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# Ground control to major growth

By ... Gavin Poole | 17 Sep 2025

On a cold night on London's Heddon Street, David Bowie stood beneath a neon sign, photographed in the rain, to introduce the world to Ziggy Stardust.



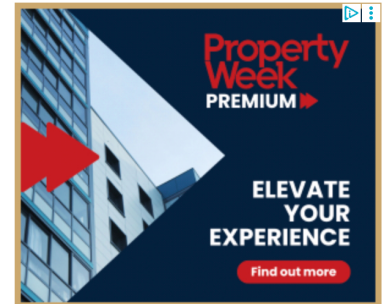
Gavin Poole is chief executive of Here East

Nearly 54 years to the day, his legacy is being reintroduced to London through the David Bowie Centre at the V&A East Storehouse in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in Stratford, east London. The permanent exhibition features Bowie's archive of more than 80,000 items, including costumes, props and handwritten lyrics. For the first time, these fragments of his work are being made public.

The exhibition is an example of how the UK is well placed to capitalise on the next generation of cultural infrastructure. Creative industries are growing one and a half times faster than the wider economy, worth £124bn and employing 2.4 million people. The government's 10-year Creative Industries Sector Plan, published in June, is set to capitalise on our world-leading culture by nearly doubling investment in the sector to £31bn by 2035.

But it is also a perilous time for physical creative spaces. Museums and galleries have struggled to rebound from the pandemic and London has lost 2% of its cultural spaces in the last few years, while nearly a third of creatives face insecure tenures. The opportunities, and challenges, are clear to back the sector via investment in creative spaces.

As mixed-use schemes become the norm, big cultural and creative assets are central to shaping UK communities. They act not only as attractions but also as anchors to foster local identity, a sense of belonging and long-term value. Planners and developers are recognising that embedding cultural institutions in large developments can be a game-changer.



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Starman: David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust is part of his legacy explored at the V&A East Storehouse

Cultural hubs such as the V&A East Storehouse bring credibility and encourage visitors. They drive footfall outside working hours, enliven districts on evenings and weekends and create a vibrancy that makes places attractive to businesses, residents and tourists. They provide a sustainable economic stimulus that can outlast short-term retail or office demand.

For developers, the lesson is equally clear: cultural assets cannot be treated as marketing accessories. Without authentic integration, long-term funding and community alignment, they risk becoming white elephants.

For Here East, built as the 2012 London Summer Olympics broadcast and press centre, culture was never a tokenistic addition but a core part of its transformation. Creative institutions there are not only thriving; they are shaping the area's identity. More than three quarters of new floor assistants and collections staff come from the four Olympic boroughs. This is what authentic placemaking should look like and serves as a model for future projects.

As more cultural centres experiment with digital innovation, from immersive experiences such as ABBA Voyage to collections available on demand at the V&A East Storehouse or the Design Museum, the line between audience and participant is blurring. Developers should embrace this trend. Flexible, hybrid institutions have the potential to drive both economic resilience and creative breakthroughs.

Not every development can house an archive on the scale of the Bowie Centre; but every community can benefit from cultural integration through grassroots studios, affordable creative workspace or partnerships with local arts groups. The government's creative strategy aims to address this, through 12 'creative clusters' across the UK to nurture such ecosystems. This will rely on working with local leaders and government to ensure there is a community-first approach.

The principle remains the same: culture strengthens place. Done well, it can future-proof developments, energise economies and enrich civic life. For developers, planners and policymakers, the lesson is simple: if we treat cultural infrastructure not as a space oddity but as an essential, we can create sites as enduring as Bowie's music itself.

*Gavin Poole is chief executive of Here East*

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