

Economy, Culture and Tourism Scrutiny Panel

DATE	11/03/2026
REPORT OF	Carolina Borgstrom, Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure
SUBJECT	UK Town of Culture
STATUS	Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

An application to the UK Town of Culture programme has the potential to generate interest across our wider community in relation to culture and the arts. Being shortlisted or winning would further contribute to many of the Council's Outcomes. It would contribute to a stronger economy and stronger communities, supporting business growth, nurturing skills of all generations including building the futures for children and young people and enhancing community interaction. Creativity and telling our story of culture and heritage already forms a core part of transforming our town centres into attractive and vibrant places, promoting social cohesion, and where residents and businesses are proud of where they live and work, promoting pride in place and a fairer and healthier North East Lincolnshire.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK Town of Culture programme was launched in late 2025 with a deadline of 31st March 2026 to submit an Expression of Interest. Following a selection process three towns will be shortlisted for the title with a winner being selected to host UK Town of Culture in 2028.

An Expression of Interest from Grimsby will build upon the momentum generated over the last five years and provide an opportunity to showcase ambitions plans to place creativity at the heart of place making plans for Grimsby and also, the wider borough.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

The Panel is asked to review the plan for Grimsby to submit an Expression of Interest to the UK Town of Culture 2028 competition and subject to the panels agreement, that scrutiny panel members actively promote the Expression of Interest as widely as possible.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1 Liverpool won the European Capital of Culture title in 2008. This was a Europe-wide competition to highlight one city based on its cultural offer. This proved such a huge success for the city and the region that a UK-specific City of Culture initiative was launched in 2013 to give more cities in the UK a chance to hold a title that draws attention to their cultural offering and brings economic and cultural benefits into the winning city. Every four years, a new UK City of Culture is

chosen, with the most recent being Bradford in 2025.

- 1.2 Further expanding this model, the first UK Town of Culture programme was launched on 30th October 2025 by The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) with one town receiving £3m to deliver a cultural programme in 2028 (two runners up will receive £250,000). The three shortlisted towns (one small, one medium, one large) will receive £60,000 to help deliver their full bids for the competition.
- 1.3 The UK Town of Culture competition is targeted at small, medium and large towns, enabling them to tell their unique story and shining a spotlight on the important role that towns play in our national life.
Applications for the competition 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

Source: [New Town of Culture competition to shine a spotlight on the contribution of towns that tell national story - GOV.UK](#)

On 14th January 2026 further details were realised regarding the application process

Source: [First ever UK Town of Culture competition to restore pride in communities - GOV.UK](#)

Application process

Milestone	Deadline
Expression of Interest Deadline	31 st March
Shortlisted places announced	Spring 2026
Full application period	Spring 2026 – Autumn 2026
Panel visits	Autumn 2026
Finalists and winner announced	Early 2027
Delivery Period	2028

Development Activities

Following the endorsement from the Greater Grimsby Board on 27th February, the intention for Grimsby to submit an Expression of Interest was made public. The Council and Horizon Youth Zone, working together on the Expression of Interest, are encouraging people to help shape and ‘back the bid’ in a range of events throughout March. This will include the 2025 Group Grimsby Town Centre meeting on 3rd March and Our Future event on 9th & 10th March. On the afternoon of 11th March, a public workshop is taking place and there will be opportunities to ‘back the bid’ at the range of events which the Council and partners are organising throughout March.

The Council and Horizon Youth Zone will be asking everyone to help shape the expression of interest and 'back the bid' by using #GY28 in social media posts, by completing a short survey [https://tell-us.questionpro.eu/GY28- external site](https://tell-us.questionpro.eu/GY28-external-site)

Further information can be found here: www.nelincs.gov.uk/uk-town-of-culture.

The drafting of the bid will be overseen by a subgroup of the Greater Grimsby Board with co-opted members to bring expertise in creativity and children and young peoples' engagement. This is supported by an internal project team bringing together council departments including heritage and culture, regeneration, public health, children services and more.

The final bid will be approved by the subgroup together with the Leader, Portfolio Holder and Chief Executive of Horizon Youth Zone.

2. RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALITY ISSUES

- 2.1 A successful Town of Culture bid would likely lead to the following, linked to the 'stronger economy and stronger communities' ethos of the North East Lincolnshire Council Plan:
- National acclaim and coverage.
 - Greater chance of securing further investment into arts, culture and heritage investment, alongside other industries.
 - Provides the platform to develop new national and international partnerships
 - Creates further opportunities for our creative and heritage sectors, developing their skills as well as other businesses buying into the title.
 - Compliment the breadth of capital regeneration taking place across our towns, including preservation of our heritage.
 - Boost the reputation of North East Lincolnshire and the Council, as an engaging and effective place.
 - Enhances health and wellbeing of North East Lincolnshire residents and sense of pride in place, by telling our story.
 - Boosts visitor numbers, town centre footfall and trade, further enhancing attractive and vibrant town centres.
- 2.2 From a strategic perspective North East Lincolnshire's status as a Heritage Place (Heritage Fund), a Priority Place (Arts Council England) and a priority for Historic England provides the opportunity to work closely with these funders and others to increase investment into UK Town of Culture. There is also the opportunity to utilise the status as UK Town of Culture to generate further funding support from philanthropic sources, corporate sponsorship and trusts and foundations.
- 2.3 Competition for UK Town of Culture is likely to be extremely competitive with every town in the UK eligible to apply. Therefore, it is important to utilise the expression of interest process to increase the visibility of heritage and culture in North East Lincolnshire to help establish long term ambitious plans that support attractive and vibrant town centres, boost visitor happiness and satisfaction, preservation of our heritage, nurturing our children and building their future, telling our story of culture

and heritage.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

A clear message that Grimsby is making an application to UK Town of Culture highlights shows to residents and visitors that creativity is for all and builds upon progress made in recent years. An application aligns with the Council Plan, Creativity Strategy, Grimsby Masterplan and Our Children, Our Strategy.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

From a strategic perspective NEL's status as a Heritage Place (Heritage Fund), a Priority Place (Arts Council England) and a priority for Historic England provides the opportunity to work closely with these funders and others to increase investment into UK Town of Culture. There is also the opportunity to utilise the status as UK Town of Culture to generate further funding support from philanthropic sources, corporate sponsorship and trusts and foundations.

If the Expression of Interest is successful, further consideration will be given to the allocation of council financial resources to ensure that budget and activities are aligned to the UK Town of Culture programme.

In recent years, the Council and partners have been hugely successful in attracting significant external funding to deliver creative activities in NEL e.g. Our Future Starts Here by The Culture House, VANEL and other partners recently secured £1.4m investment from the National Lottery Community Fund. It is anticipated that growing reputation could lead to future investment to help deliver the Town of Culture programme.

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

The Expression of Interest will focus on children and young people. Many of the activities which could be delivered by UK Town of Culture will have a benefit to children and young people by enhancing creativity in a range of settings. This is likely to include supporting creative and heritage organisations engage with children and young people within new settings including the Horizon Onside Youth Zone, Our Big Picture, Unseen Arts and What if We Create alongside working with the NEL Music Hub, schools, The Culture House, Grimsby Institute, Franklin College and other local and national organisations

6. CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURE RECOVERY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The detailed creative programme for UK Town of Culture would be developed in the shortlisting phase (if selected). It is anticipated that the creative programme will highlight Grimsby's unique natural assets and economic opportunities including our relationship with the sea and environmental opportunities. It is anticipated that events and activities would take place in parks and green spaces bringing local people and visitors into contact with nature. In addition, consideration will be given

to ensure the carbon footprint of activities is minimised by encouraging the use of sustainable transport and reducing the use of single use plastics and encouraging recycling.

7. PUBLIC HEALTH, HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND MARMOT IMPLICATIONS

A successful application to be UK Town of Culture will improve public health and reduce health inequalities by creating pride of place and supporting initiatives that promote physical and mental wellbeing. This includes widening access to a diverse range of creative activities and events, and creating safe, welcoming spaces where people can connect and participate — key factors in improving mental health and social cohesion. The Marmot Review highlights that opportunities for social participation and strong community networks are vital for improving health and reducing inequalities, contributing to longer and healthier lives.

8. MONITORING COMMENTS

In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

9. WARD IMPLICATIONS

This report covers activities across all wards in Grimsby and the impact of UK Town of Culture would be beneficial to residents across North East Lincolnshire.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

11. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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