RIPON Theatre FESTIVAL

Impact Report
2026



Headlines

Ripon Theatre Festival 2026 took place from 5-12 July, with community outreach events before, during and after the main festival week.
We saw record numbers of attendees, both for our ticketed performances and free events.



Headlines

“Ripon Theatre Festival is not simply a good week of theatre. It is the moment a five-year experiment in what a small city can do with modest means and serious ambition finally proves its argument.”
The Yorkshire Times



Total Attendances
10,400

Ticketed Attendances
2,444

Free Attendances
7,956

Outreach Attendances
968

Professional Performers
92

Community Performers
404

Volunteers
48

Audience approval

Survey respondents rated 4 or 5 stars

97% Value for money

98% The performance you saw

98% Your overall experience



"The festival is a superb event which encompasses a wide range of artists and appeals to a wide range of audiences. It is lovely to see children, in particular, enjoying so many different artistic events."

Audience Survey Respondent

Audience

60%
Audience from Ripon

38%
First-time attendees

12%
Parties with a disabled person

188
Children attended an event with their school

67%
Of events were free

29%
Increase in total attendances



"Really good atmosphere, nice family vibe. a taste of performing arts, getting children out and about, boosting self-esteem. Kudos to all the volunteers."

Audience Survey Respondent

Access & Inclusion

British Sign Language interpretation for Batty!

Disabled-led professional performance

Updated access information on the website

Induction loop in the Arts Hub

Training for volunteers

Ticketing improvements











"a festival that treats accessibility as a design principle"
The Yorkshire Times

"RTF is a joyous experience aimed, from the beginning, to make theatre accessible to as many people as possible." **Jeremy Dunford, Ripon Disability Forum**

Our Events

Ticketed theatre programme

Highlights included *One Man Poe* & *Down to Chance*

Open air theatre

From Illyria, The Rubbish Shakespeare Company & The Dukes Theatre Company

New venues

Including The Water Rat & King William IV pubs, Costa Coffee & Harrogate Road Methodist Church

Schools' performances

From Opera North & Mind the Gap









160
Events







"All ticketed events were above my expectations - several were challenging or thought provoking."

Audience Survey Respondent

Event Partnerships







Cathedral collaboration
Incidents in the Life of an Anglican Slave

Expanded Pop-up programme
Pubs, cafes, shops & library

Sunday Market partnership
With Little Bird

Kirgate Traders' partnership
Road closure & street party





"Kirkgate on Saturday had an amazing festival atmosphere. Everyone enjoyed the live performances, the interaction with the crowds was seen by the smiles on people's faces. We are proud to have been a part of it too. Thank you so much, and we look forward to working with you again next year!"

Katie Ross, The Portly Pig

Big Family Weekend

Street entertainment & walkabout acts

Highlights included *Kismat Walla, Frankie Magilligan, Phileas Fogg,* & *Ye Birdz*

Interactive events

Live performance in a vintage bus & the interactive *Museum of Memorable Trees*

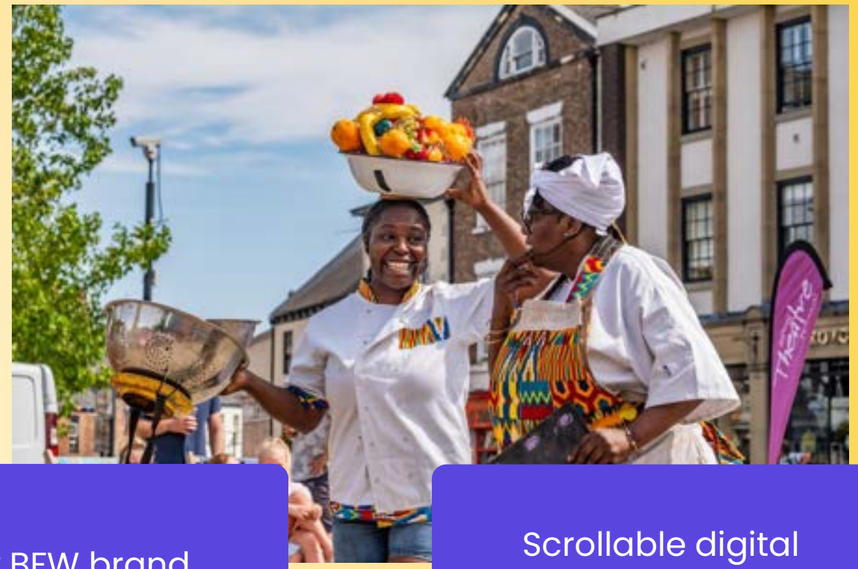
Free family theatre

Highlights included *Count Ocular*, *The Soapsud Sisters* & *The Crow House*

Youth-led show

From Zest Theatre & young people from Ripon





Printed weekend guide

New BFW brand

Scrollable digital schedules





"How brilliant the new scrollable programme on the website was. A really great addition and so easy to use!"

Audience Member, Big Family Weekend

Big Family Weekend







"I love your festival, it's so friendly.. I don't have to travel very far and there's so much variety to choose from."

Audience survey respondent

Our Performers







92

Professional performers

From UK, Ireland, Canada and Italy

404

Community performers

From across the region







Performers' Approval



"It is one of the best organised and marketed experiences that we've had."

Victoria Firth, Writer and Performer, *Batty!*

"We have never been so well hosted and cared for."

Kate Veysey, Out of Character Theatre

"Myself and all of my dancers, parents and community just wanted to extend our thanks for involving us in such a beautiful weekend. We loved every second of it."

Una O'Connor, St Aelred's Irish Dancers

"You have created something very special and you should all be extremely proud. It was a pleasure to perform for the crowds."

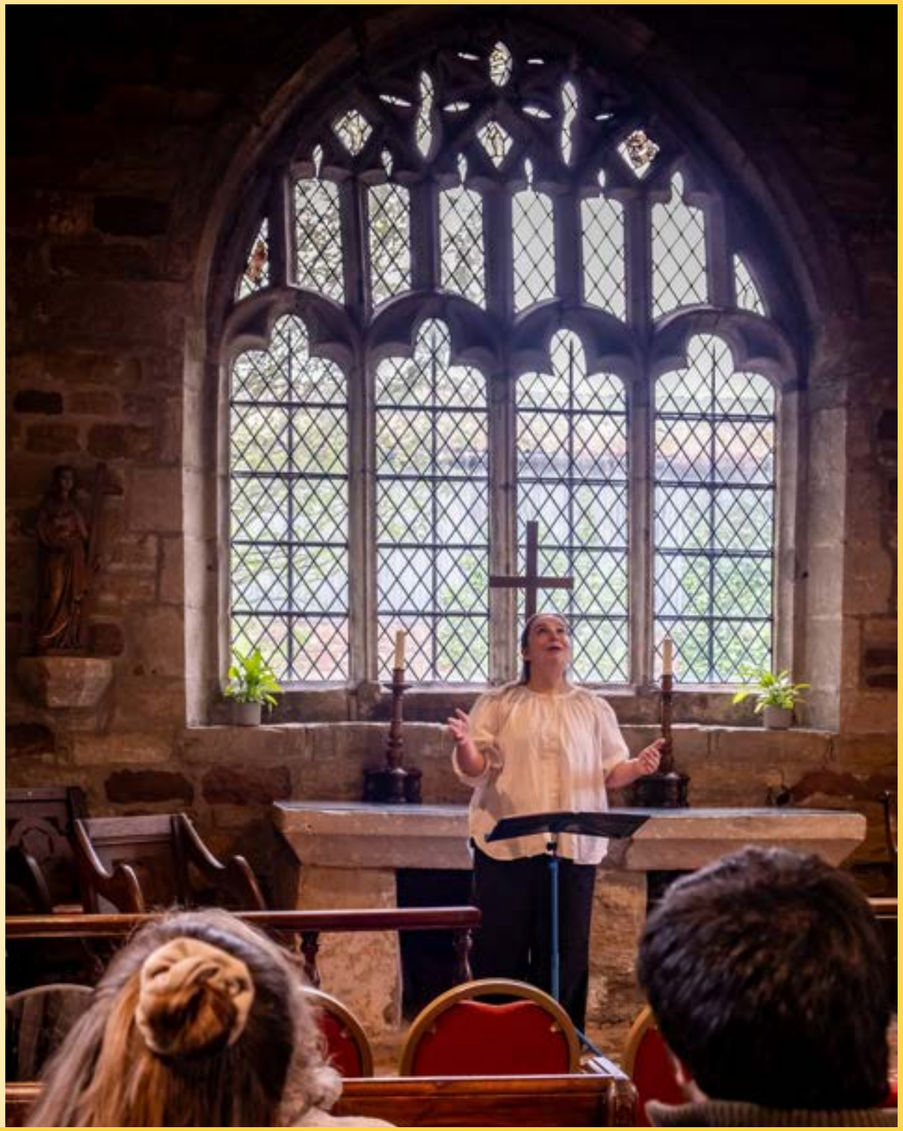
Rupert & Danielle, The Flying Buttresses

Artist Development

"I cannot thank you enough for all your hard work in getting our little play onto the stage yesterday. It was a wonderful occasion, moving, entertaining and completely compelling. Magic.
It was extremely liberating to watch our ideas transformed on the stage, our characters suddenly appearing in 3D and our cold words given such warm and energetic life."

Andy Croft, Writer, *Outcast*





Showcasing works in progress

Developing new projects

Supporting artists to develop work in the community

"Thank you so much for giving me the space and chance to perform Jord (now renamed as Our Lost Sisters!). It was such a welcoming space to try out some new material"

Imogen Wood, Writer and Performer, Jord

Artist Development

"I learnt at the first session that puppets, with whatever age, gender, additional needs or even illness, are able to unlock anxiety, stress and worry… As a direct result of these sessions I am researching the therapeutic use of puppetry."

Mark Edwards, PuppetPower North





"I was very impressed with the support to help me create something that fitted the ethos and theme of the festival… where links might be made and how sessions could be tailored to the participants. I enjoyed being able to watch the Opera North performance and see how they used the material in different ways which was good for my own CPD."

Bryony Harris, Music Moves

Joining In

Expanded Participation Programme	Sunday Participation Zone	Youth Engagement Project	Interactive Events	Sessions in Irish Dance, Puppetry, Choral Singing & Stage Combat	Q&As and Pre-show events










105
Public workshop attendances

320
Sunday Zone participants

"The post-show Q&A was as illuminating as the performance itself. An audience that had arrived curious left captivated."

Audience Member, *Incidents in the Life of an Anglican Slave*

Reaching Out

4
performances in a care homes from Handmade Theatre

7
Shakespeare workshops in schools with The Rubbish Shakespeare Company

5
bedside & one-to-one performances in care homes from Spiltmilk Dance

5
upskilling workshops for care workers and volunteers
(3 to come in November)

4
puppet workshops with young-onset dementia groups

4
intergenerational music sessions



"Oh my goodness, we have just had the best time! It was really fun, very interesting and we had the most laughs we've ever had."

Volunteer, Dementia Forward Puppet Workshop

Reaching Out – with care homes

181
Care home audiences





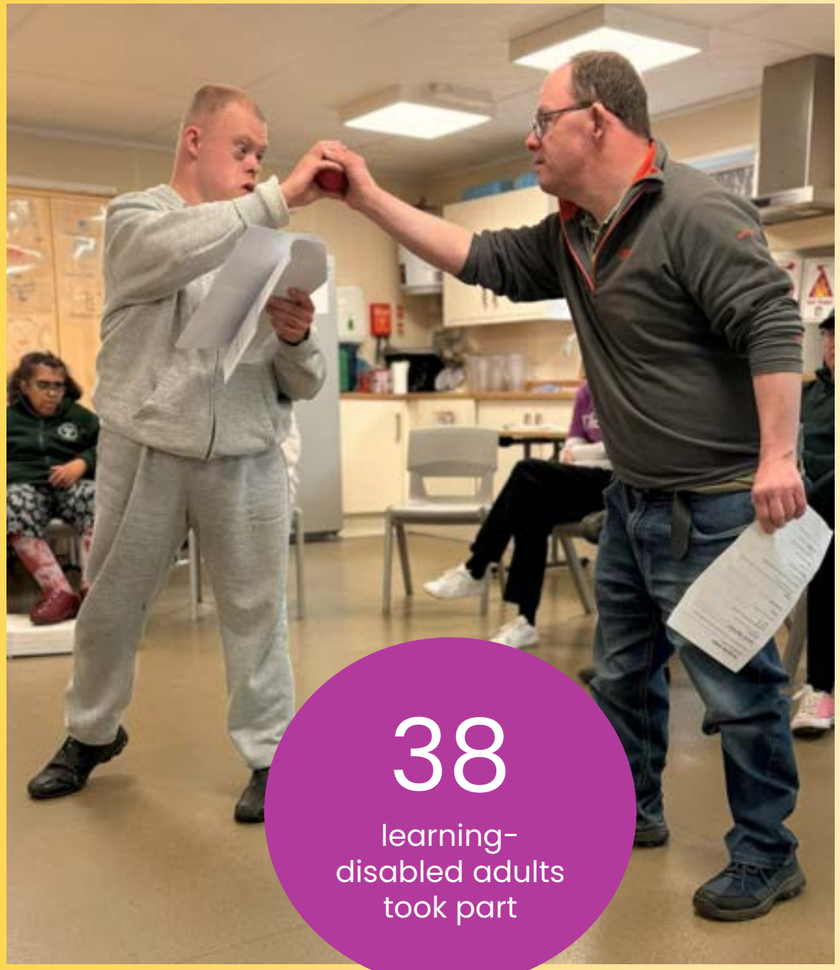


"That was delightful. The more we do this, the better it is for us. When are you coming back?"
Resident, Sycamore Hall Care Home

"Her face lit up. She's 93, but she was immersed in it, laughing her head off and singing along." **Manager, Abbeyfield**

"All I could hear was music and laughter… a lot of interaction"
Manager, Abbeyfield

Reaching Out – The Big Red Shoes



38
learning-disabled adults took part











"We've discovered talents that we didn't know were there.. and you can see their confidence coming out and their performance skills have gone up a step.. their speech, learning lines, improvising and working with props."

Sue Godden, Ripon Walled Garden

Reaching Out – with schools

"If I were to rate this workshop I would give it 11/10."

Pupil feedback from Reduced Shakespeare Company sessions

277

Primary & secondary pupils at schools' workshops







188

Primary & special schools' pupils at performances

"It was amazing. It inspired me to join a theatre when I'm older."

Pupil feedback from Reduced Shakespeare Company sessions

"They engaged with "real actors" which was exciting and they got a really good understanding of Shakespeare on their level."

Jacqui Palmer, Head Teacher, Sharow Primary School

Reaching Out – Youth Engagement Project











"A truly interactive and inclusive experience, *Soundboard* utilised the power of creativity, to give the young attendees a voice to express their opinions, hopes and concerns, with confidence." **Sarah White, Cultural and Creative Development Manager, City of York Council**

People Power

- Internship with York St John University
- Marketing, Social Media & Producer roles
- Expanded Festival Team
- Volunteer training
- Young Volunteers

"[The presentation] gave students a much broader understanding of the opportunities available within the arts sector… encouraging them to consider how they might engage with the arts in the future, whether as artists, participants, or industry professionals."

Yasmin Crossland, Evolve College

17
Festival Team Members

48
Total volunteers







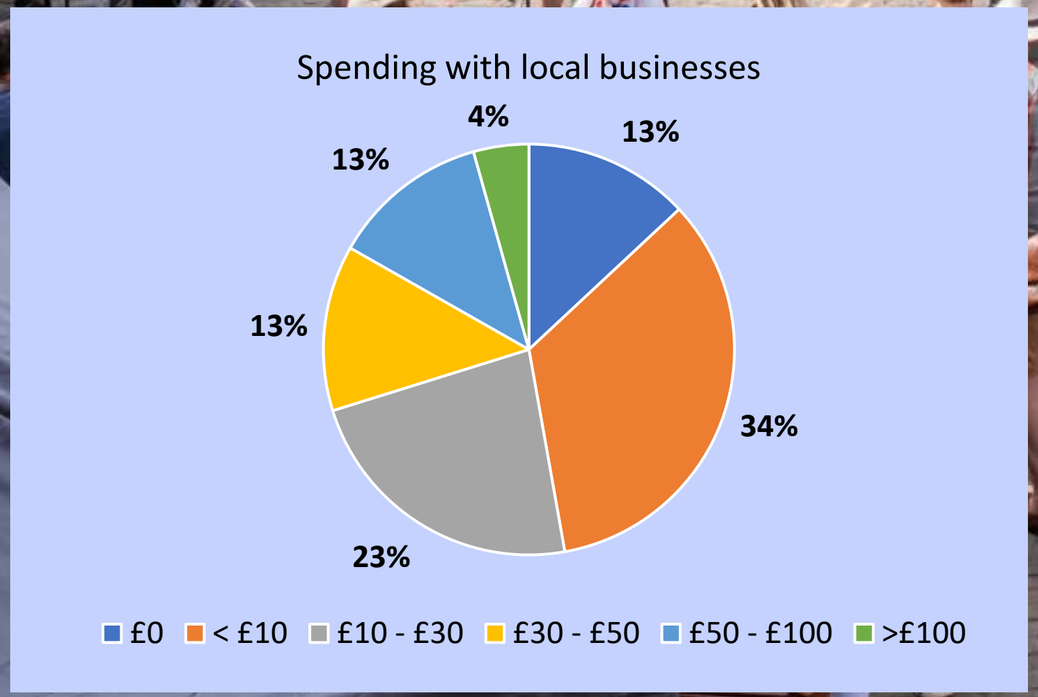
"Funders backing this festival are, in effect, backing volunteer commitment too and getting remarkable value for it."

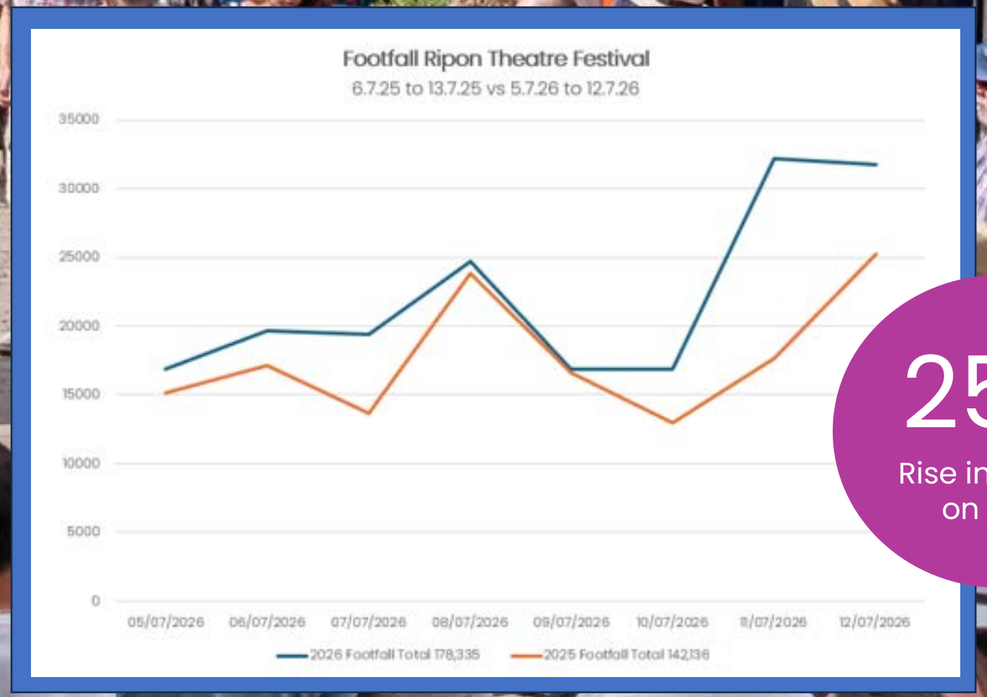
The Yorkshire Times

Supporting the Local Economy

42

Nights' accommodation in Ripon for performers





25%

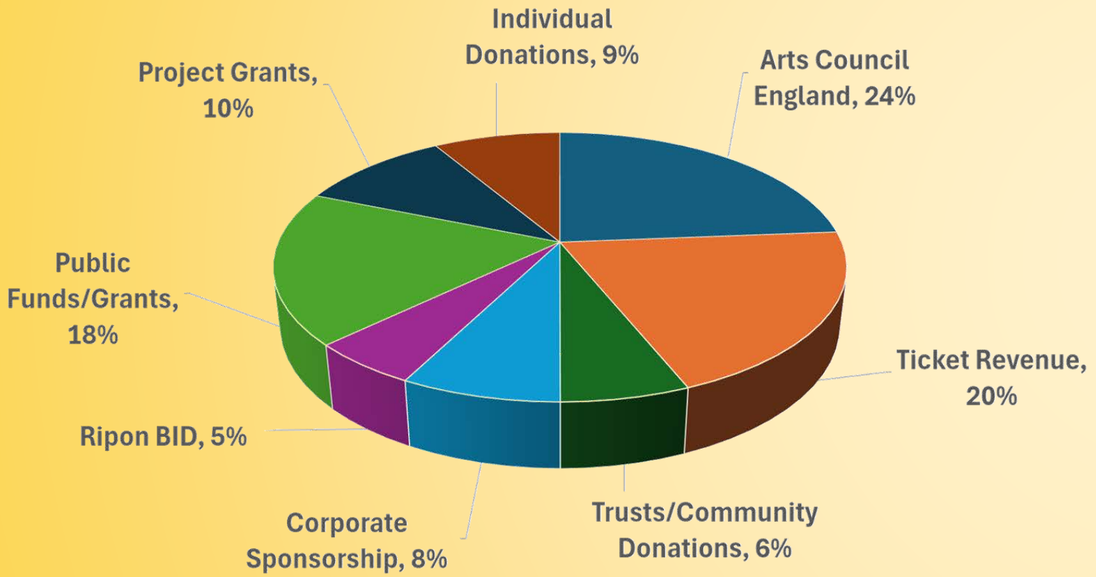
Rise in footfall on 2025

"It brought customers into the store who perhaps don't normally come to Costa and generated a great buzz for the customers and my team."

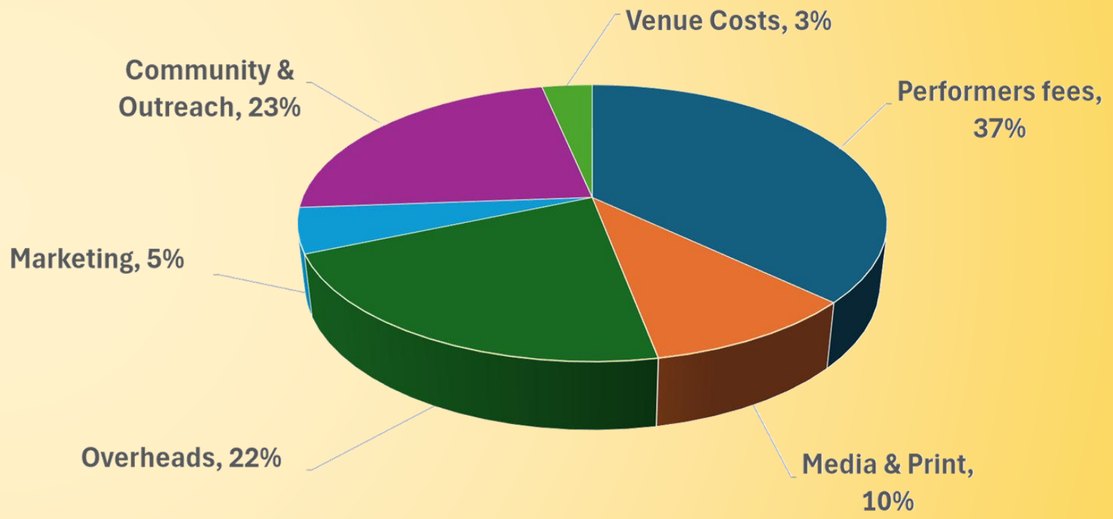
Jo Darbyshire, Costa Coffee Ripon Manager

2026 Finances

Income



Expenditure



"I feel like this was the best year yet!"

Audience Survey Respondent

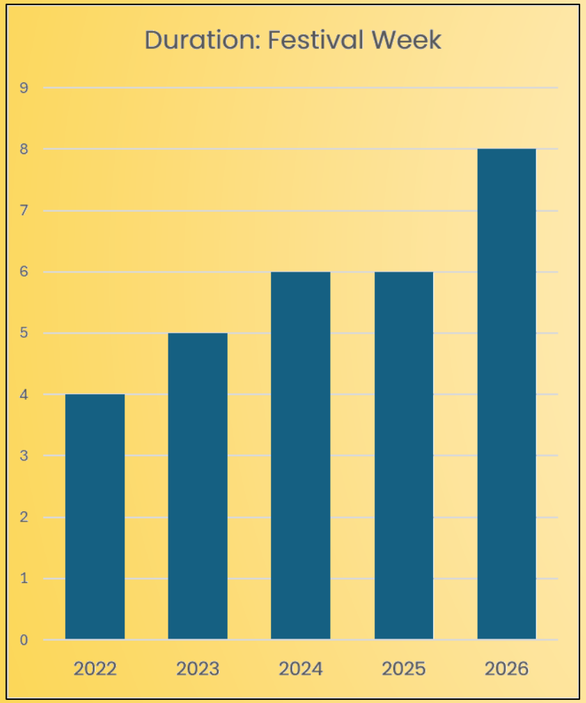
How We've Grown

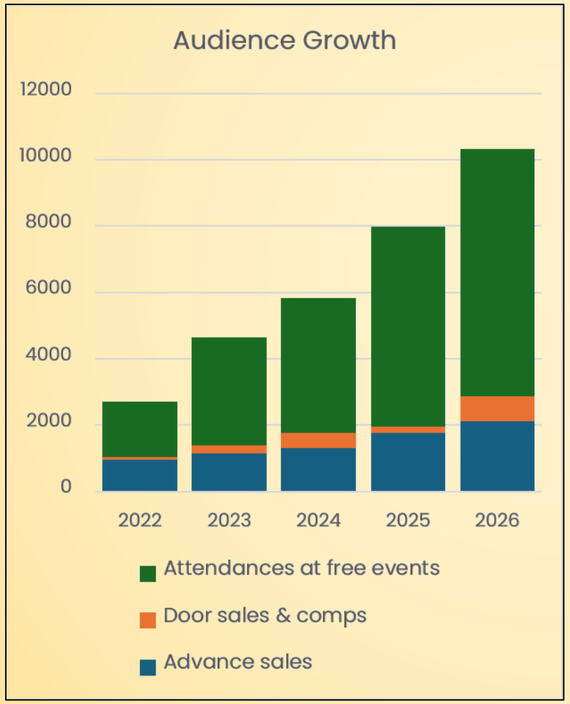
In 5 years, a 4-day festival has become an 8-day festival. The festival budget has grown from £35,000 to over £90,000.

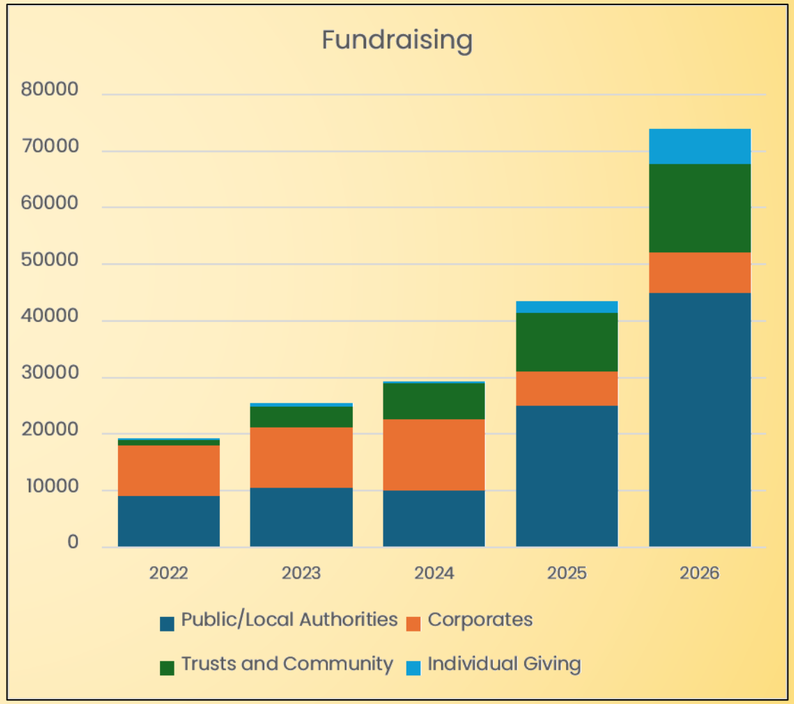
In 2022, corporate sponsorship accounted for 45% of the funds raised, compared to less than 10% in 2026.

Total event attendance figures have risen from 2,700 to over 10,000.

The number of events, venues and performers has steadily grown, with an increased focus on outreach activity.







"Thank you for organising such a wonderful programme of events. The community involvement is particularly inspiring. I love it that you use so many different venues for performances and am sure this really showcases all that Ripon has to offer. Everything I saw was of such high quality and there was a real buzz around the city. I really look forward to this every year - it's fantastic."

Audience Member

Bringing the Community Together



"Ripon Theatre Festival is welcoming for the whole community" **93%**

"Ripon Theatre Festival is good for Ripon's image" **99%**

"Ripon Theatre Festival improved my sense of wellbeing" **82%**

Survey respondents agreed strongly or very strongly

"We saw you in Ripon today. You were just wonderful. My son has been through a lot and the world is tough to navigate for him. Seeing him laugh with you was such a joy."

Audience member meeting walkabout act Hodman & Sally

Bringing the Community Together



"A brilliant day at a brilliant festival!"

Community Performer

"Really positive, leaves you with a really good feeling, nice it's available for free, this doesn't normally happen."

Audience survey respondent

"I felt incredibly grateful to be able to see such amazing performances where I live."

Audience survey respondent

"Wonderful - just wonderful, the range of performances created such a diverse programme."

Audience Survey Respondent

Bringing the Community Together



“A huge thank you for bringing eight days of incredible theatre entertainment to Ripon.
You spread the festival across venues throughout the city, giving so many places the opportunity to be part of something special.
You take people on a journey around Ripon, with every corner of the city coming alive…
For those visiting Ripon for the day, you truly showcased what our city is all about – a wonderful community with a huge heart.”

Katie Ross, The Portly Pig

Performers

Matt Miller Theatre
Fell Foss
Out of Character Theatre Company
Charlotte Mooney
Imogen Wood
Handmade Theatre
Bryony Harris
Constance Peel
The Rubbish Shakespeare Company
Spilt Milk Dance
Desirée Baptiste
Ignacio Lopez
Kiri Pritchard-McLean
Yorkshire Create
The Wakeman Mummers
Chris Sainton-Clark
Amber Topaz
Victoria Firth & Company
Fiona Georgiou Hunt
JoAnne Haines/Mind the Gap

Opera North
Ripon Ghost Walkers
Melanie Gall
Florence Glen
Ripon Poets
400 Roses
Slubbing Billy's
Chicks on Sticks
Hampsthwaite Primary School
Lily Worth
Zest Theatre
Dizzy O'Dare
Tall Paul
Harry Pizzey
Fladam
Threedumb Theatre
Janice Hopkinson
Stories with Liv
Fra Martó
PuppetPower North

Ripon Music Open Mic Bands
Ragged Edge Productions
Ripon Museums Theatre Group
Tatwood Puppets
Freddie Cleary
St Aelred's Irish Dance
Short + Sweet Yorkshire
Rudkin & Hicks
The Flying Buttresses
Somewhere Road
Yorkshire Voices
The Music Bank
HG33 Band
Skellsiders
Just More Productions
Ripon Dance Academy
All for One Choir
Calle Oche
Illyria
Maybe You Like It

Thingumajig Theatre
Jolly Good Productions
Rhubarb Theatre
Ripon Trinity Singers
Ripon Goes to Bollywood
Orb Community Arts
Circo Rumbaba
Open the Book
Medusa Gothic Morris
Ripon Walled Garden &
Jennyruth Performers
Cricket on the Hearth
Moon Rabbit Theatre
The Duke's Theatre Company

Venues

Ripon Arts Hub
Ripon Library
Ripon Cathedral
Market Place
Minster Gardens
The Water Rat
Harrogate Road Methodist Church
The Little Ripon Bookshop
Kirkgate & City Centre streets
Ripon Spa Gardens
Ripon Workhouse Museum
St Mary Magdalen's (Leper Chapel)
The Portly Pig
Costa Coffee
The Ripon Inn
King William IV Pub
The Greenhouse
Allhallowgate Methodist Church
The Unicorn Hotel (Wetherspoon's)
The Arcade, Ripon
Ripon Races



"Ripon Racecourse proved itself the perfect setting for one of the most polished pieces of outdoor theatre I have seen. This is a festival that goes from strength to strength, and if this closing performance is any indication, its success can only continue to build." **The Yorkshire Times**

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