

UK Town of Culture 2028 Competition

Expression of Interest (EOI)

Thank you for your interest in the UK Town of Culture 2028.

Please ensure you have read the “UK Town of Culture 2028 Expression of Interest: Guidance for bidders” document before applying. All EOIs must be submitted using this standard template.

The form comprises four sections which each require a statement response. You are provided with a series of prompts to use as a guide. You do not need to answer each prompt individually but your responses should address all prompts. The prompts draw from the competition criteria and bidding places should refer back to the criteria when completing the form to show the potential of their programme to make a contribution to the aims of the UK Town of Culture programme.

The form has set formatting (e.g., font size and line spacing) which should be adhered to. Please note that the EOI form is strictly word limited and we do not expect at this stage detailed economic data, research or in depth fundraising or delivery plans. Responses should also only include text.

The application deadline is **31 March 2026**. Applications received after this date will not be considered. **If a large number of applications are received, an initial sift will be conducted on the section, 'Section 2: Your Story', only.**

Contact: uktownofculture2028-competition@dcms.gov.uk

SECTION 1: BID INFORMATION

In this section, we ask for information relating to your bidding team and place. The information will not be scored but will be used to confirm your eligibility.

1.1 Contact Information

Please provide contact information for the single point of contact for your bidding team.

Name, Position, Team / Organisation, Telephone Number, Email Address.

Bishop Auckland Town Council

Townofculture@bishopauckland-tc.gov.uk

1.2 The Bidder

Please provide information for the bidder. With reference to the definitions of the Accountable Body and Delivery Body in “UK Town of Culture 2028 Expression of Interest: Guidance for bidders”. You should include information on who the lead bidder is and who the key partners are.

The *Accountable Body* for this bid will be Bishop Auckland Town Council.

The dedicated *Delivery Body*, will be an established partnership of civic stakeholders, the local college, and local cultural organisations including experienced homegrown cultural programme producers.

This will comprise of a Working Group, which has already met together weekly to produce this EOI, and a wider Forum Group, who have already met twice to workshop ideas and provide feedback.

The Working Group includes representation from the following:

- Bishop Auckland Town Council
- The Member of Parliament
- Bishop Auckland College
- Bishop Auckland based culture organisations:
 - Dr McManners, A respected community figure and Honorary Deputy Lord Lieutenant who represents, Bishop Auckland Civic Society, Gemini Collection and Chair of Bishop Auckland Conservation Panel. He is highly regarded for his dedication to protecting the town's built environment, preserving its heritage, and promoting local history as well as donor of a premier collection of artworks documenting the life, culture and industry of north east coal miners to the Mining Art Gallery.
 - The Auckland Project – the cultural regeneration charity working to establish Bishop Auckland as a must-visit cultural destination. The Auckland Project was established to acquire and restore Auckland Palace and its set of paintings by Francisco de Zurbarán. Today it operates Auckland Palace and its extensive gardens and parklands, The Faith Museum, exploring 6,000 years of belief, the Mining Art Gallery displaying

the work of the 'pitmen painters', the Spanish Gallery which showcases Golden Age Hispanic art and culture, the Artists' Hub space for art classes and community events, the Weardale Railway heritage line and Binchester Roman Fort.

- 11Arches (Kynren) - a registered charity dedicated to transforming history into unforgettable experiences. Through world-class productions and community-led initiatives, we celebrate the past, empower the present, and build a legacy for the future. From the globally acclaimed *Kynren – An Epic Tale of England* to the eagerly anticipated *Kynren – The Storied Lands*, their mission is to entertain, educate, and inspire, while driving social and economic regeneration in Bishop Auckland and beyond.
- Bacchanalia for Culture CIC is a Bishop Auckland-based cultural production company and social enterprise. The organisation designs and delivers high-quality festivals, events and creative pop-ups in civic spaces, working with local authorities, businesses and communities to animate town centres, support local economies and create shared cultural experiences.
- Daisy Arts CIC – a local arts organisation using arts and culture to engage; delivering, in partnership, inclusive programmes and events that bring people together; improve wellbeing, nurture aspirations, build confidences and support learning
- Dispel Art' – A local arts organisation who advocates for equitable access to creativity for all regardless of who you are or where you are from.
- Hearth - a community-rooted cultural initiative in Bishop Auckland. We create space for connection, creativity, and care through joyful experiences and engagement with Art, Culture, and Nature.

The Culture Forum includes (but is not limited to), Made in North East, Bishop Auckland Choral Society, Bishop Auckland Theatre Society, Bishop Auckland Football Club and Museum, Bishop Auckland Rugby Club, Ferryhill Brass Band, Bridge Creative CIC, Civic Society, Green Matters, Friends of Darlington and Stockton Railway, Weardale Railway, Gemini Collection, Northern Heartlands, Bishop Auckland Peoples Museum, SWD News, Northern Echo, M Smith Independent Film Maker, Bishop Auckland Conservation Panel, Local Historians, Locomotion, Durham County Council, Altogether Greener, Wear Rivers Trust, Town Hall, Visit County Durham, Elected members, Angel Trust, Bishop Auckland Music Society, representatives, and Artist Hub Resident Artists.

The Town Council will provide governance, financial oversight and civic accountability. The Delivery Body will be responsible for programme design, cultural commissioning, engagement and marketing, production, and planning for social and economic impact. This partnership model reflects the way culture already operates in Bishop Auckland: civic

weight combined with independent cultural production.

1.3 The Geographical Area

Please specify the geographical area that you are bidding for, with reference to the relevant geographical boundary designations. You may want to note the town categories set out in the “UK Town of Culture 2028 Expression of Interest: Guidance for bidders”. We will use your geographical area’s population size to categorise your bid.

The bid area is predominantly the Bishop Auckland built-up area as defined by the Office for National Statistics (BUA22CD, E63000267). This includes Bishop Auckland, South Church, Auckland Park, Tindale and St Helen Auckland – an area with approximately 23,000–24,000. However, as people do not live their lives by invisible political boundaries, we will also consider adjacent villages with strong cultural ties to Bishop Auckland, including West Auckland (E63000277), Witton Park (E63000258), Escomb (n/a), Coundon & Leeholme (E63000260), and Toronto (n/a) – which have populations of 3100, 400, 360, 400, 2500, respectively – to form part of the bid area, taking it to around 30,000 residents.

This places the bid firmly in the mid-sized town category for the purposes of the Town of Culture competition.

Beyond these boundaries, Bishop Auckland’s cultural and economic influence extends into the surrounding South and West Durham area. Villages all the way up the Wear Valley (such as Howden-Le-Wear, Fir Tree, Wolsingham, Frosterley, Stanhope, Eastgate, Westgate, and St John’s Chapel which all have Bishop Auckland postal addresses), villages in the Gaunless Valley area (such as Butterknowle, Copley, Evenwood, Cockfield, Hamsterley, Toft Hill, and High Etherley), all look to Bishop Auckland as the largest civic, cultural and commercial hub for the area.

While these places do not form part of the bid area (where significant spend and activities will take place) their residents and local cultural groups will be engaged in the design and delivery phase where possible, reflecting shared heritage and cultural exchange as the stories of these places often go hand in hand with those of Bishop Auckland, and therefore we will be engaged in partnership, ensuring a connected cultural ecosystem while maintaining a clear focus on the defined bid geography.

Bishop Auckland is a historic market town in County Durham, situated at the meeting of the Rivers Wear and Gaunless and positioned roughly 12 miles from both Durham and Darlington. The town occupies elevated ground overlooking the Wear Valley and is surrounded by farmland, wooded areas and historic parkland, giving it a distinctive natural setting and a strong sense of place.

The settlement has been shaped by its Roman origins: the Roman road runs through the town’s centre and the Roman Fort of Vinovia (Binchester) sits immediately to the north. This has influenced the town’s linear layout and the character of its four electoral wards, each with its own community identity.

ONS Census data shows a population profile broadly aligned with County Durham, with a high proportion of single-person and single-family households. The town experiences significant deprivation, with over half of households deprived in at least one dimension. This reflects long-term socioeconomic challenges following the decline of mining and industry. Economic inactivity is above national levels, and local evidence indicates that around one in seven young people are NEET, affecting aspirations and access to cultural and creative pathways.

The town centre contains cultural and heritage assets of national importance. Auckland Castle, the historic home of the Prince Bishops, sits within extensive parkland and is surrounded by museums, galleries and historic streets currently undergoing major restoration through philanthropic investment, creating a growing cultural cluster at the heart of the town.

Bishop Auckland is accessible via the Bishop Auckland Railway Station and the A688 and A68 road corridors, acting as a gateway to the Durham Dales and wider South West Durham. The town's landscape, heritage, communities and challenges together define a place with deep cultural roots and significant need. These characteristics underpin the ambition for Bishop Auckland to become Town of Culture 2028, using culture to drive regeneration and opportunity.

SECTION 2: YOUR STORY

In this section, we want to understand the unique story and culture of your town. [Maximum 400 words for each section]

2.1 Vision

Please use the following prompts to guide your response:

- What is the story of your town (e.g., places and landscapes, people, communities, culture and heritage) and what is special about it (e.g., including, how it has contributed to a local identity - and, if relevant, how it has contributed to the national story)?
- How will your programme celebrate the story of your town, and what themes will be explored in your programme?
- How will your programme help to build knowledge of your town (e.g., improving, celebrating, raising the profile)?

Bishop Auckland has a rich history, a proud community, and unparalleled plans for cultural regeneration. Once considered 'left behind', we are building a future as proud as our past. Shaped by change and resilience, we live by our town motto — TEMPORI PARENDUM: WE MOVE WITH THE TIMES.

As Vinovia, we were a mighty garrison at the Northern frontier of the Roman Empire, selected for our commanding strategic position over the River Wear. We became an early cradle of Christianity, home to secret converts, and later building Escomb Saxon Church from the stones left at Vinovia.

We became Bishop Auckland, the country seat of the Prince Bishops of Durham, who wielded the might of Crown and Church. Around their palace estates we grew into a bustling market town.

Industrialisation transformed us again. At Witton Park, the Stockton & Darlington Railway began – the world's first passenger railway. Connected to the world we grew fast, mining the coal that powered the Industrial Revolution that transformed the world. Mining communities faced great hardship but culture shone bright in our brass bands, colliery banners, reading rooms, theatre, institutes, and mining art – and our all-conquering amateur football teams.

Deindustrialisation was a painful chapter, but our story continued. Regeneration didn't happen to Bishop Auckland: our community chose to '*move with the times*' once more. The funding came from outside, but the hard work was all ours.

Thousands of volunteers have learned to ride horses and clash broadswords in 'Kynren', an explosive historic pageant telling '*the story of us*'. Our volunteer workforce welcomes visitors to Auckland Palace, and our world-class museums and galleries. Our town is alive with artists' studios, choirs, brass bands, amateur sports, food festivals and creative events that ignite dark nights.

Our Town of Culture programme will celebrate change, community and creativity rooted in place: how people and places can reinvent themselves.

From immersive storytelling inspired by Kynren, to participation in art, music, food, sport and making, our programme will place local people at its heart. It will bring visitors to enjoy

our town, share our story, and support our regeneration. Programming will celebrate our hard work, creating a new life for the main street and a joined-up cultural offer that is visible, accessible and proudly distinctive.

Bishop Auckland: ToC2028 will offer a model of change for other post-industrial towns, too: look to the past, move with the times, build a bright future together.

2.2 Local Needs

Please use the following prompts to guide your response:

- *What local challenges and issues does your town face that your bid can help to address? What priorities, needs, groups and demographics will your programme target and why?*
- *How does your bid align with any other local and / or regional plans to tackle local needs?*

Bishop Auckland has seen immense change in recent years, with major investment in the Market Place and the regeneration of Auckland Palace, its museums, galleries and gardens. These developments, Kynren and its new Daypark are creating opportunities for employment, skills development, volunteering, and leisure, with many residents proudly contributing to and benefitting from change.

However, changes have not always been felt equally. Bishop Auckland:

- includes some of County Durham's most deprived wards: most in the 10% most deprived nationally in term of income, health and access to opportunity.
- is a recognised NEET hotspot, and educational attainment in key areas like Maths and English falls behind UK average.
- has over a third of its units vacant on Newgate, our mile-long high street. Once a source of pride, it is now a symbol of decline, undermining perceptions of wider regeneration.

Cultural participation also reflects inequality. While the town has a strong cultural programme and a history of everyday creativity, some communities feel disconnected. Young people often believe there is little available locally, contributing to low aspiration and outmigration. Other groups such as people struggling day to day, older people and the large Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities, sometimes do not see themselves reflected in traditional arts or heritage provision, but from previous work we know that if given an opportunity in the right way they are likely to engage.

Our programme addresses these challenges directly, placing underrepresented groups at the heart of delivery. Culture will be co-created with communities rather than presented to them. Everyday forms of culture will be celebrated, from digital creativity and youth entrepreneurship, to the rich traditions of different communities, to local practices such as horticulture, making, community events, sport especially rich amateur footballing tradition. The approach is transformative socially, building confidence, skills and a sense of belonging; and economically, strengthening civic pride, footfall and town centre vitality.

Our approach will also address communication needs. Survey results showed many suggested activities already exist, but residents are unaware of them. We will identify how each community accesses information so we can use appropriate, targeted messaging to improve awareness and engagement across the town.

The EOI aligns with: Durham County Council's regeneration priorities, including town centre renewal, skills development, and inclusive growth; Visit County Durham's Destination Management Plan; the regional priorities of economic growth, innovation and culture, set out by the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority; as well as HM Government's national priorities within the Towns Fund programme. It builds on investment by The Auckland Project and Kynren, ensuring Bishop Auckland's cultural assets are not only nationally recognised but also meaningfully embedded in residents' everyday lives.

2.3 Empowerment

Please use the following prompts to guide your response:

- *How have you developed the ideas within this bid? To what extent have you already consulted your local community and community groups (i.e., residents, businesses, institutions, creative providers, and cultural organisations) on your interest in UK Town of Culture?*
- *How will your local community and community groups be involved in developing and delivering the full application, programme and its legacy? How will you hold yourself accountable to community groups and members when making decisions about the programme?*

We began our Town of Culture plans with 40+ local organisations representing heritage, culture, education, voluntary groups, and business. From this positive, warm forum a working group convened to take the process forward: Town Council, MP's Office, Civic Society, voluntary and arts organisations.

Social media shared news and a survey which garnered almost 300 responses. People's responses were positive and aligned: 77.4% said the current cultural offer was very good or good. 83% said they were proud - especially of Kynren, and our exceptional art and museums.

Priorities were clear: our 'high street', our heritage, bringing communities together and attracting visitors. Responders were keen on free outdoor events, reinstating festivals like the Flower Show, STEM competitions (reflecting industry and Jeremiah Dixon), music and theatre (building on Stan Laurel, local theatre and colliery bands).

A further forum updated participants, who were supportive and cohesive.

Much as warm responses have fuelled plans so far, our priority ahead must be people who are sceptical, unconvinced, or hostile to cultural initiatives. They are not a problem to manage: they are part of our town. If our programme only includes people who already participate in Bishop's cultural life, it will fail both ethically and practically.

For the development and delivery of the full application, we will meet people where they are to shape the programme and the legacy people want. Including listening to people about what makes their town special and what they want to see happen, via:

- Creative workshops in local schools, Bishop Auckland College and elsewhere
- Events for older residents at the allotments and community and welfare groups

- Informal events with food and entertainment in less connected communities like our Traveller sites and estates.
- Informal 'Ask me about ToC' programme in shops, at local events, existing classes, groups and in the Town Hall
- Business and voluntary sector roundtables, considering next steps, funding and delivery.

Community involvement will continue throughout programme design and delivery via:

- A Community Advisory Panel
- Commissioning opportunities
- Volunteer and ambassador programmes and apprenticeships
- Transparent reporting - decisions and programme development

Clear reporting, open decision-making and structured feedback loops will ensure that community input is visible, traceable and meaningfully integrated into delivery. Regular events allow our community – never 'shy bairns' – to be involved, hold us to account and stay with us. We will develop a programme by the people, for the people.

SECTION 3: CULTURE FOR EVERYONE

In this section, we want to understand how you will design a cultural programme for all which will provide visible, accessible culture that boosts the profile of your town. [Maximum 400 words for each section]

3.1 Quality and Innovation

Please use the following prompts to guide your response:

- *What is your cultural and heritage infrastructure, and how will you use it and build upon them in your programme? If your infrastructure is more limited, how could you leverage UK Town of Culture to develop your infrastructure on a permanent or temporary basis?*
- *What type of activities will your programme deliver, and how will they work together? Please refer to proposed lead artists / creatives, if they are known. You may refer to creating and / or promoting existing events that could become a returning event using the leverage generated by UK Town of Culture investment*

We have a rich cultural and heritage infrastructure that provides an exceptional foundation for a Town of Culture (ToC) programme. Our assets include Auckland Palace, the historic Market Place, Escomb Saxon Church, the origins of the first passenger railway, Kynren, and museums, churches, galleries, community venues and volunteer-led groups. The Town Hall, Spanish, Mining and Independent Galleries, alongside the Artists' Hub, form a growing cultural cluster, supported by the revitalisation of Newgate Street and a new hotel. This combination of heritage spaces, creative organisations and active community groups forms a resilient and distinctive ecosystem that can be creatively expanded during the ToC year.

We have a proven record of hosting large events like the Kynren, Food Festival, Christmas Town, and AGlow across its infrastructure supported by a resilient voluntary and community sector.

Our programme will activate the town's infrastructure in new and innovative ways, complementing the long-term regeneration. Key approaches will include:

- **Bringing heritage sites to life** - performance, storytelling, public art and immersive experiences.
- **Positioning Kynren as a narrative and participatory anchor**, showcasing large-scale community creativity and volunteering.
- **Using Newgate Street as a creative spine**, enabling street culture, markets, pop-ups and artist-led installations.
- **Developing temporary cultural spaces**, - mobile stages, neighbourhood-based creative hubs and outdoor performance platforms.
- **Building capacity** through skills development, volunteer training and micro commissions for emerging creatives, helping grow the local cultural sector.

Where infrastructure is limited, ToC investment will enable temporary activation, technical upgrades and improved accessibility creating a more connected cultural environment and supporting long-term regeneration.

Our programme will deliver a series of interlinked activities that create a coherent, year-long cultural narrative:

- **“Stories of Bishop Auckland”** – a cross-town programme of public art, performance, oral history and community storytelling.
- **Heritage trails and community-curated exhibitions**, celebrating local identity / lived experience.
- **Seasonal celebrations**, elevated to signature legacy events through artistic commissions and large-scale participation.
- **A headline celebration: “Bishop Auckland – The Story of Us”** festival bringing together:
 - workshops with local and regional artists
 - youth culture programme across digital and performing arts
 - “Culture Makers” volunteer scheme
 - micro and headline artistic commissions
 - “Culture on Your Doorstep” neighbourhood model ensuring town-wide engagement

These activities create a connected cultural ecosystem that showcases Bishop Auckland’s creativity, strengthens existing infrastructure, and introduces innovative new ways for residents and visitors to experience culture. Our integrated approach will raise the town’s national profile and secure a lasting legacy of pride, creativity and partnership.

3.2 Opportunity

Please use the following prompts to guide your response:

- *How will you ensure the initiatives and opportunities (e.g., learning and skills-building, career awareness, bringing different communities together) you are planning are genuinely aligned with your community’s needs and interests, especially for younger members of the community?*
- *What social and community impacts will these help you to achieve in your area, and why are these important to your town?*

Young people are central to this programme, and every initiative will be shaped around the needs and interests of the town’s diverse communities. To ensure genuine alignment, we will undertake direct engagement with young residents, schools, Bishop Auckland College, youth organisations, community groups and families. This will include co-design workshops, youth-led focus groups, peer-to-peer consultation and working with trusted neighbourhood organisations. This approach will ensure that the opportunities we create respond to real priorities and barriers identified in the Local Needs section, such as transport, cost, confidence, awareness of creative careers, and access to cultural spaces.

The programme will deliver targeted opportunities that reflect what young people have told us:

- **Culture, heritage and tourism career pathways** delivered with Bishop Auckland College and local schools, providing direct exposure to real jobs and progression routes.
- **Paid trainee roles, apprenticeships and work placements**, ensuring young people can gain experience without financial barriers.
- **Skills-building workshops** in digital media, production, performance, storytelling, event management and other creative disciplines, led by local practitioners and regional cultural partners.
- **Cross-community creative projects** that bring together young people, schools, volunteers, heritage groups and artists to co-create public artworks, performances and installations.
- **Neighbourhood-based opportunities**, ensuring children and young people across the town—including those with limited transport access—can participate close to home.

These opportunities will deliver significant social, educational and community outcomes. They will:

- increase cultural participation and widen access
- raise aspirations and build confidence
- create clear pathways into further education, training and employment
- strengthen intergenerational relationships and civic pride
- grow the skills, visibility and resilience of the local creative and heritage sector
- foster collaboration across communities and neighbourhoods

These impacts are essential to the town's long-term regeneration. Supporting young people to develop skills, feel pride in their town and see a future here contributes to stronger social cohesion, greater resilience and a more vibrant local economy. By aligning initiatives with genuine community needs and by investing in young people as creators, leaders and contributors, not just audiences the ToC programme will leave a lasting legacy of shared identity, confidence and connection.

Intergenerational activity will remain a core feature, ensuring culture is shared across ages and neighbourhoods and strengthening relationships that continue long after the programme year ends.

We will maximise lasting infrastructure to ensure a strong legacy beyond Bishop Auckland:ToC2028, including enhanced opportunities.

3.3 Accessible

Please use the following prompts to guide your response:

- *How will you embed accessibility across the design and content of your programme?*

- *How would you aim to reach the widest possible audience?*

We will proactively explore and remove barriers to participation. Including understanding challenges such as transport, childcare, cost, cultural norms, or confidence in engaging with arts and heritage. To reach the widest possible audience, cultural activity will extend far beyond traditional venues and into neighbourhoods, estates, parks, community centres, schools, and local gathering spaces. Outreach programmes, doorstep culture activity, and mobile pop-up events will make participation easy for those who face transport, financial, or confidence barriers.

Diverse programming, informed by audience development work and community consultation, will help ensure that the programme reflects the town's full spectrum of identities, interests and lived experiences of our communities. Residents will be invited to contribute their culture and ideas, creating a two-way dialogue that shapes content and delivery.

The development phase will bring communities on board in shaping activities that integrate seamlessly with their lives, encouraging participation in a democratic and inclusive manner. Examples include neighbourhood-based pop-ups and creative trails, which allow people to engage close to home before exploring larger town-wide events. This approach supports gradual and confident engagement across wards and demographics. Partnerships with organisations such as our local Wellbeing Hubs, providers such as Daisy Arts CIC, and Hearth and their Social Prescribing working knowledge will provide additional pathways for residents to access programmes, linking cultural participation with wellbeing and healthcare outcomes.

The town prides itself on being inclusive. When delivering town-wide events, we ensure that social value is embedded by working with organisations such as Bridge Creative CIC. This partnership approach creates meaningful opportunities for young adults with learning disabilities and autism to participate, contribute and gain experience.

Accessibility will be embedded throughout the design and delivery of the programme to ensure that every resident, regardless of age, background, income, or ability can take part. From the outset, events will be planned with a commitment to free or low-cost access, physically accessible venues, clear information, and inclusive programming. Where appropriate, activities will include BSL interpretation, captioned content, audio description, and accessible formats, ensuring that disabled audiences and those with additional needs can fully participate. Family-friendly scheduling and thoughtful event timings will support parents, carers and people working irregular hours.

Our aim is to make culture tangible and visible across Bishop Auckland, not limited to a single building or precinct, but woven into the daily life of the town ensuring that everyone can see themselves reflected in the Town of Culture year.

3.4 Communication

Please use the following prompts to guide your response:

- *How will you build a communication plan that utilises a breadth of media formats and reaches different types of audiences?*

We will identify how each community accesses information so we can use appropriate, targeted messaging to improve awareness and engagement across the town.

The programme will prioritise meeting people where they already are, rather than relying solely on traditional advertising. This will include:

- Direct presence at existing high-footfall public events and town-centre activations
- Physical visibility in everyday civic spaces, including markets, cafés, community venues and clubs
- Targeted youth engagement through Bishop Auckland College, schools and youth organisations
- Strengthened partnerships with local businesses to act as informal information nodes
- Development of a town-wide Ambassador Network drawn from residents, volunteers and youth representatives
- Investment in digital capability to consolidate fragmented channels and build a more coherent local communications infrastructure

Rather than assuming a pre-existing audience pipeline, the approach recognises current limitations and treats communication as part of the cultural programme itself, visible, relational and embedded in daily life.

Messaging will position Bishop Auckland not only as welcoming and contemporary, but as a town confident in articulating its lived identity and future direction.

We will extend our communications by using Bishop Auckland's established networks, including local media, schools and community social channels. Organisational and volunteer networks Kynren, The Auckland Project, Gaunless Gateway legacy channels, the ToC Forum and sport/community groups will further amplify messages. These trusted routes ensure we reach residents who may not engage with traditional or digital advertising.

We will build on existing expertise and connections within larger cultural organisations, and secure external expertise to develop an identity that blends traditional arts and heritage, active family exploration, youth-led events and digital arts, around our 'move with the times' theme. Reflecting our history of hard work and moving with the times, we would aim to use local voices and stories to share our town and our plans.

We will welcome visitors from across the UK and beyond to join our ToC2028 celebrations and support Bishop Auckland's cultural regeneration. Using traditional media and fresh digital content from the ToC programme, we will showcase the town as a place where heritage and innovation meet.

Where possible the programme will maximise lasting infrastructure to ensure a strong legacy beyond Bishop Auckland:ToC2028, including enhanced communication channels that improve the reach and effectiveness of messaging with our communities.

SECTION 4: MAKING IT HAPPEN

In this section, we want to understand how you will deliver a successful programme.
[Maximum 400 words for each section]

4.1 Partnerships

Please use the following prompts to guide your response:

- *How will you secure and work with additional external partners (e.g., artists and creatives, cultural and heritage organisations, funders, institutions, businesses, voluntary sector and civic society partners, and residents) to deliver the programme?*
- *How will you ensure your partners are representative of your town population?*

Bishop Auckland Town Council (BATC) will act as the Accountable Body, ensuring financial, legal and governance oversight of the Town of Culture programme. A formal working group is already in place, supported by a wider partnership forum of more than 40 organisations across culture, heritage, education, voluntary sector and business.

To secure specialist expertise, BATC will commission via the ToC Board (Working Group see 1.2) a ToC Executive Producer from an experienced cultural delivery organisation with a proven track record in producing large-scale festivals, town-centre programmes and community-led creative activity. This model ensures clear separation between governance and delivery, with BATC providing strategic oversight while the commissioned Delivery Body leads on creative direction, programming, production and community engagement for specific parts of the programme.

Partnership working will be embedded through a commissioning and collaborative delivery model, drawing on the town's existing cultural ecosystem. Key anchor partners will include The Auckland Project and Kynren, supported by Bishop Auckland College for skills and youth pathways; local artists and creatives; voluntary and community organisations; and national and regional cultural institutions already active in the town. This builds on established joint working across major events, the Artists' Hub, Christmas Town, heritage festivals and community parades.

Ensuring partners are representative of the town's population will be a core principle throughout the development phase, we have already introduced the ToC Forum and will move on to include a Community Advisory Panel. We will proactively engage with under-represented groups to widen participation and ensure that partners, volunteers and creative contributors reflect the full diversity of Bishop Auckland. This includes targeted work with organisations supporting young people, disabled residents, culturally diverse communities and those who have historically faced barriers to engagement.

Our greatest partnership will be with residents themselves. Bishop Auckland has always been shaped by civic pride and collective effort—from the ranks of the Durham Light Infantry to the communities who rallied behind Bishop Auckland FC, to the thousands who volunteer each summer for Kynren. The ToC year will honour that legacy by creating clear participation pathways, valuing lived experience and embedding residents' ideas directly

into programme design, delivery and evaluation.

Our aim is simple: for every resident to see themselves reflected in this programme—and to feel able to say, “***I helped make that happen.***”

4.2 Programme Management

Please use the following prompts to guide your response:

- *How will the programme be managed throughout the year, including leadership structure and delivery model?*
- *How will you provide clear roles and responsibilities, and ensure the team has the skills and capacity to deliver?*
- *What are the key risks associated with your proposed programme (i.e., risk, mitigating action, RAG rating)?*

The programme will be managed through a clear leadership structure and a proven delivery model. Bishop Auckland Town Council (BATC) will act as the Accountable Body, retaining financial and legal responsibility and holding strategic oversight.

The dedicated *Delivery Body*, will be the ToC Board (Working Group) made up of established partnership of civic stakeholders, the local college, and local cultural organisations including experienced homegrown cultural programme producers as set out in section 1.2.

A formal governance framework will be established at the outset, including:

- BATC – oversight, accountability and decision-making.
- Delivery Organisation Working Group – responsible for day-to-day planning and delivery.
- Cultural Forum and Community Advisory Panel – ensuring local representation, challenge and co-design.

The ToC Board will operate through a defined leadership structure, including appointment of a ToC Executive Producer responsible for programme direction, supported by a cross-organisational Programme Team covering commissioning, scheduling, partnership coordination and delivery integration. Specialist workstreams will be led by skilled staff or commissioned partners, including:

- Programming and artistic commissioning
- Community engagement and participation
- Communications and audience development
- Finance, compliance and monitoring
- Operational delivery and production management

Clear roles and responsibilities will be formalised through delivery agreements, job descriptions, partner MOUs and commissioning contracts. Skills and capacity will be strengthened through recruitment of experienced cultural producers, targeted upskilling of local staff and volunteers, and contracting specialist organisations as needed. This commissioning-based model ensures depth of expertise, resilience and the ability to scale delivery across the year.

Budgeting and financial planning will be led by the Delivery Body, with BATC reviewing, approving and monitoring in line with Council financial regulations. Independent evaluation and quarterly reporting cycles will ensure transparency, accountability and evidence-based decision-making.

Key risks and mitigations

Risk	Mitigation	RAG
Funding shortfall	Diversified income, phased delivery, early bids	Amber
Delivery capacity	Multi-organisation commissioning; additional producer support – proven Track record in co-producing large scale events across the town in partnership.	Amber
Stakeholder alignment	Partnership forums; clear governance; shared planning	Amber
Reputational risk	Community co-design; robust comms; rapid issue resolution	Green/Amber
Programme slippage	Critical-path monitoring; contingency planning	Amber

A live Programme Risk Register will be reviewed weekly by the Programme Team and monthly by BATC. Any red or escalating risks will follow a defined escalation route to senior leadership to ensure rapid stabilising action.

This management model provides clarity, accountability and the specialist cultural capacity required to deliver a year of high-quality, community-centred cultural activity.

4.3 Financial Management

Please use the following prompts to guide your response:

- *If shortlisted, how would you use a £60,000 grant to strengthen your full application?*
- *How much do you expect it will cost to deliver your programme?*
- *How much additional funding will you need to raise to deliver the programme, and where will you get that additional funding (e.g., existing / reallocated budgets, income from charitable trusts and foundations, income from public funding bodies, business investment / sponsorship, crowdfunding, cultural partnership cash contributions / joint funding applications, in-kind support)?*

The £60,000 grant will be used to strengthen our plans through a structured programme of creative development, technical planning and deep community engagement. A core focus will be reaching residents who are not currently involved in cultural activity, using outreach in estates, community centres, schools, cafés and other familiar settings. Activity will include creative workshops, small-scale performances and informal conversation sessions designed to build trust and surface ideas from voices that are often under-represented.

The grant will also support a range of technical activity essential to a high-quality full bid, including research and development to test programme concepts; independent audience research and market analysis; the creation of detailed, costed programme plans and commissioning frameworks; and the exploration of commercial partnerships. A comprehensive multi-source fundraising strategy will be prepared to secure additional investment required to deliver the programme.

Early progress already demonstrates strong community commitment and organisational momentum. Local cultural, voluntary and business partners have contributed in-kind time, expertise and meeting space to shape the Expression of Interest. Two successful open forums have brought together more than 40 organisations to discuss the vision, leading to the formation of a core Working Group that is collaborating intensively on the next steps. In addition, a public survey gathered almost 300 responses within a week, clear evidence of appetite, energy and support from residents. The town is motivated, optimistic and ready to use this opportunity as a catalyst for positive change.

The projected cost of delivering a full Town of Culture 2028 programme is £3–4 million, reflecting the scale of a year-long, town-wide cultural celebration delivered across multiple venues, community settings and public spaces.

The £3 million award will act as the core investment. To deliver the full programme, additional funding will be raised through a diversified income model that is standard practice for major cultural programmes. This will include:

- Public funding bodies (Arts Council England, NLHF, British Council, DCMS programmes)
- Charitable trusts and foundations supporting culture, heritage, community development and place-making
- Corporate sponsorship and business investment, aligned with Bishop Auckland's growing visitor economy
- Earned income, such as ticketing for selected events, trading and commercial partnerships
- Partner cash and in-kind contributions, including cultural organisations, education partners, and the voluntary sector
- Alignment with existing local budgets, regeneration programmes and place-based initiatives

This broad-based funding approach will ensure financial resilience, reduce dependency on any single source, and maximise long-term legacy impact for the town.

4.4 Monitoring, Evaluation and Legacy

Please use the following prompts to guide your response:

- *What outcomes of your programme can be monitored and evaluated? Please refer to outcomes referenced throughout your bid, including those referenced in "Local Needs" and "Opportunity".*
- *How are you currently monitoring the impact of any culture and heritage programme(s) and how could these methods be adapted and used to evaluate UK Town of Culture?*
- *What baseline information is available to help assess the impact of your programme?*

Monitoring and evaluation will be embedded from the outset, with baseline data established during, EOI development and the £60,000 Bid development phase. This work will create a clear picture of current cultural participation, audience profiles, youth engagement patterns, civic perception, accessibility, and the town's cultural and economic landscape. These baselines will allow us to measure progress against outcomes referenced throughout the bid.

A comprehensive evaluation framework will track the following outcomes:

- **Cultural participation:** total audiences across free/ ticketed events, demographic and ward-level analysis to assess reach across age, background and neighbourhood.
- **Youth engagement and progression:** participation rates - workshops, training, apprenticeships and volunteering, including measurable progression into education, employment or creative pathways.
- **Volunteer involvement:** recruitment, retention, training completed and skills gained, reflecting the town's commitment to intergenerational engagement.
- **Creative and cultural sector growth:** number of paid creative roles, commissions issued, and skills development for local practitioners/ organisations.
- **Community and social impact:** shifts in resident perception, pride in place, social connectedness, and intergenerational participation.
- **Economic impact:** footfall, business engagement, town-centre activity, spend, event-related trading, and the contribution of cultural tourism.
- **Audience diversity and accessibility:** inclusive participation levels, representation of harder-to-reach groups, and improvements in cultural access.
- **Communications and profile:** media coverage, digital reach, ambassador activity, and national visibility.

Existing cultural partners already use established monitoring systems, including:

- attendance, ticketing data, visitor analytics and demographic insight
- volunteer management systems
- partner reporting
- audience surveys and qualitative feedback

These approaches will be scaled up for ToC, supported by independent evaluators, consistent data collection tools and shared reporting templates across all partners. Evaluation will combine quantitative metrics with focus groups, interviews, creative evaluation methods and resident testimony to capture lived experience.

Robust baseline data is already available from:

- Kynren's extensive audience and volunteer datasets
- The Auckland Project's visitor insights and economic modelling
- Bishop Auckland College engagement and skills data
- Town centre footfall analytics
- Local voluntary sector participation records
- Initial public consultation, which generated almost 300 survey responses in the first week

The development phase will consolidate all available datasets into a single baseline, ensuring consistency, comparability and a clear foundation against which the impact of the ToC programme can be measured.

Emerging datasets will also be incorporated, including data from overnight stays when the hotel opens in 2027.

Monitoring and evaluation will be in the governance structure, with independent oversight and regular reporting to the Accountable Body, ensuring transparency, objectivity and continuous learning.