

UK City of Culture 2029 longlist revealed

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Nine places have been longlisted to be the next UK City of Culture in 2029.

- Each place will now receive £60,000 to develop a full application
- The announcement comes as over 230 towns register interest in the inaugural UK Town of Culture competition

Nine places across the UK have been longlisted to be the next UK City of Culture in 2029 and will each benefit from a funding boost to support their bid for the title.

The nine longlisted locations are: Blackpool, Inverness-Highland, Ipswich, Middlesbrough, Milton Keynes, Portsmouth, Sheffield, Swindon and Wrexham.

Winning this title will have enormous benefits for local communities, with previous hosts attracting millions of pounds in additional investment and thousands of visitors to their area, as well as generating new jobs.

Today's announcement comes as over 230 towns have thrown their hat into the ring to become the UK's first-ever Town of Culture by registering their interest in bidding for that title. Many towns have also declared that they will be submitting a bid, to highlight their unique story and the elements of their local culture and heritage that they would celebrate should they be successful.

The competition is open to applications from small, medium and large towns for just under two more weeks, with the winner then tasked with delivering a vibrant cultural programme in 2028.

Both of these competitions are part of the Prime Minister's ambition to restore pride in every part of Britain. Throughout this year, both competitions will continue to shine a light on local visions and voices from across the UK, which will encourage local investment, create a lasting sense of pride, and open doors to the arts for everyone.

Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy said:

For far too long, opportunity has not been shared equally across the country. The UK City of Culture and new UK Town of Culture competitions recognise the enormous contributions made by communities all over the UK who are all part of the story of who we are as a nation.

I look forward to seeing what the nine longlisted places have in store as they progress in the competition. I also urge any towns thinking about entering the UK Town of Culture competition to seize this opportunity and get involved. It's a chance to show the country what makes them unique and shine a spotlight on their cultural offer, enriching the lives of local people.

The UK City of Culture longlist was recommended by an independent expert advisory panel, chaired by Sir Phil Redmond and supported by Deputy Chair, Claire McColgan. Panel members have been

selected based on their wide range of expertise from across the UK.

They are:

- Sir Phil Redmond (Chair)
- Claire McColgan (Deputy Chair)
- Roberta Doyle (Scotland Representative)
- Dr Sarah Green OBE
- Shona McCarthy (Northern Ireland Representative)
- Jonothon Neelands
- Devinda De Silva (Wales Representative)
- Moira Sinclair OBE (England Representative)
- Trenton Tomlinson
- Megan Wastell
- Claire Whitaker CBE

The longlisted places will now work to finalise their bids, which will explain how they would use culture to create transformational opportunities and better lives for people living in their local area.

All nine longlisted places will receive £60,000 each to help them to develop their full bids for the competition - up from £40,000 since the last competition.

For the first time ever, there will be a confirmed cash prize of £10 million for the UK City of Culture winner to help them deliver a show-stopping year of rich cultural activity rooted in their unique identities and drawing on local strengths and stories. The three most impressive bids from places that reach the shortlist but are not selected as the winner will receive £125,000 each to help them to take forward elements of their bid.

Sir Phil Redmond, Chair of the City of Culture Expert Advisory Panel, said:

Once again, the UK City of Culture competition is providing bidders the opportunity to both demonstrate and experience a focused year, using culture as the creative catalyst for change, raising awareness and changing perceptions. Derry-Londonderry, Hull, Coventry and more recently Bradford, have all demonstrated the quality and depth of cultural activity embedded across the UK, as well as the benefits of simply taking part.

The competition brings people together, to talk to each other rather than at each other, sharing commonality and tolerating difference. Above all, allowing places to demonstrate their own pride in their places.

It is for these reasons that the new UK Town of Culture competition has been launched, to share the opportunities as wide as possible, with Expressions of Interest (EOI) due by the 31st March.

The UK City of Culture 2029 winner will be announced later this year and will follow Bradford's tenure as UK City of Culture 2025. Previous winners Derry-Londonderry, Hull, Coventry and Bradford have shown how the competition can deliver greater and long-lasting cultural participation,

economic regeneration and local pride.

Last year Bradford led a showstopping cultural programme of 5,000 events - over 75% of which were free - that pulled in an audience of three million, involved over 650 local artists and organisations, and resulted in capital investment for more than 30 local cultural organisations. Bradford's year in the spotlight also led to increased opportunities for local people to get involved with events, with over 87,000 residents taking part in key projects throughout the year.

There is also evidence that bidding to win City of Culture in its own right brings many benefits, including supporting a place to develop its cultural strategy and bring together key partners.

Scotland Office Minister Kirsty McNeill said:

I'm delighted to see Inverness make the longlist to be named the next UK City of Culture. I would like to congratulate the city and the bid team on reaching this stage of the competition.

With its blend of significant historical sites, contemporary festivals and impressive landmarks - such as the newly-restored Inverness Castle - the 'Capital of the Highlands' has a unique story to tell. It also has huge potential to demonstrate how culture can drive long-term investment and positive change across the region.

Secretary of State for Wales Jo Stevens said:

Wrexham is Wales's newest city and I'm delighted to see it flying the flag for Wales in this competition. The city and area has so much to offer in heritage, culture and sport - I wish Wrexham every success with its bid.

I also encourage our fantastic Welsh towns to take the opportunity to apply to become the UK's first Town of Culture so we can share what makes our communities special with as many people as possible.

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Hilary Benn said:

With the deadline to register an Expression of Interest just over two weeks away, I really hope towns across Northern Ireland will think about applying to the Town of Culture competition.

There is so much to celebrate in the history and culture of towns across Northern Ireland.

The Town of Culture competition offers practical support to boost local cultural activities, which helps bring communities together.

Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of Blackpool Council, said:

Blackpool is bursting with culture and variety. We've just celebrated a week-long festival of circus and magic and are looking forward to welcoming the works of both Claude Monet and William Shakespeare in March - all of which is complemented by our year-round celebration of the art and culture of today and tomorrow.

Our diverse culture and entertainment offer means Blackpool has something for everybody, from all age groups and backgrounds. Being named as the City of Culture 2029 would showcase the talent and creativity that we already have on our doorstep, making all our residents proud of our bold, vibrant and cultural town.

To top it all off, 2029 would mark the 150th anniversary of one of Britain's first and most loved mass arts displays - the Blackpool Illuminations.

Convener of The Highland Council, Councillor Bill Lobban said:

I am delighted that Inverness and the Highlands have been longlisted for UK City of Culture. This is an extraordinary moment which recognises the creativity, resilience and cultural richness of communities spread across one of the most unique and diverse regions in the UK. This bid celebrates our landscapes, our languages, our young people and our shared ambition for a confident, connected and sustainable future. We are delighted to take this next step and to showcase the Highlands as a place where culture drives opportunity, innovation and pride.

Bryony Hope, Head of Communications and Development at DanceEast said:

Being named on the longlist for UK City of Culture 2029 is an important moment for Ipswich and recognition of the ambition that exists here. The bid has been shaped by genuine partnership, collaboration and leadership - from Ipswich Borough Council and cultural organisations through to businesses, community organisations, residents, children and young people, and Ipswich Town Football Club. We are all united by a shared belief in the role that culture can play in strengthening communities and supporting our shared future.

We see every day how creativity brings people together, builds confidence and opens opportunities for people of all ages. Ensuring that the next generation can access and shape culture in Ipswich is a central part of the vision behind the bid.

We are proud to see Ipswich recognised nationally and we welcome the opportunity to build on this momentum. Our focus now is on working with partners and young people across Ipswich, our region, nationally and internationally, to develop the strongest possible case to become UK City of Culture 2029.

Middlesbrough Mayor Chris Cooke said:

Our bid takes Middlesbrough's motto, 'Erimus', - which translates to 'We Shall Be' - literally.

It brings together our history as an industrial powerhouse with our ambition to become the UK's most creative place.

I am delighted that we've been longlisted for what would be a once in a generation opportunity to celebrate the creativity of our residents, artists and businesses and change how people view Middlesbrough.

Cabinet Member for Planning and Placemaking at Milton Keynes City Council, Councillor Shanika Mahendran said:

Being longlisted for UK City of Culture 2029 is an exciting moment for Milton Keynes. It recognises the potential of our bold design heritage, our creative communities and our forward-looking identity, and we thank the expert judging panel and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for seeing that potential. We look forward to working closely with partners from across the city as we develop the full application, and to showing even more of what makes Milton Keynes such an inventive, welcoming and culturally ambitious place.

Bernie Topham, Chair of Portsmouth Creates:

We are truly ecstatic that we have made the Longlist of cities in the running to become UK City of Culture 2029.

Even at the very start of this process we have seen and felt firsthand the incredible power that a competition like this can have on a community and place.

This is a hugely proud moment for everyone here in Portsmouth, now we must continue working together to put Portsmouth on the map... Because together We Are Pompey 2029!

Councillor Tom Hunt, Leader of Sheffield City Council, said:

We're incredibly proud that Sheffield has been longlisted for UK City of Culture 2029. This city has always been powered by creativity – seen in our globally influential music, film, games and art. We don't just put culture on a stage, we live it, make it and share it with the world. Grown from the ground up, it's shaped by the people who call Sheffield home.

Culture isn't separate from how Sheffield grows, it's part of how we build a stronger, more confident city. It brings people in, creates jobs, supports our independent businesses, and helps talent choose to stay and build their future here.

This is a brilliant moment for our city and a chance to show the confidence, creativity and ambition that defines Sheffield today.

Councillor Marina Strinkovsky, Swindon Borough Council's Cabinet Member for Placemaking and Planning said:

Being longlisted for UK City of Culture is an extraordinary moment for Swindon. It recognises the imagination, talent and determination that have always defined our town. This achievement belongs to every artist, volunteer, young producer, community group and cultural organisation that has poured their energy into telling Swindon's story.

We're a place built by thinkers, makers and innovators and today's news shows that the rest of the country is beginning to see what we've known all along. Longlisting gives us a powerful platform to showcase our heritage, our ambition and our belief in Swindon as a cultural powerhouse.

I couldn't be prouder of what we've achieved together and I'm excited to hear if we get shortlisted".

Amanda Evans, Culture Bid Director at Wrexham Community & Culture Trust comments:

We are delighted to make the longlist and are more driven than ever to win the UK City of Culture title for 2029.

Winning the bid will help to secure a bright social and economic future for Wrexham, bringing new opportunities for people who live and work in the area, as well as

supporting our arts and culture sector in more ways than ever before. This is a really, really exciting time for us and we are committing everything over the next few months to put Wrexham on a global stage and show why we are worthy of winning the title.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

UK CITY OF CULTURE

Full list of bids (*marks longlisted bids):

- Blackpool*
- Bristol
- Carlisle
- Exeter
- Herefordshire
- Inverness-Highland*
- Ipswich*
- Isle of Thanet
- Middlesbrough*
- Milton Keynes*
- Peterborough
- Plymouth
- Portsmouth*
- Reading
- Sheffield*
- Swindon*
- Wrexham*

UK TOWN OF CULTURE

Applications for UK Town of Culture 2028 will be judged on three main criteria:

- Your story - the unique story of the town
- Culture for everyone - how the town will design a cultural programme for all
- Making it happen - how the town will then deliver a successful programme

The bids for the 2028 title will be assessed by an independent expert advisory panel chaired by Sir Phil Redmond. Further details on the panel members will be confirmed in due course.

For more information on how to bid for the UK Town of Culture 2028 title, please go to: UK Town of Culture 2028 Expression of Interest

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-city-of-culture-2029-longlist-revealed>