulfilment** – Their focus is on enjoyment, relaxation, and personal meaning rather than social media optics.
- **Inclusive & Evolving** – Older Millennials may attend with partners or children, shifting demand toward more inclusive and versatile experiences.

- **Content with Depth** – While active online, content sharing tends to centre on storytelling, memory-making, and deeper engagement.

How Keen Insights can Drive CFF Strategy

- **Premium & Comfort-Oriented Activations** – Wellness zones, gourmet food stalls, boutique camping, and community lounges resonate.
- **Value-Based Loyalty** – Aligning with long-term causes like sustainability, mental health, or cultural equity builds brand affinity.
- **Cross-Channel Connection** – Integrated campaigns across email, podcasts, Instagram, and mobile apps sustain relationships.
- **Word-of-Mouth Amplification** – Reviews, testimonials, and personal recommendations drive discovery and trust.
- **Legacy & Retention Strategies** – Loyalty programmes, returning guest incentives, and personalised experiences deepen connection.

*Age ranges and generational definitions adapted from the **Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), 2023** and **Pew Research Centre**.*

Brand Identity & Messaging

CFF has a powerful and emotionally resonant brand rooted in community, history, and musical integrity. However, to remain relevant and grow its audience, the brand must evolve. The goal is to maintain authenticity while modernising visual and verbal identity to appeal to younger audiences and wider cultural communities.

- Develop a flexible and consistent brand toolkit that includes logo variations for different uses, a refreshed colour palette, and seasonal artwork.
- Introduce an annual brand theme to unify campaigns and create excitement (e.g. *"Folk That Feels Like Now"*).
- Highlight spaces for experimentation and youth culture, supporting a fresh visual identity for this venue.

Quick Wins

- Create and promote a 2026 theme with updated campaign visuals.
- Commission vibrant and diverse photo and video content that shows the CFF experience through the eyes of a younger and more diverse audience.

Website & Digital Experience

CFF's website is serviceable but underwhelming. It does not fully reflect the spirit or excitement of the festival. The goal is to improve user experience, particularly on mobile, and provide rich, engaging content that drives ticket sales and enhances pre-event anticipation.

- Redesign the homepage with immersive visuals and interactive content.
- Implement persona-specific navigation journeys (e.g., "First Time Here?", "Family Planning a Weekend?", "Returning Regular?").
- Incorporate live artist content, playlists, interviews, and media.

Quick Wins

- Refresh the homepage with a dynamic hero banner and 2026 campaign copy.
- Add a dedicated landing page for first-time attendees, including testimonials and practical info.

CRM & Data Strategy (Spektrix)

CFF uses Spektrix but is not leveraging its full capabilities. Audience data is out of date, segmentation is minimal, and no clear customer journeys are in place. The goal is to clean and restructure the database and build automated journeys to deepen engagement.

- Conduct a database audit and deduplication process.
- Introduce behavioural and demographic tagging aligned with marketing personas.
- Launch automated email sequences for first-time bookers, high-value buyers, and VIP prospects.

Quick Wins

- Run an internal Spektrix clean-up and tagging project.
- Launch a simple welcome journey for new attendees.

Audience Segmentation & Campaign Journeys

Understanding the audience and speaking directly to their interests is crucial. This section defines clear audience personas and campaign pathways for each.

Key Personas:

- **Heritage Loyalist** - Longstanding attendees, value tradition and nostalgia.
- **Folk Family** - Parents with children, drawn to community and value.
- **Music Discoverer** - Younger, adventurous audience interested in emerging talent.
- **Cultural Explorer** - Arts-curious, experience-focused attendees.
- **Local First-Timer** - Cambridge area residents trying CFF for the first time.

- Build segmented email and social media campaigns per persona.
- Align ticketing and content offers with known preferences and behaviours.
- Leverage partnerships to engage new segments, especially local and younger audiences.

Quick Wins

- Use CRM to identify and tag these personas.
- Launch a local awareness campaign with discounted Thursday tickets.

Content & Social Strategy

CFF should be a year-round brand, not just a summer event. Engaging content helps build loyalty and buzz, particularly among younger and digital-native audiences.

- Launch the "Folk Diaries" series with artist interviews, community stories, and event and entertainment experience tips.
- Schedule weekly content drops, such as Spotify playlists or behind-the-scenes features.
- Use Instagram Reels and TikTok to introduce artists and showcase festival experience moments.

Quick Wins

- Post regular user-generated content under a community hashtag like #MyFirstCFF.

- Share themed playlists reflecting different audience vibes.

Ticketing & Offers

Optimise the ticketing strategy to reward loyalty (particularly VIP tickets high cash margin contribution) encourage early booking and introduce value-based offers for families and newcomers.

- Launch early bird weekend tickets first to drive commitment.
- Delay day ticket release to preserve full weekend uptake.
- Create promotional packages - family, premium, VIP, and group discounts.
- Launch a "refer a friend" scheme with tiered rewards.

Quick Wins

- Email loyal customers early with premium upgrade opportunities.
- Integrate booking process with upsells (parking, merch, VIP).

Sponsorship & Partnership Activation

While there is a role within the organisation responsible for commercial development and partnership acquisition, this position currently lacks the **strategic mandate, resource backing, and access to high-quality audience and performance data** necessary to effectively drive long-term sponsorships, advertising agreements, and brand activations.
Key Issues:

- **Role Ambiguity** - The existing role appears underdefined and insufficiently empowered. It functions more as a support or coordination position rather than a proactive, target-driven commercial leadership role that is typical in comparable festivals.
- **Absence of Robust Audience Insight** - Without accurate, up-to-date data on audience demographics, behaviour, and segmentation (e.g. Audience Spectrum profiling, CRM-driven insights), potential sponsors cannot be presented with compelling, quantifiable value propositions. This severely limits the ability to approach and convert meaningful long-term partnerships.
- **No Unified Sponsorship Strategy** - There is no cohesive strategy in place that outlines tiered partnership packages, benefits, activation opportunities,

and year-round engagement. There is no mapping o brands or corporates to the audience based on values for example. There is no screening in place and the current approach seems hyper local (which is great) but restricts ambitions and the opportunity to engage with bigger brands that would resonate with current audiences. Without such a framework, outreach is ad hoc and lacks the professionalism required to attract high-calibre partners.

- **Untapped Potential** - Opportunities to collaborate with local and regional brands (e.g. boutique hotels, ethical food partners, tech companies) are being missed but the recommended option will open these opportunities. In the absence of a proactive lead who can nurture these relationships, the festival cannot monetise its considerable cultural equity.
- **Experience Integration Missing** - There is minimal integration of sponsor experiences into the festival programme (e.g. branded lounges, co-curated stages, sponsor-hosted experiences) a key industry trend. Without this, partnerships are restricted to low-impact logo placement or pouring rights.

Strategic Implications

To position the Cambridge Folk Festival for financial resilience and brand revitalisation under Option 3, it is essential to establish a **dedicated Commercial Development Manager**. This role is currently NOT budgeted but in the initial two years (if option 3 is taken up) at 0.5 FTE would more than pay for itself inleading on costs.

- Target-oriented, experienced in arts sponsorship, and empowered to negotiate multi-year deals.
- Supported by a data analyst or marketing insights function.
- Integrated into programming and marketing planning cycles to align sponsor offers with audience profiles and stage experiences.

Investing in this function would unlock significant revenue potential and better position the festival within the competitive sponsorship landscape of the live events sector.

- Develop a sponsor pitch deck based on audience segments and engagement opportunities.
- The offer should be tiered for instance Gold, Silver, Bronze
- Invite partners to co-curate or host onsite activations.
- Create branded content series with sponsors (e.g. Q&As, artist stories).
- Look at engaging with a professional agency on a performance/commission basis (which is common in this field).

Quick Wins

- Identify five potential brand or cultural partners for low-cost 2025 activations.
- Upload a sponsorship prospectus to the website.

Year-Round Engagement & Community Building

Keep the spirit of the festival alive between events. Community connection and brand loyalty can be nurtured through regular updates, events, and co-creation.

Advocacy and Ambassadors

CFF are in the enviable position to have a brand with tangible provenance and a core loyal audience. Amongst this group are a hardcore minority opposed to change. CFF should explore how they engage this group and more widely to become "Informal" ambassadors for CFF thought the year. They should be engaged in understanding that without change the Festival's future is in doubt.

- Send a monthly newsletter with stories, sneak peeks, and offers.
- Run a winter/spring mini event with emerging artists to build anticipation.
- Use festival as a platform for broader cultural conversations and local pride.

Quick Wins

- Engage and utilise core audience
- Launch monthly email content schedule.
- Run a survey post-festival asking fans to help shape CFF 2026

Introduce a Tiered Concessions Strategy

Instead of treating all vendors equally or ad hoc, CFF should segment its food & beverage offer into **tiered experiences.**

Tier 1 - Premium/Experiential

- Curated spaces with **artisanal/local produce**, themed around folk heritage, sustainability, or regional identity (e.g., *"Folk & Flavour Pavilion"*).
- Opportunities for **sponsor-branded bars or lounges**, with exclusive access or tasting sessions e.g. a **Cambridge Gin Lounge** or **Adnams Ale Hall** with storytelling, sampling, or folk-song pairing.

Tier 2 -Core/General Concessions

- High-volume vendors selected through a **competitive tender** with minimum service and sustainability standards.
- Use branded signage, shared marketing, and a unified design system to elevate quality perception and consistency.

Tier 3: Community-Driven & Social Impact

- Stalls run by **local non-profits, schools, or cooperatives** with reduced rates tying into CFF's values of community and inclusion.
- Offers both good-will PR and local relevance.

This gives CFF leverage to

- Charge premium fees to Tier 1 vendors in exchange for exclusivity or brand placement.
- Offer scalable vendor options that match audience expectations and spending power.

Leverage Pouring Rights Beyond Flat Fees

Current arrangements likely involve flat concessions or low-value exclusive rights. Instead, these can be structured as strategic partnerships**.**

Shift from Transactional to Collaborative:

- Work with drink partners (e.g. local craft breweries, distilleries, kombucha makers) to co-create festival-branded drinks or festival-exclusive products.
- Structure deals as value bundles, e.g.
    - Fee + co-branded assets (e.g. reusable cups)
    - Fee + programming support (e.g. "sponsor a songwriters' session")
    - Fee + infrastructure contribution (e.g. building a branded bar tent)

Metrics for Better Value

- Instead of just income per pitch, assess **value per attendee touchpoint** - how many people engage with a drink brand through activities, tastings, or merch.

Activate Local & Heritage Brands Strategically

Currently, local business presence (like Adnams) is ad hoc and passive. CFF should aim to curate and choreograph place-based brand storytelling.

How to Activate Local Brands

- **"Meet the Maker" Experiences** — e.g. A Cambridgeshire Cider masterclass or Adnams storytelling with live folk music.
- **Branded Stages or Sessions** — e.g., "Folk & Ferment" acoustic evenings sponsored by a local brewery.
- **Cross-promotion** — featured profiles on the website, social media, or even pre-festival "tasting sessions" in city venues.

By controlling how and where these brands appear, CFF can command higher fees and build **mutual value**.

Use Audience Data to Guide Vendor Mix

A critical opportunity: audience insight is underused when selecting F&B vendors. By linking CRM data (via Spektrix) to Audience Spectrum segments, CFF can curate the vendor lineup based on audience lifestyle and values.

Example Alignment by Persona

Audience Segment	***F&B Preference***	***Vendor Fit***
Heritage Loyalists	*Quality ales, heritage food, sit-down areas*	*Local breweries, artisanal pies, table seating*
Folk Families	*Healthy meals, kid-friendly options*	*Fresh wraps, juices, ethical snacks*
Cultural Explorers	*Curious and premium taste, storytelling*	*Global fusion, regional dishes, craft spirits*

- *Ask vendors to submit a proposal outlining how they connect with one or more* ***audience segments****.*
- *Score bids not just on price, but on* ***alignment with audience engagement goals****.*

CFF has the brand equity, and location uniqueness to develop a premium, curated, and differentiated concessions model. Moving away from ad hoc vendor booking toward a tiered, data-driven, brand-integrated system could generate higher revenue and deliver richer experiences.

CFF 2025–2026 Indicative Media Outreach Plan

Timeline Phases

Phase	***Timing***	***Focus***
Phase 1	*Q3 2025*	*Brand relaunch, early engagement*
Phase 2	*Q4 2025*	*Ticketing & campaign push*
Phase 3	*Q1 2026*	*Community building, final sales*
Phase 4	*Q2 2026*	*Festival lead-in, onsite amplification*

Segment-Specific Media Strategy

Heritage Loyalist

Profile - 60+, multi-year attendee, emotionally connected, trusts legacy media

Channels
- Email newsletters
- Local radio & press (e.g. BBC Cambs, Cambridge News, freesheets, local commercial radio)
- Direct mail / festival alumni postcards
- Facebook organic posts and groups

Content Strategy
- Nostalgic stories (“Your First CFF, 1972”)
- Artist retrospectives and legacy highlights

- VIP/premium upgrades ("Make this year your most memorable")

Example Campaign
"You've Been With Us Since the Start — Here's Your Early Access"
A direct email + printed invitation pack to legacy attendees offering priority access to premium tickets and a legacy lounge onsite.

Folk Family

Profile - Parents, often under 45, looking for wholesome, shared experiences

Channels
- Meta ads (Facebook/Instagram)
- Mumsnet/Cambridge Kids platforms
- Local school newsletters
- Community radio + school/PTA partnerships

Content Strategy
- "Top 5 Family Things to Do at CFF"
- Discounts on Thursday/Friday day tickets
- Family camping bundles + Den highlights

Example Campaign
"This Summer, Let the Whole Family Unplug and Dance"
Instagram carousel ad with images of children drumming, families (ceilidh) dancing, and peaceful moments under trees. Swipe-up to "Build Your Family Bundle."

Music Discoverer (18–35)

Profile - Festival-hopping, genre-fluid, experience-focused, spends time on TikTok and Instagram

Channels
- TikTok Reels and IG Stories
- Spotify ads + CFF curated playlists
- YouTube shorts
- BBC Introducing, Resident Advisor, DICE blog partnerships

Content Strategy
- "6 Artists You'll Say You Saw First at CFF"
- Stage 3 stage teaser videos

- UGC campaigns and influencer takeovers

Example Campaign
"Folk, but Not as You Know It"
Short-form IG/TikTok series showing snippets of genre-bending sets, quirky interviews, and real-time reactions. Overlayed with a trending folk/electronic remix and call to "Join the Movement."

Local First-Timer

Profile - Cambridge-based, not yet engaged with CFF, curious but unsure

Channels
- Geo-targeted Facebook/Google ads (CB postcodes)
- Cambridge Independent, Cambridge Matters
- Posters/flyers at libraries, cafes, co-working spaces
- Local influencer/blogger outreach

Content Strategy
- "What's Happening in Your Back Garden This Summer?"
- First-timer guides - maps, food, travel
- Discount code for Thursday/Friday day entry

Example Campaign
"Try It For a Day – Your Festival, Your City"
Geo-targeted Facebook ad offering 2-for-1 tickets for CB1–CB5 postcodes, featuring a walking map from the city to Cherry Hinton and interviews with local attendees.

Cultural Explorer

Profile - 35–55, arts-curious, often London/SE-based, loves Glastonbury/End of the Road

Channels
- Guardian Culture + Arts Professional display ads
- Instagram Reels with strong visuals
- Podcasts (e.g., Folk on Foot, TalkArt)
- Newsletter collabs with The Line of Best Fit, London in Stereo

Content Strategy
- "A Weekend of Folk, Food and Wonder"

- Behind-the-scenes with curators
- Showcase of storytelling acts and cultural elements (wellness, workshops, talks)

Example Campaign
"More Than Music - Your Arts Festival Escape"
Sponsored Guardian article + IG ad campaign linking arts programme to broader cultural experiences - "Folk meets food, thought, and theatre."

Paid Media Budget Framework (Indicative Allowances)

Channel	Target	Duration	Budget Estimate
Meta Ads (FB/IG)	Families, Locals	8 weeks	£5,000
TikTok Reels	18–35s, Music Discoverers	4 weeks	£3,500
Spotify Playlists + Audio	Younger/new	6 weeks	£2,000
Guardian Culture	Cultural Explorers	4 weeks	£4,000
Local Radio	Heritage + Local	10 weeks	£1,500
Influencer Partnerships	All segments	Rolling	£2,500

Based on the extensive review of the Cambridge Folk Festival Final Report, here is a headline **recommended marketing budget** for **Option 3** (the move to a city centre model post-fallow year), viewed through the lens of a **Festival Marketing Director**:

Recommended/suggested Key KPIs by Segment

Segment	*KPIs*
Heritage Loyalist	*Early bird ticket uptake, VIP upgrade rate, email open rate*
Folk Family	*Family ticket sales, bundle redemption, Den attendance*
Music Discoverer	*Social shares, playlist follows, Den/day ticket sales*
Local First-Timer	*First-time ticket sales, discount code usage, email sign-ups*
Cultural Explorer	*VIP ticket sales, package conversion, cultural content engagement*

Summary Timeline & Rollout

Phase	***Timing***	***Focus***
Q2 2025	*Brand refresh, website tweaks, CRM clean-up*	*Planning & Prep*
Q3 2025	*Launch 2026 brand theme, content & email campaigns*	*Build Momentum*
Q4 2025	*Ticketing live, persona campaigns, partnerships activated*	*Sales Push*
Q1 2026	*VIP/donor push, family promos, digital content peaks*	*Acceleration*
Q2 2026	*Onsite activation, social sharing, data capture*	*Delivery & Retention*

Ticket Pricing

Ticket	**Customer**	**2024 Price**
Weekend	Standard	£230
Thursday	Standard	£35
Friday/Saturday/Sunday	Standard	£89
Weekend	Cambridge City Resident	£196
Friday	Cambridge City Resident	£60
Weekend	Cambridge City Resident Disabled Access	£147
Friday	Cambridge City Resident Disabled Access	£45
Weekend	Cambridge City Resident Personal Assistant	£49

Friday	Cambridge City Resident Personal Assistant	£15
Weekend	Premium	£395
Car parking weekend		£20
Car parking day		£6
Cherry Hinton Caravan		£145
Cherry Hinton Caravan	Disabled	£107
Coldham's Common Large Caravan		£95
Coldham's Common Small Caravan		£65
Cherry Hinton tent		£75
Coldham's Common Tent		£55

12. Artist & Programme Review

The Cambridge Folk Festival (CFF) retains a distinguished legacy, with its programming heritage shaped by notable figures such as Ken Woollard and Eddie Barcan. Historically, their vision positioned CFF as the preeminent folk festival in the United Kingdom. However, the evolution of the festival market has introduced substantial competition, notably from events such as Celtic Connections, Manchester Folk Festival, and broader-appeal festivals including Latitude. These developments have progressively diminished CFF's share of the folk audience.

While CFF maintains a loyal and passionate audience base, predominantly aged 60 and above, this demographic alone is insufficient to sustain the festival's long-term financial and operational viability. Future programming strategies must simultaneously protect CFF's legacy and evolve the offer to engage new and younger audiences.

Our strategic review highlights the critical need to redefine the programming brief. CFF must preserve its reputation as a launchpad for emerging artists while also expanding its appeal. In recent years, the reduced presence of emergent and mid-tier acts, particularly those championed by platforms like BBC Radio 2, has narrowed the Festival's audience reach. The programming approach has at times been overly constrained by traditional interpretations of folk music, limiting its relevance and competitive edge.

To restore and future-proof the Festival, we recommend a return to a broader 'folk and roots' programming identity. This allows for a more expansive and dynamic curation that encompasses traditional folk, Americana, country, bluegrass, gospel, early rock and roll, and other music traditions grounded in storytelling. Such a framework would facilitate the inclusion of artists like Maggie Rogers, Hozier, Bon Iver, Kara Jackson, Florence and the Machine, and Arlo Parks, among others.

A clear curatorial strategy is vital: headliners should reflect a balanced mix across folk, roots, and crossover genres to appeal to a wider demographic without compromising the Festival's core identity. We advocate for a model where each day features strong headline artists across both the Main Stage and Stage 2, supported by a carefully curated roster of mid-range and emerging acts. This approach aligns with the demonstrated purchasing behaviours of CFF's target audiences, who base ticket-buying decisions heavily on headline acts.

Increasing changeover times between acts or extending artist set times reduces financial pressure and programmed in conjunction, gives the artist programmer scope to schedule extended set 'specials'.

The importance of engaging a highly credible music booker, with expertise across the contemporary folk, roots, and adjacent music sectors, is fundamental to implementing this vision successfully. In addition, commissioning unique or signature performances (bespoke CFF sets) could further elevate the Festival's artistic cachet and audience appeal, following models used effectively by events such as Southbank's Meltdown Festival.

Developing a clear, strong tagline for the Festival's repositioning—one which reflects both tradition and contemporary resonance (e.g., "Sounds of the Soul")—would provide further coherence and focus to marketing efforts for 2026 and beyond.

Diversification of Programme Offer

As market competition intensifies, particularly around CFF's traditional July date, it is essential to enrich and diversify the broader festival experience.

The Den – which becomes the new Stage 3 - already provided a foundation for younger and family-oriented programming; however, we recommend amplifying this offer. Expanded daytime activities such as participatory workshops, comedy sessions, family-focused entertainment, and arts talks should be positioned as core elements of the Festival experience rather than peripheral features. Successful models, such as the participatory cricket at Wilderness Festival, demonstrate how inclusive, fun programming fosters deeper audience engagement and community spirit.

Comedy programming offers particular potential. Working with national comedy promoters (e.g., Show and Tell, Get Comedy, Berk's Nest) could yield strong results at reasonable cost. Integrating comedy more prominently would widen demographic appeal, complement family marketing, and reinforce the Festival's welcoming, celebratory atmosphere.

Sponsorship and partnerships could also be leveraged more effectively through branded activations within spaces such as Stage 3. These could include craft beer partners and talks, creative installations, and pop-up performances—enhancing the audience experience at minimal cost to the Festival itself.

We propose that Stage 3 hosts family programming during daytime hours (11:00–16:00), transitioning to curated evenings led by local folk and roots promoters from 17:00–23:00.

Artist Budget and Financial Modelling

In the longer term, a critical realignment of artist budgets is necessary. Current benchmarks indicate that festivals of circa 15,000 capacity operate with artist budgets around £750,000. For a recalibrated CFF with a target attendance of 10,000, an aspiration to move the artist budget towards £500,000, as ticket sales and resources allow, would provide a solid foundation to attract three strong headliners per stage (Main Stage and Stage 2), alongside a vibrant supporting programme.

Aligning programming budgets with the proposed three-stage infrastructure model thereby reducing overall site infrastructure and production costs will ensure a financially sustainable balance between programme quality and operational feasibility.

Awards and Profile-Building

CFF's existing association with the Christian Raphael Prize offers a valuable platform., reinforce its leadership role in the folk and roots sector, and deliver substantial national media coverage.

Given the competitive context (e.g., Manchester Folk Festival's current engagement with BBC Radio 2), swift action would be necessary to secure this opportunity. Alternatively, elevating the profile of the Christian Raphael Prize such as through dedicated showcase events on the opening night could also deliver meaningful benefits.

13. Governance and Structure

Corporate Structure

The local authority model for Cambridge Folk Festival, with it being an activity of Cambridge City Council (CCC) has advantages and disadvantages to other models. The principal advantage is the benefit of the CCC's infrastructure, the full costs of which is not recharged to the festival's profit and loss account. The disadvantages compared to a charity/trust structure include the relative difficulty for councils of fundraising from certain sources including trusts & foundations and some public/Lottery funds. Overall, there is no overwhelmingly compelling reason at present for the Festival to move out of local authority control.

There could potentially be some benefit to the Festival to have an independent charitable trust with no operational responsibility and the ability to do the following that the Council either cannot do or could only do with difficulty;

- Claim Gift Aid on donations from individual UK taxpayers.
- Fundraising from a variety of sources.
- Running a 'Friends of Cambridge Folk Festival' scheme.

The charity/trust would purchase specific items for the Festival and make grants to it, relieving the budget.

Staffing Structure

Some of the job titles of CCC staff working on the festival are understandably set out in a Council format. However, it would make for clearer delineation of responsibilities to designate all standard festival industry roles within the team; this would also provide clarity for suppliers and other stakeholders. These festival roles – in addition to the Council job titles - would include Exec Producer.

14. Options Analysis

This Options Analysis identifies potential future operating models for Cambridge Folk Festival. Each option is evaluated against key strategic priorities:

- Financial sustainability
- Artistic and cultural relevance
- Audience development
- Civic value to Cambridge
- Operational deliverability

Option	Description	Strengths	Risks/Weaknesses
Option 1 **Recalibrated CFF as a one-site greenfield festival**	Retain Council ownership; deliver a streamlined, scalable greenfield festival on one site, aligned to a 7,500–15,000 capacity model, with refreshed artistic curation and operational efficiencies. Option 1 relocates all accommodation from Coldhams to Cherry Hinton, retains Stage 1 infrastructure and artist budget as known (with one fewer act per day and slightly extended sets/turnover), and replaces Stages 2 & 3 with tents/stages of the scale of	Reduces operational subsidy of accommodation on second site at Coldhams Common Protects civic ownership and historic brand - Aligns costs tightly to income - Opportunity to reposition for younger, family audiences - Opportunity to develop sponsorships and partnerships	Financial pressure remains if ticket sales targets not met Requires skilled repositioning and strong marketing Although Cherry Hinton Hall can accommodate as campers the numbers that were accommodated on both sites in 2024, this includes those using live in vehicles, and those who keep cars with

	Stage 3 in 2024, each with a limited artist budget. The Den is discontinued. Other artistic spend and some infrastructure costs are slightly trimmed, but strong children's element remains.	Using level of income attained in 2024 as a baseline, Option 1a would improve the financial outturn with an opportunity to break even, however with the residual risk of a reduced, but still significant, loss.	their tents (something very few festivals are able to permit) Risk of alienating parts of legacy audience if change perceived as too radical, especially of vehicle and camping offers, which will require behavioural change with audiences. Financial management will be key – taking industry standard approach to budget management expertise Possible operational challenges in providing some services live in vehicles are accustomed to (e.g. sanitary disposal, showers), and there may need to be a reduction of capacity for such vehicles.
Option 2	As Option 1 but with Stage 2 infrastructure and artist budget reinstated (and additional £100k investment.)		
Option 3 (Preferred Option) **Reimagined CFF as a city centre, multi-**	A radical remodelling of the Festival which retains the brand in City Council ownership, leading a curated programme across numerous venues of different scales, using	Primarily uses – indeed showcases - the city's exceptional identity and sense of place, including its numerous highly distinctive venue assets of strong architectural and heritage interest, partner	Requires exceptional partnership working, including diary and ticketing management with partner venues, and strategic co-ordination with accommodation /

venue event (potentially but not necessarily combining a temporary venue in a tented structure on, e.g., Parker's Piece) with a co-ordinated programme of individually ticketed events at partner venues which are sold through a central box office	the City Council's venues and working in partnership with non-council owned venues	organisations, accommodation offer, central green spaces. Retains/contributes far more secondary spend in the city's hospitality and retain sector. Fully scalable: P&L control of individual event elements, and obviates or reduces core cost and weather risk of building greenfield festival event and accommodation site: a more future proof, and potentially much greener model. Can be aligned very closely with cultural, community and educational strategies.	destination management and education sectors. Substantially different offer which depends on different audience behaviour, requiring clear communication of vision, and audience development. Requires detailed further modelling and business planning beyond the scope of this document.
Option 4 **Strategic Partnership Model**	Maintain greenfield festival but outsource programming, production, and/or marketing to a third-party operator under Council oversight.	- Brings in external expertise, energy, and investment - Reduces operational risk and overhead for Council - Retains public ownership identity	- Loss of direct creative control - Reputational risk if partner underperforms - Contractual complexity and potential cost of procurement process

Option 5 **Full Commercialisation / Sale**	Fully transfer CFF operation to a commercial festival operator (e.g., Live Nation, AEG Presents), via sale or licensing.	- Immediate removal of financial and operational risk for Council - Potential upfront revenue from sale/license	- Loss of civic identity and public ethos - Programming may move further from folk/roots focus - Local stakeholder backlash likely - No guarantee of event continuation in its current form
Option 6 **Sunset and Reinvestment**	Gradually wind down the Cambridge Folk Festival in its current form after celebrating a final edition, reallocating resources into a broader city cultural programme.	- Clears ongoing financial liabilities - Creates opportunity for new, community-driven cultural activities aligned to council priorities increasing audience size and scope.	- Loss of major cultural flagship event - Damage to Cambridge's national cultural brand - Potential political and community backlash Intense competition in multi-genre festival market and historic partners
Option 7 **Major Expansion and Rebranding**	Invest heavily to transform CFF into a large-scale, multi-genre festival (e.g., akin to Green Man or Latitude), significantly	- Maximises potential economic impact and visitor spend - Potential to access wider sponsorships and partnerships	- Very high financial and operational risk - Requires major capital investment and site upgrades - Could alienate core audience -

Options 1,2 and 3 in detail

Option 1 (Greenfield)

Recalibrated Cambridge Folk Festival: maintaining a greenfield event based at Cherry Hinton Hall

- Streamlined to match a 7,500–12,000 capacity model on a single site (plus the separate car park). This has been modelled on Cherry Hinton Hall.
- Option 1 is the most streamlined version in terms of taking out costs. It ceases the campsite at Coldhams Common, retains Stage 1 as known, downscales Stage 2 to be of the same scale of production as Stage 3, and with minimal artist budgets for Stages 2 & 3. The Den is discontinued as a fourth stage space, with elements of its programme assimilate into the new Stage 3.
- Refresh artistic vision to broaden demographic reach.
- Invest in operational efficiencies and audience engagement.
- Build a stronger financial base for future growth or partnership development.

A staged implementation plan should be developed, focusing on:

- 2025 as a fallow and repositioning year (research, rebranding, audience consultation, programming and planning).
- 2026 relaunch aligned to new curatorial strategy and refreshed marketing strategy
- Post on-sale review early in 2026 to assess viability of progressing to Option 2
- Post festival review in 2026 to consider reinstating satellite campsite and growing income targets and artistic and marketing budgets for 2027.

Medium-term review in 2027 to assess delivery outcomes.

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TOTAL		**£1,717,591**	
SURPLUS / DEFICIT		-£949	

Option 1 budget notes:

- This is the most stripped back version in terms of costs, to illustrate the recommended strategy if there is little confidence in growing revenues from the 2024 baseline.
- On an equivalency basis, 2024 Coldhams based ticket holders are modelled as accommodated at CHH as campers (cap 1400 spaces: on 2024 figures they could all be accommodated, but in tents).
- The premium/VIP scheme shows some growth such that is makes a return, by increasing capacity to 100 and doubling spend on viewing platform and direct staff costs.
- £92,000 insurance cost in 2024 is not repeated.
- 50% of 2024 increase in fence stewarding spend is recouped by alternative sourcing strategy and rationalisation.
- Some minor efficiency savings are made in site infrastructure procurement.
- Marketing spend remains the same overall in this model: costed additions can be added to expenditure to model impact.
- Small increase in merch turnover and slight improvement of GP (47.2% to 48%, plus inflation) is modelled.

Sensitivities are set out in the Appended Spreadsheet

Option 2 (Greenfield)

As Option 1, but with Stage 2 fully reinstated in terms of infrastructure and programming budget

- Option 2 is the same as Option 1 but with an additional £100k of committed expenditure which – in the model shown - reinstates Stage 2. By deduction, an alternative or additional approach can be taken concerning Coldhams Common: a decision can be taken to retain the cuts to Stage 2 but instead reinstate Coldhams Common, which will also commit an additional £100k of expenditure. If the decision is taken to reinstate both, the overall increase to Option 1 expenditure is £200k
- For risk management purposes, Option 2 can be implemented when there is confidence in income projections.
- A decision to commit the expenditure to reinstate Stage 2 and/or Coldhams Common camping can be taken early in 2026, when confident in that income and planned expenditure are on track to meet the required income levels.

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SURPLUS / DEFICIT		-£97,636	

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SURPLUS / DEFICIT	-£97,636	-£17,713	£179,939

**Peak attendance excludes under 5s and all staff and artists*

NB ADJUST MARJETING COST ACCORDING TO MARKETING STRATEGIES ADOPTED

Three Year Plan Budget assumptions:

- Option 2 activated in 2026 with Stage 2 reinstated
- Coldhams reopened for 2027
- For direct comparison purposes, an inflationary forecast has not been included on 2027 and 2028 figures.

2024 ACTUALS	TENTS / VEHICLES	WEEKEND TICKETS	TENT/VEHICLE OCCUPANCY
COLDHAMS	632	1226	1.94
CHERRY HINTON	797	1452	1.82
	1429	2678	1.87
2027 FORECAST	2600	4872	1.87

The 2024 budget has been interrogated on a line by line, and supplier contract element by element basis, as far as possible, to devise a viable model for continuing Cambridge Folk Festival as a greenfield festival at 2024's income levels or better.

However, there remains a significant element of risk to both income and costs for greenfield events. The Festival reports that the average decline in ticket sales annually since 2016 is 5.42%. Under Option 1 model, a further 5.42% reduction on ticket sales from 2024's figures would result in a deficit of c. 480k.

The client posed the question: "If there was no history and established audience and brand, and you were starting a new event in Cambridge, what format would you recommend?" The answer is Option 3; a radically different model.

Option 3 (Recommended Option)

- **Reimagined Cambridge Folk Festival: a city centre, multi-venue event with individual event ticketing from a centralised box office, marketed under the Cambridge Folk Festival brand.** A curated programme of events at venues to include The Corn Exchange, The Guildhall, The Junction 1 & 2, and with the potential to include Arts Theatre, ADC Theatre and much of the city's exceptional stock of venues in educational and ecclesiastical settings including iconic spaces such as Kings College Chapel, its museums, pubs, community centres, and music in unusual spaces.
- Building on the brand, legacy and heritage of CFF, this could rapidly become England's and English Folk music's equivalent of Celtic Connections, adapted to make best use of Cambridge's built and community assets.
- It could also potentially develop to include, a larger scale, temporary tented venue on e.g. Parker's Piece, developed from existing plans for previous events.
- It would assist in activation, encourage walk ups and impulse buys. It will also be more appealing to potential partners through increased visibility and reach.

A staged implementation plan should be developed, focusing on:

- 2025 Folk In The City programme as a research and audience consultation opportunity.
- Consultation with potential venue, artistic, and destination management partners contributing to further, detailed planning and modelling.
- Medium-term review in 2027 to assess delivery outcomes.

This model builds on Cambridge's strengths as a destination, and it is recommended that careful consideration be given to the appetite for risk in Option 1 compared to the fully scalable risk this option presents.

The vision for this event is to draw on similarities and differences between Celtic Connections in Glasgow, and to an extent the emerging new festivals in e.g. Manchester and Hartlepool, adapted to the strengths of Cambridge, including the Cambridge Folk Festival legacy, the city's venue stock and exceptional architecture, potentially including churches and University venues, its accessibility and late-night trains to London. Cambridge Folk Festival can maintain its position as England's pre-eminent folk festival in an entirely new format, greener, more climate proof, innovative.

There is considerable capacity within existing venues that are professional or regular concert settings. The following list is not comprehensive, but indicative:

Venue	**Seated Capacity**
Corn Exchange	1409
Guildhall	400
Junction 1	300
Junction 2	220
West Road Concert Hall	499
Fitzwilliam College Auditorium	250
Robinson College Auditorium	240
Howard Auditorium	150
Magdalene College Auditorium	142
ADC Theatre	228
Arts Theatre	666
Pembroke College Auditorium	220
Fitzpatrick Hall	220
Mumford Theatre	270
Peter Hall Performing Arts Centre	400
Atrium Hall - Netherhall	350
Atrium Theatre - Chesterton	450
Portland Arms	80
Blue Moon	60
Leys Great Hall	337
Corpus Playroom	80
All Saints Church	200
Kings College Chapel	1000
Trinity College Chapel	525
St John's College Chapel	413
Old Divinity School	180
Our Lady of The Assumption & the EM	600
	9889

With some venues on the list above which provide a larger standing concert format, which is wholly relevant to some of the festival's genres, there is evidently a combined capacity in excess of 10,000.

Within the scope and timeframe of this consultancy it is not possible to give a fully costed option, as there are far too many variables and unknowns. At its simplest and least risky, it's a co-ordinated programme of concerts, workshops and activities across several existing venues, each individually ticketed but jointly marketed and branded, sold through a single box office and with priority booking for subscribers and multi-buy ticket discounts. It allows people to attend at their own price point, for a single event, or to design their own itinerary, and visitors can choose accommodation of any style and price point. University rooms, such as those offered by Gonville and Caius out of term time close to West Road Concert Hall, would be an attractive part of this offer, to some.

The deal basis for each concert can vary: Cambridge City Council can be the promoter, or can work in partnership with other venues/promoters under strict brand, ticketing and quality guidelines. Sessions, walks and boat rides, free and educational activities can be included, and funds can be raised for some of these elements.

The venue programme is extendable: it can be a few days, but can extend as the festival grows: extending stays is a key objective for destination managers.

Key considerations

Artistic Leadership and Vision – successful urban festivals on this model thrive when there is a strong artistic vision and leadership in the curation of the programme.

Seasonality – optimal dates to be determined: urban festivals are less reliant on clement weather, and factors including availability of venues and accommodation are considerations alongside audience demand and artist touring plans. The potential for involvement of university and other educational venues and as accommodation providers is a strong influence on an out-of-term timed event. If not July, September might prove the best fit for all factors.

Visitor accommodation - 55% of weekend ticket holders in 2024 camped or stayed in live in vehicles. When, and to what extent does the city's accommodation offering have the capacity to serve the total visitor audience on each festival night? Is there demand (and if so in year 1), a location, and a viable cost plan for a temporary campsite and vehicle park nearer the city centre?

Celtic Connections – a relevant case study

Development of a meaningful financial, programme and operating model for a venue-based festival, with the Corn Exchange and Guildhall as central venues, will need consideration by the Council as to the cost basis for these venues and their resources, and assumptions about the scale of ambition – the duration and number of venues and events - in year 1.

A highly relevant case study is Glasgow's Celtic Connections. This festival launched in 1994 as an event based solely in Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, which had opened in 1990, to utilise the concert hall at a time when it was otherwise relatively under-utilised, and when hotels had good availability. In 1995 it used additional venues nearby and it now extends to c. 300 events across 24 venues over a 19-day period. With commercial programming at ticketing at its core, the festival has developed a strong educational programme, a commissioning programme, and a prestigious emerging talent competition such that it also receives cultural funding, from Creative Scotland (the arts council for Scotland) and from the city council's own culture budget.

The festival is completely rooted in Scottish folk music but explores its relationship with other cultures and genres. It categorises its events programme into several genres, but can assign more than one genre to an event. These are folk, traditional, world, indie, blues, jazz and soul, late night music, exclusive, rock and pop, Americana, orchestral, kids, new talent, film, and theatre. As well as ticketed concerts it runs an emerging talent prize, through an open stage with a pre-selection process presenting a series of free showcase concerts, with the eventual winner getting a cash prize and an appearance in the subsequent year's programme: numerous leading Scottish artists have emerged from this route. It also includes a self-financing industry facing showcase, and schools, workshops, community and other free activities that are wholly sustained by cultural funding and which add to the festival feel, brand value, and audience development.

The festival offers a membership scheme (£40 for individuals, £63 joint) which offers priority booking for most events, 15% discount on tickets, and selected other benefits. A free under 26 scheme offers selected discounts but no general discount, and recommendations for events particularly suitable for younger audiences.

In the Glasgow model:

- The council's cultural charity, Glasgow Life, runs Celtic Connections, and Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, the key initial venue when the festival was

launched. Although it has grown considerably in 30 years, GRCH remains the central venue.
- There is no commercial hire charge for use of GRCH / Glasgow Live facilities: actual costs are recharged as a facility fee the festival.
- Key revenues that derive from booking fees for tickets sold for all events at the festival (12% of face value) are not considered income for the festival cost centre, and
- Further revenue derives from the voluntary charitable donation option in the ticket sales process and a general appeal via the festival channels are received by Glasgow Life are not directly attributed to the festival cost centre P&L; they are restricted funds for the festival however and are apportioned to the overall grant given as cultural funding to the festival; but
- The council takes an overview of all these revenues in appraising the festival's performance and allocating core costs to the festival budget.
- Most of the ticketed programme is promoted directly by the festival, who engage and pay the artists a negotiated guaranteed fee and retain the ticket income. Artist fees are budgeted at c.50% of the forecast revenue for events across the whole programme, with some cross-subsidy of individual events.
- The festival sells tickets for all events included in the festival programme. Some venues' own corporate policies, notably those operated by commercial theatre operators, require them to retain a substantial allocation to sell directly, however, and this is a consideration when programming those venues, including whether those venues are provided with tickets at face value, or value after booking fees.
- In venues not operated by Glasgow Life, the festival generally pays normal hire fees for external promoters.
- In the larger scale venues, there are some exceptions to the general rule of the festival being promoter; this is typically where other regional promoters have a strong established relationship with a particular artist. This is considered on a case-by-case basis, the consideration being more about relationship management than financial arrangements.
- Small venues apply to directly promote programming congruous with the festival (approved by the creative director) themselves or with independent promoters, c. 100 cap. For these events the festival includes the event as programming, sells tickets, and charges a £100 marketing contribution.
- All stages have festival branding displayed

A high-level rounded overview of the overall income budget for 2025's 19-day, 300 event, 24 venue festival ~
- £2M ex-VAT turnover
- 73% ticket sales

- 7% other revenues (sponsorship, non-governmental grants, merchandise)
- 10% Creative Scotland – towards schools / free / emerging talent / commissions
- 10% city council cultural funds – towards schools / emerging talent / commissions

The festival pays VAT on ticket sales and recovers VAT on expenditure.

On that basis, the festival presents a cost-neutral or better outturn, usually a surplus. A view is taken that, with the festival generally generating a surplus on its direct marginal budget, and with further income from booking fees (> £100k) and charitable donations not directly attributed to the festival cost centre but assessed in parallel, and with the clear substantial economic impact for the city, there is not a need to recharge the salaries of the main Glasgow Life permanent staff whose principal roles are managing and producing the festival to the festival cost centre.

Celtic Connections retains a freelance Creative Director, otherwise a highly respected professional musician, composer and arranger who works alongside a permanent Festival Manager, who is assisted by a Producer. These latter two roles are not charged to the festival sot centre P&L, but are considered alongside box office, charitable other economic impacts of the festival that are not charged to the festival P&L. Other roles are part-assigned to the festival from the Glasgow Life team for sales and marketing (the festival is in a position where it can announce its programme in September for the following January, with a very strong on-sales demand to priority bookers. Strategic communications are handled by Glasgow Life; general press and PR is handled by an external PR agency, and a few specialist music PRs are engaged to target specific media. A schools concerts co-ordinator is retained from September onwards, from within the city's education service.

The festival uses Festival Pro software very effectively to manage operations, and the festival is delivered by a mixture permanent Glasgow Life staff assigned to the festival, and role-specific freelancers. All artist contracting and invoicing is processed by two members of the GRCH admin team. For the advancing and delivery phase, a team of two freelance production managers are retained, overseeing everything that happens within GRCH and working across all the external venues to ensure communication between artists and venue in-house teams; specific event technical hires and backline are dealt with on a case-by-case basis: either the festival orders, or the venue hires and recharges at settlement.

An experienced music tour manager is retained as a freelancer for arranging travel into Glasgow and accommodation, with a separate festival internal transport co-ordinator. Two shift managers staff the back-of-house festival office for general queries, guest lists, rehearsal space, artist packs, accreditation, meal vouchers, supported by volunteers; the main front-of-house information point for audiences is GRCH box office.

There are paid co-ordinators for the late-night club and sessions, who are otherwise local professional folk musicians; these planned events are a key part of the festival offering over the weekends of the festival but are programmed in the few weeks before the festival from availability/ volunteering from visiting artists; no fees are paid for these performances but internal transport is provided; line ups are announced on the day. Staff and artist catering is provided on a meal ticket basis at GRCH artist catering, or through meal vouchers redeemable at a number Glasgow restaurants.

With well-established audiences, the festival now generally attains well over 90% capacity for the evens in its own venues, and artist spend is weighted accordingly. The festival does

Using this methodology, the festival has been stable and has grown in number of events, audiences, and venues over the past decade or more; a deficit in 2018 was more than recouped in 2019 through a focus on strictly commercial programming. The model allows for scalability, control, and mitigation.

Financial Strategy

To begin developing a financial strategy for Cambridge Folk Festival using a comparable model, there are many variables to consider. A Year 1 programme might assume an 11 day festival period, from Thursday to Sunday, with 11 main programme venues being The Corn Exchange, Guildhall, Junction 1 & 2, Kings College Chapel, Trinity College Chapel, West Road Concert Hall, Our Lady of the Assumption Church, Pembroke College Auditorium, and Peter Hall Performing Arts Centre hosting a total of 69 events across the period. Targeting 75% capacity across the main ticketed programme, and allocating a generous 50% of net ticket revenue before PRS to artist fees and costs on that basis, and making estimates for negotiated hire/facility/production costs with external venues that will need fuller exploration, an indicative budget is provided.

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With a fixed cost budget, the sensitivities around ticket sales are:

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Whereas this model will need a lot of refinement of ticket pricing and other costs, it serves to provide a basis for planning, and these initial estimates and targets bear helpful comparison to the greenfield model. Some notable factors:

The residual contribution to core costs (£150k at 75% capacity, plus c. £80k booking fees) is comparable to the core costs the festival currently has (£178k in Options 1 & 2)); whereas there could be a need and benefit to organisational redesign (and which may lead to a reduction in core costs, alleviating other budget pressures) the potential overall capacity is similar.

The artistic spend (£436k) equates very well with the current greenfield model (£444k in Option 2, with Stage 2 reinstated), but requires around £1M less in ticket income to be sustainable.

This is primarily due to the massive reduction in venue/production costs compared to building greenfield venues and accommodation.

A Big Tent (if feasible and needed) - The Corn Exchange is the largest built concert venue in the city. A co-ordinated programme using the existing venue stock, including some creative use of ecclesiastical and educational assets, gives considerable overall capacity and a model that can be made to balance and scale.

A key consideration will be whether the Corn Exchange provides a large enough main venue, and if not, what are the other options: is there the need, demand and viability (*not* recommended for Year 1 but subsequently as the festival succeeds and grows) for a larger venue, in a tented structure, perhaps on Parker's Piece, with a festival village to accommodate traders, a bar, daytime activity, and headline artist ticketed shows in the evening.

It is recommended that this not be the focus in Year 1, making the step away from greenfield production to the venue festival to understanding the venue festival model and benefits, but rather that it is considered as "another venue" and a cost marginal element for future years as a profit/loss centre in its own right, with its business case developed carefully, on the cost/contribution basis used for other venues in the indicative model above. It's a relatively high cost/risk compared to the built venues, and to maintain the standards of excellence in programming that will characterise the festival it will require subsidy from secondary and tertiary incomes. Perhaps, like Edinburgh Festival, it is included every third or fourth year, having built up the funds to subsidise the infrastructure so that the programme can justify it.

The illustration and location below are for scale only.

The city has experience of doing this and has some initial cost plans for consideration.

Using broadly the same approach to specification as the Festival uses in the greenfield event at Cherry Hinton Hall, an indicative site budget is provided for a 3000 capacity Big Top and associated ancillary spaces.

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These are high level, indicative costs only. Intentionally, this budget does not reflect

Income

- ticket income
- secondary income
- event specific sponsorship

Expenditure

- core costs
- artistic spend
- PRS
- event specific marketing spend

These aspects need development in line with the artistic vision and overall programme curation and audience development and sponsorship strategies. But a high-level analysis, **based on 100% capacity with a £72 face value ticket, over four nights**, indicates the scale of the challenge:

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SURPLUS/DEFICIT BEFORE CORE	-£34,100.00

Further consideration of apportionment to core costs including salaries and insurance may be required.

It is evident that the Big Tent option is unlikely to recoup its substantial production costs from ticket sales in Year 1, and will require further investment/subsidy, and there is a risk that the Big Tent, rather than the bigger, urban festival vision, becomes the overriding focus in Year 1. Successful reignition of the festival as an urban, venue-based event will allow the considered introduction of the Big Tent venue, when its need, demand and viability have been developed.

Option 3 is our recommended and preferred option, we would be able and delighted to work with Cambridge City Council to further develop this model if required.

Recommended Marketing Budget – Option 3 (City Centre Reset)

Current Budget - £50,000
Proposed Indicative Budget - £90,000–£110,000

Justification

1. **Strategic Reset Requires Visibility**
    - The festival is returning after a fallow year and shifting to a more urban, distributed model.
    - There is a need to relaunch the brand narrative and counter perceptions of decline. This would be done through paid media but most importantly should be editorially driven nationally
    -
2. **Audience Development Priorities**
    - Must **engage younger demographics (18–35)**, "Local First-Timers," and "Cultural Explorers."
    - Requires digital-first, persona-based campaigns (e.g. Spotify integration, influencer partnerships, geo-targeted ads).
3. **Digital Modernisation Costs**
    - Overhaul website UX/UI to align with sector leaders (e.g., Green Man, Latitude).
    - Dynamic social content creation (short-form video, mobile-first assets).
    - Enhanced CRM and segmentation work with Spektrix/Audience Agency.
4. **Campaigns Across Platforms**
    - Budget must cover multi-phase, full-funnel digital marketing: Awareness → Engagement → Conversion.
    - Paid media (e.g. Meta, Google, Spotify), PR, OOH in Cambridge, and influencer activations.
5. **Partnership & Fundraising Support**
    - A portion of marketing budget should support commercial partnerships and new "Friends of CFF" initiatives (branding, campaigns, donor funnels).
6. **Benchmarking Insight**
    - Comparator festivals (e.g. Shrewsbury, Moseley) operating with leaner infrastructure still invest significantly in smart marketing to maintain loyalty and grow reach.

Suggested Budget Breakdown (Indicative Estimate)

Category	Budget (£)
Database cleaning and deduping (highest estimate)	8000
Digital & Social Campaigns	35,000
Website/CRM Modernisation	15,000
Design & Branding (Repositioning)	10,000
PR & Press Office	10,000
Local/OOH/Influencer Partnerships	10,000
Sponsor-Facing Marketing Collateral	5,000
Contingency/Testing Budget	5,000
Estimated Total	**£98,000**

Recommendation - A staged release of this budget (Q4 2025–Q3 2026), with early investment in branding and web rebuild, and heavy digital spend Jan–July 2026.

15. Quick Wins

The development of a cohesive and inclusive strategic plan has been hindered by a lack of clear direction and collective buy-in. While the team has demonstrated commitment and responsiveness to audience feedback, the absence of a unified, forward-thinking strategy has resulted in a reactive rather than proactive approach.

Leadership has shown limited flexibility in adapting to changing circumstances, and there has been a reluctance to make bold decisions or confront key challenges particularly in relation to rising costs and operational pressures. As a result, the festival has largely continued momentum rather than being guided by a clear vision or plan. This has led to missed opportunities for innovation, growth, and honest engagement with our audience about the realities we face.

To move forward, a strategic reset is essential anchored in shared goals, transparent communication, and the courage to make necessary changes to support financial sustainability and enhance the customer experience, we recommend prioritising the release of weekend tickets in the initial sales phase. The release of day tickets should be strategically delayed and limited, to maximise full weekend attendance and optimise overall ticket revenue.

Marketing and Communications

Following a detailed review of the Cambridge Folk Festival's current marketing, audience engagement, branding, and sponsorship landscape, it is clear that the festival is well-positioned to reassert its leadership role within the UK folk and roots music scene. However, significant and strategic action is required across several areas to modernise approaches, broaden audience reach, and ensure future sustainability.

The Cambridge Folk Festival stands at a critical and exciting inflection point. With its historic brand strength, loyal base, and enduring community spirit, it has a unique opportunity to revitalise itself for a new generation without losing its soul.

By taking immediate steps through the outlined quick wins and systematically building towards a long-term, data-driven marketing and audience development model, CFF can secure its position **as the** leading folk and roots festival in the UK for the next 50 years and beyond**.**

The following section sets out an actionable roadmap, distinguishing between **immediate quick wins** (cost-neutral or low-resource interventions) and **medium- to long-term strategic recommendations**.

Quick Wins (Immediate Actions - 2025)

These actions can be initiated with minimal new cost and will have an immediate positive impact on audience engagement, brand perception, and operational efficiency.

a. CRM and Data

- Duplicate and clean the Spektrix database to improve audience targeting and remove outdated records.
- Introduce initial persona-based tagging in CRM aligned to the newly defined AA Audience Spectrum segments (Heritage Loyalist, Folk Family, etc.).
- Launch a first-time attendee welcome email journey, building loyalty from first engagement.

b. Branding and Communications

- Refresh the website homepage to feature a dynamic 2025 brand theme and emotional storytelling, without needing a full rebuild.
- Create and promote a unifying 2025 campaign tagline (e.g., *"Folk That Feels Like Now"*) to frame all communications.
- Commission new photography and short video content capturing diverse audiences, community feel, and atmosphere.

c. Ticketing and Campaigns

- Prioritise early bird weekend ticket sales and delay day ticket release to encourage fuller weekend attendance.
- Introduce local community discount codes for Thursday/Friday day tickets, targeting Cambridge postcodes.

d. Content and Social Media

- Launch a monthly "Folk Diaries" content series on email and social channels, featuring behind-the-scenes stories, playlists, and artist spotlights.
- Activate user-generated content (UGC) campaigns using hashtags like #MyFirstCFF to drive authentic storytelling.

e. Sponsorship and Partnerships

- Develop a simple sponsorship prospectus and proactively approach five local/regional brand partners for low-cost 2025 activations.
- Offer curated partner activations in Stage 3 (e.g., local breweries, media partners hosting sessions) at minimal additional cost.

Strategic Recommendations (Medium- to Long-Term - 2025–2026)

These steps build on the quick wins, establishing a sustainable and data-led marketing and engagement strategy for CFF's future.

a. Brand Evolution

- Undertake a full brand refresh while retaining CFF's core heritage values, updating visual identity, colour palette, and logo flexibility.
- Introduce seasonal or annual brand themes to create a sense of newness each year and avoid stagnation.

b. Audience Development

- Build deeper audience insight by fully integrating Audience Spectrum segmentation into CRM and marketing processes.
- Design segmented campaign journeys across all communications (e.g., first-time visitor nurture flows, premium loyalty programmes, youth-specific outreach).
- Formalise an annual Audience Development Plan, setting KPIs for audience growth, diversity, and engagement.

c. Website and Digital Experience

- Plan for a major website upgrade in 2026, focusing on mobile optimisation, dynamic storytelling, filterable artist line-ups, and integrated ticket journeys.
- Introduce interactive festival planning tools (e.g., build-your-own-schedule, artist recommenders) to enhance the online journey.

d. CRM and Ticketing

- Implement advanced CRM capabilities such as abandoned basket recovery, dynamic upselling (e.g., parking, VIP).
- Expand the Friends of CFF loyalty/membership scheme, offering exclusive perks, early access, and digital content.

counterculture

- Implement a 'Heritage' donation on each ticket. This is an optional donation of approximately £3+ per ticket and is reinvested into CFF sustainability site costs.

e. Sponsorship and Commercial Development

- Establish a dedicated commercial development role or partnership to actively build and manage sponsorship, fundraising, and philanthropic opportunities.
- Seek **national profile partnerships** (e.g., BBC Folk Awards hosting, new media collaborations) to restore visibility lost after the Radio 2 relationship ended.

f. Year-Round Engagement

- Build CFF into a **year-round cultural brand** through regular email newsletters, pop-up winter/spring events, podcast launches, and artist collaborations.
- Use festival off-season to **deepen audience loyalty** through storytelling, participatory opportunities, and early-bird benefits.

Summary Roadmap (Simplified Timeline)

Phase	*Timing*	*Priority Actions*
Q2 2025	*Quick wins - CRM clean-up, homepage refresh, early campaign launch*	
Q3 2025	*Launch rebranded communications, audience segmentation, early ticket sales*	
Q4 2025	*Sponsorship activations, Friends scheme launch, deeper audience engagement*	
Q1 2026	*Pre-festival acceleration - premium campaigns, family bundles, UGC content*	
Q2 2026	*Festival delivery, onsite activations, live digital engagement, data capture for evaluation*	

Appendices

Database deduping and cleaning (Indicative options and costs)

Option	Cost Estimate (GBP)	Details
Freelancer / Contractor	£1,200 – £4,000	Project-based, depending on complexity
Specialist Data Agency	£2,500 – £8,000+	Includes deeper cleaning, enrichment, QA
SaaS Tool (e.g. Dedupely, Talend)	£80 – £800/month	Subscription-based, may require setup time and expert help initially
In-house with Data Team	£800 – £2,500 (time cost)	Depends on internal hourly rates and skill level

Cambridge Bedstock

Hotels – Seasonality Overview

Hotels in Cambridge experience strong seasonal fluctuations in occupancy and pricing:

Peak Season

- Late Spring to Early Autumn (May–September)
  This is the busiest period, driven by:
  - University of Cambridge graduation (mid-June to early July)
  - Summer language schools and conferences
  - Domestic and international leisure tourism
  - Punting season and outdoor attractions
- Occupancy: Often exceeds 90% in June–August.
- ADR (Average Daily Rate): Up to 30–50% higher than off-season. For instance, a hotel room that might be £100 in January can rise to £150–£200+ in June/July.
- Shoulder Periods (March–April, October):
  Moderate demand due to conferences, research visits, and early/late tourism.

Low Season

- November to February (except around Christmas/New Year)
    - Visitor numbers drop off
    - ADR and occupancy fall significantly (many hotels run promotions or close parts of their inventory)
    - Business travel and a trickle of university-related visits sustain minimal demand

2. Airbnb – Seasonality and Occupancy

- Occupancy Rate
-
    - Peak months (June–August): 80–90%+ occupancy
    - Off-season (January, February): Can drop to 45–55%
    - Overall average annual occupancy: ~73%
      (Airbnb in Cambridge is slightly above UK average due to strong demand and limited traditional hotel capacity)
    -
- Pricing Trends:
  Like hotels, average nightly rates increase 30–50% in summer, especially for entire homes near the centre.
- Peak Booking Windows:
    - University term starts (late Sept/early Oct) and graduation weeks (mid-June)
    - May Balls and exam periods (late May–June)
    - Summer tourism peak (July/Aug)
    - Christmas markets and festive events (limited but present Dec)

3. Student Halls – Seasonal Availability

- Occupied During Term Time
    - October to mid-June: Halls are largely fully occupied by students.
    - Most college accommodation is not accessible to the public during this period.
    -
- Available to Public During Vacation
    - Summer vacation (mid-June to late September):
        - Some colleges and private halls release hundreds of rooms to tourists, academics, or conference delegates.

    - Booking often via third-party platforms like UniversityRooms.com or directly through colleges.
    - Peak availability aligns with peak hotel/Airbnb demand.
    -

- Winter break (mid-Dec to early Jan)
  - Limited availability in some halls (especially for conference use).
  - Colleges are often closed or only offer rooms for internal guests.

Indicative Digital & Social Campaign - Strategy Package

Suggested Budget Allocation £35,000

Goal - Maintain older audience while attracting new, younger festival-goers

Budget Allocation (indicative Summary)

Category	Budget (£)	Purpose
Paid Social Advertising	£14,000	Drive awareness, engagement, and ticket sales via targeted ads.
Content Creation	£6,000	Produce video and visual assets for social and email.
Social Media Management & Scheduling	£4,000	Community engagement and daily content delivery.
Influencer & Artist-Led Campaigns	£3,500	Tap into artists and micro-influencers for youth engagement.
Email Marketing & CRM	£2,500	Convert previous attendees and nurture leads.
Analytics, Tools & Reporting	£2,000	Optimize performance and campaign visibility.
Trend Boost / Contingency Fund	£3,000	Seize reactive opportunities (boosts, trends, etc.)

Platform Strategy

Platform	Focus	Audience
Facebook	Ticket sales, heritage feel, community	Ages 45+
Instagram	Visual storytelling, countdowns	25–45

TikTok	Short-form, fun, behind-the-scenes	Under 30
YouTube Shorts	Teasers, artist clips, vlog-style content	Under 35
Email	Loyalty, offers, segmented announcements	Legacy attendees

Content Calendar (6 Weeks Pre-Festival Example)

Week	**Content Example**	**Platform(s)**	**Notes**
W-6	"This is Cambridge Folk" 30-sec teaser	Instagram, YouTube Shorts	Hook new audiences
W-5	Artist Line-up Carousel + Artist Sound Clips	Instagram, Facebook	Visual + audio variety
W-4	Micro-influencer attends rehearsal or line up launch day	TikTok, Reels	Younger reach
W-3	"5 Things You'll Love" post (food, vibes, artists)	All platforms	Blend of content types
W-2	Email #2: Last chance for VIP's or discounted tickets	Email	Retarget past buyers
W-1	"Pack with me for Cambridge Folk" (influencer)	TikTok, Instagram Reels	UGC-style engagement
Event Week	Real-time updates, Stories, daily recap videos	All platforms	On-the-ground feel
Post	"Top Moments of 2025" highlight reel	Facebook, YouTube	Retention and brand affinity

Example Posts

Facebook (Older audience)

"From legends to new voices - join us at Cambridge Folk Festival this summer for music that stirs the soul 🎼. Tickets are going fast – don't miss your chance to be part of a tradition that keeps evolving. 👉 [Ticket Link] #CamFolkFest2026"

Instagram (Mixed audience)

Image: Vibrant crowd, sunset stage
"Feel the music. Meet the makers. Move with the rhythm of tradition reimagined.

Final tickets [link in bio]
#CambridgeFolkFestival #FolkFuture #LiveMusicLovers"

TikTok (Younger audience)

Video: Artist warming up backstage/ crowd clip/dance moment
Audio: Folk remix track
Text overlay: "Didn't know folk could sound like this? Welcome to Cambridge. #FolkTok #CamFolkFest2026"

Influencer Strategy Example

- **Target** - UK-based lifestyle/music TikTokers (5K–30K followers)
- **Deliverables**
  - 1x "Why I'm going" reel
  - 1x in-event recap video
- **Artist/band asks**
  - 1x pre-festival story
  - 1x behind-the-scenes moment (soundcheck or setup

Analytics Plan

- Weekly campaign dashboard (Meta, TikTok Ads Manager, Google UTM tracking)
- Email open rate tracking (returners vs new leads)
- Boost successful content mid-week (using contingency fund)
- Post-event wrap-up metrics

Special Peak Events (Trigger Spikes in Demand)

Event	Typical Timing	Impact
Graduation Weekends	June–July	Hotels sell out months in advance. Airbnb prices spike.
May Balls	Mid to late June	Many colleges hold all-night formal parties; city is full of visitors.
Open Days	June & September	University/ARU open days lead to spikes in demand from prospective students and families.

Event	Typical Timing	Impact
Cambridge Science Festival	March	Popular among academic and family tourists.
Cambridge Literary & Film Festivals	April & November	More modest but cause price bumps.
Folk Festival	Late July	Major event in Cherry Hinton; spikes local Airbnb demand.
Cambridge Beer Festival	May	10,000+ visitors; central hotels fill quickly.
Summer Language Schools	July–August	Bring thousands of teen visitors; halls and hotels often block-booked.

Sources: *The above figures and details are drawn from recent data and official sources, including hotel and university publications, and market analytics. Notably, Cambridge's hotel sector has grown in recent years, and the city now boasts* ***around 37 hotels*** *(many recent additions in the budget and mid-range segment). The Airbnb market statistics are as of 2024 airbtics.com, reflecting the continuing high demand for short-term rentals in the area. Student accommodation numbers are based on university housing info and developer data for private halls.*

Overall, within a 3-mile radius of Cambridge, one can estimate on the order of ***7,000+ beds*** *available across hotels, Airbnbs, and student residences, illustrating a robust capacity for a city of Cambridge's size to host visitors, tourists, and students at any given time.*

Examples of Festival Brand Experiences

Three UK at TRNSMT, Latitude, Reading & Leeds, and Isle of Wight Festivals (2023)

Three UK, a mobile network provider, implemented a multifaceted activation strategy across several major UK festivals. They offered charging stations for attendees' devices, with exclusive discounts for their customers. Additionally, they provided pre-sale ticket access through their app and created interactive spaces like the "Three Archway" at TRNSMT, where festival-goers could take and share photos on social media. These initiatives not only enhanced the festival experience but also reinforced Three UK's commitment to connectivity and customer engagement.

Vodafone’s Partnership with Glastonbury Festival (2023)

In 2023, Vodafone became the official connectivity partner for Glastonbury Festival, implementing a range of activations to enhance the attendee experience. They provided comprehensive site-wide connectivity, ensuring festival-goers remained connected throughout the event. Vodafone also launched an official Glastonbury app, offered access to sold-out tickets through their rewards program, and introduced cutting-edge technological activations on-site. This partnership not only improved the logistical aspects of the festival but also positioned Vodafone as an integral part of the Glastonbury experience.

Fever-Tree’s Ultimate Gin & Tonic Bar at Festival No.6

Fever-Tree, renowned for its premium mixers, crafted a sophisticated activation at Festival No.6 that appealed to mature festival-goers. Their "Ultimate Gin & Tonic Bar" not only offered high-quality beverages but also introduced a sustainable initiative: a cup deposit scheme where attendees received £1 back for each returned cup. This approach mirrored the festival's emphasis on sustainability and resonated with an audience appreciative of both quality and environmental consciousness.

Johnnie Walker’s 'Johnnie & Ginger' Sampling at Festival No.6

Targeting a more discerning palate, Johnnie Walker introduced their 'Johnnie & Ginger' cocktail through strategic sampling at Festival No.6. By setting up multiple mini-bars across the venue and distributing vouchers for free samples, they effectively engaged attendees. This activation not only showcased the brand's versatility but also provided a relaxed environment for festival-goers to experience a classic beverage in a contemporary setting.

Naked Juice’s 'Colourtopia' at Latitude and Wilderness Festivals

Aiming to blend health-conscious choices with interactive art, Naked Juice launched 'Colourtopia' at festivals like Latitude and Wilderness. Attendees were invited to decorate a communal art piece using fruit stickers, creating a vibrant mosaic. This activation fostered a sense of community and creativity, appealing to an older demographic that values wellness and artistic expression.


Naked.
COLOURTOPIA
STICK AROUND & GET NAKED


vodafone


SESSIONS

BAR
Heineken
BAR

counterculture