

The Light represents a major investment in creativity, culture, learning and community. Opening in summer 2026, The Light will be a dynamic, multipurpose cultural venue located at the heart of the Durham Innovation District on the transformed site of the former DLI Museum and Durham Art Gallery. It will offer a welcoming and engaging space where visitors will be able to experience internationally significant exhibitions, created in partnership with leading national and global institutions.



A place where art and science meet

The light will present an ambitious programme showcasing world class creativity from the North East, the UK, and across the globe. Positioned at the intersection of art, heritage and science, it will be a meeting place and a beacon for creativity, where communities can gather and feel something powerful. Rooted in Durham, The Light will set a new standard for each and every visitor, so they return again and again.

Light art will play a prominent role, inspired by County Durham's deep-rooted connection to light – from the creation of Bede's lunar calendar 1,300 years ago and Joseph Swan's pioneering lightbulb, to Durham University's involvement in the James Webb Space Telescope.

A space for creativity and collaboration

We want to shake up the traditional view of a museum and gallery, by listening and collaborating, utilising technology and developing innovative partnerships across cities and sectors, ensuring we are on peoples' 'must visit' bucket list. Artists and scientists will be encouraged to create, experiment and collaborate. Communities will gather for events, learning and participation.

A vibrant visitor destination

The building, once the site of the Durham Light Infantry (DLI) Museum and Durham Art Gallery, is being significantly extended and transformed. In addition to 550 sqm of state of the art temporary gallery spaces, The Light will

also be home to a dedicated DLI Gallery, that will retain the building's historic connection to the Regiment, telling the story of the 'Durhams' through objects, documents, creative responses, and film footage from the DLI Collection.

Set within beautiful natural grounds, The Light will also offer outdoor space for visitors to explore, play and enjoy, alongside quieter areas designed for reflection.

And it doesn't stop there. More than just exhibition space, The Light will offer facilities to host private events and conferences. A ground floor café will provide a welcoming place for visitors and passers-by to stop for refreshments, and, inspired by our collections and changing exhibitions, the shop will offer a distinctive, design-led retail experience that we hope will become a destination for visitors and locals alike.

Together with its sister venue, The Story, the permanent home to the DLI Collection, and other attractions in the county, The Light will support and enhance a local, regional and national visitor offer that celebrates and showcases our past, present and future ambition.

We anticipate 80-100,000 visitors annually



Inaugural Exhibition – Victory Over The Sun: Encounters With Light

Curated by Natasha Howes, Principal Curator, Light Night Leeds and former Senior Curator, Manchester Art Gallery.

The inaugural exhibition for The Light is a group show of internationally significant contemporary artists who use light in extraordinary and experimental ways. Victory Over The Sun: Encounters with Light features over 20 artists who have brought something new to the light art cannon. The exhibition takes its name from a 1913 Russian Futurist Opera where a group of protagonists wanted to destroy reason by disposing of time and capturing the sun. The idea of capturing the sun has strong parallels with the 19th century scientists who invented artificial light. The creation of electric light bulbs provided miniature, man-made suns to illuminate the world after dark. The UK inventor of the light bulb was physicist and chemist Joseph Swan, working independently of Thomas Edison in the US. Swan was born in County Durham and his spirit of innovation continues here today with world class research at the University of Durham and in the neighbouring Durham Innovation District. The Light is therefore perfectly placed to explore the connection between innovation and science, art and creativity through the medium of light.

Swan's original 1878-9 lightbulb acts as a provocation at the start of the exhibition, which goes on to examine how artists have employed light as a material in their work from the 1960s to the present day, using newly developed technologies from fluorescent tubes and neons, to LEDs and digital media. The exhibition explores different themes, perception, the sculptural and spatial dimensions of light, links to science and nature, the use of text and how light can even be used as a tool for drawing. Visitors will experience different sensory encounters throughout the exhibition, demonstrating how the simple light bulb, and its victory over the sun, can produce a myriad of possibilities.

The Durham Light Infantry: Unexpected Encounters & Connections

Discover the remarkable impact and enduring legacy of the distinguished Durham Light Infantry (DLI) in this brand-new exhibition. Through personal stories and shared experiences, visitors will uncover surprising tales of science, innovation, travel, adventure, laughter, and loss.

Carefully chosen objects and archival treasures—including iconic pieces from beloved collections—bring to life the regiment's history. These items bear witness to sweeping social and industrial change and highlight the DLI's role at the forefront of innovation and training, whether in peacetime or on the front line.

Renowned for courage, resilience, and unwavering camaraderie, the DLI was more than a regiment—it was a close-knit family with a bold and distinctive character. This exhibition explores that spirit and its contemporary relevance through thought-provoking, interactive, and immersive displays.

We invite visitors to connect with the personal stories behind the DLI, experience the realities of life on the front line, and reflect on how these moments shaped both local communities and the wider world.

Durham County Council Culture Service

Home to around 530,000 people, one world heritage site, two national landscapes and a world leading university, County Durham is an innovation engine and cultural powerhouse. It's a place of learning and unspoilt beauty, powered by a proud heritage, with a DNA of inventiveness and entrepreneurship which has provided many world firsts.

But, our large county is also one of unequal opportunity with areas of significant deprivation, poor health, isolation and economic challenge. Our mission is to address these inequalities, improve access to culture and empower communities through creativity—supporting civic pride, wellbeing and the local creative economy.

The Light sits within Durham County Council's Culture Service, led by Dr Sarah Glynn (Strategic Manager for Culture). Alongside statutory functions including libraries and archives, we deliver a wide ranging culture portfolio including museums, heritage venues and collections, theatre, live performance and cinema, community arts and cultural engagement, and major festivals and events. We also act as a supporter and facilitator for the wider cultural sector in the county leading on strategic planning, policy development, and cross-sector collaboration, ensuring that culture and creativity are embedded in the county's economic and social development.

Since 2023, our Culture Service has been in a period of change and transformation—embracing creative thinking and smart risk-taking, reshaping priorities to do the unexpected and deliver excellence. We work together to deliver the best outcomes for the communities who live in, work in and visit County Durham; every role in the culture service contributes to this shared journey.