

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.

Colette Kerr
Events & Activities Officer

Saffron Walden Town Council
01799 516501
events@saffronwalden.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.

Lead bidder: Saffron Walden Town Council

Key partners: Audley End House (English Heritage), Fry Art Gallery, Gibson Library, Saffron Music Trust, Saffron Screen, Saffron Walden BID, Saffron Walden Heritage Development Group, Saffron Walden Library, Saffron Walden Museum, Saffron Walden Tourist Information Centre, UCAN Volunteer Centre, Uttlesford District Council

Accountable Body: Saffron Walden Town Council

Delivery Body: Saffron Walden Town Council

In our TOC bid, SWTC performs the role of all three bodies, i.e. Lead Bidder, Accountable Body and Delivery Body. In evidencing our credentials, experience and aptitude for major project delivery, the following information is provided:

SWTC is an award-winning local Council, performing at the highest of levels, evidenced as follows:

- 2026 SWTC was a finalist in the prestigious National Association of Local Councils (NALC) awards for 'Council of the Year', rated in the top 5 local Councils in the UK (from 10,000). NALC recognised the Council's strong governance, creativity, partnership working and dexterity in adapting to the changing needs of our locality and environment.
- Accreditation to the National Association of Local Council (NALC) Gold Award.

The prestigious Gold Award signifies that a council stands at the pinnacle of best practices, attaining excellence in governance, community leadership, and council development. Distinguished by their forward-thinking approach, Gold Award councils not only provide exemplary leadership for their communities but also foster unity, exhibit outstanding business planning processes ensuring optimal value for money, and consistently pursue innovative solutions and opportunities for improvement. These councils serve as beacons of the highest standards achievable within our sector, showcasing the epitome of what can be accomplished for our communities. The Gold Award represents their unwavering commitment to exceptional performance and continuous advancement.

- 2024 awarded Essex County Association 'Council of the Year' in recognition of service delivery, diversity and efficiencies.
- Continued staff improvement and training programme. In 2023, the Clerk received a first-class degree in Community Governance. The Deputy Clerk is now undertaking this same training.
- Regular Councillor training on governance, finances and planning ensuring compliance and understanding of changing legislation.
- Unqualified end of year accounts for over 15-years.
- Demonstrable evidence of excellent governance, management and leadership.

In evidencing our ability to lead projects, work in partnership with others and community engagement, the following evidence is provided:

- In 2023, SWTC re-opened a derelict community centre (now known as Jubilee Hub), forming a partnership with Uttlesford Community Action Network (CVSU) and Enterprise East CIC (supporting people with mental health issues or disabilities). The partnership shares costs, but more importantly experience and competencies providing a free, inclusive, resident-designed programme of activities. This partnership continues to grow from strength to strength and is indicative of a successful group of like-minded organisations coming together for a common goal. This partnership body is in the process of submitting a substantial bid (£1m) to the National Lottery Fund with funding intended to continue the growth and expansion of the community services at Jubilee Hub.
- SWTC has received numerous grants from Uttlesford District Council, Essex County Council, the National Lottery Fund and other external bodies. Grants have included those under the Shared Prosperity Fund, Community Initiative Fund, NLF Awards for All and local schemes. Each grant requires accountability of funding, along with monitoring and management of funding and of the project. We have an excellent, proven record of meeting funders' needs and expectations, always providing supportive information to meet monitoring and accountability needs.

- SWTC is the lead body in a locally established network of partners, organisations and public bodies working towards a shared common goal of improving our locality. In 2024 we established a body called the “Tourism, Cultural and Heritage Network” whose membership includes Essex County Council, English Heritage, Uttlesford District Council along with local artists and makers. Many of these are included in the key partners list, referenced earlier in this section. This Network is an active, proactive and engaged body of local organisations whose common goal is to improve Saffron Walden. This Network forms the foundation of our collaborative and partnership working and a successful TOC bid would be funnelled through this Network.
- The TOC bid is itself a collaborative effort, with each partner in the Network playing an active part in writing and overseeing the bid. The Network has embraced this bid process, and every partner is committed to delivering the TOC projects and activities.
- SWTC conducts regular community consultations to both sense-check that we are delivering services according to local needs and that these meet community expectations. Consultations are often targeted at a specific demographic, including young people, older generation, vulnerable adults and to those directly accessing our services. We review and reflect on all feedback, changing or adapting services where appropriate to do so.
- SWTC has an excellent track record of delivering community events ranging from a small community activity to civic events such as Platinum Jubilee events and the Kings Coronation, Freedom Parades and Remembrance Day. Each event attracts a different audience, requiring appropriate event management plans, risk assessments, health and safety requirements, and partnership working.

Our events range from small, discrete group activities for 12-20 people, through to civic events with over 5,000 in attendance. SWTC manages all aspect of these events with a dedicated and experienced team of Officers overseeing each element of event management. For many events, and especially civic events involving the local army barracks, we work closely with all emergency services, anti-terrorist services, armed forces as well as local communities and individuals.

- SWTC has the skills, experience and dexterity to plan and deliver a ‘village fete’ type event, through to a packed civic event requiring marshals, security guards and specialist provision through emergency services.
- An integral part of our event management is the procurement of services from 3rd parties, management of health and safety, and all other elements associated with event management either on a large or small scale. We also conduct review and reflection meetings following each event to evaluate the good, bad or indifferent elements of any event seeking to improve at every opportunity.

- A further integral part of our event management is the hosting of Safety Advisory Group (SAG) meetings. SAGs provide a forum for discussing and advising on public safety at an event. They aim to help organisers with the planning, and management of an event and to encourage cooperation and coordination between all relevant agencies. They are non-statutory bodies and so do not have legal powers or responsibilities and are not empowered to approve or prohibit events from taking place. Event organisers and others involved in the running of an event, retain the principal legal duties for ensuring public safety. Attendees will often include emergency services, community providers, local transport companies and representatives from other agencies. SWTC leads on the SAG meetings where SWTC is the delivery body.

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.

Saffron Walden is located approximately 10 miles south of Cambridge and in the north of the Uttlesford District of Essex. The Parish of Saffron Walden (as defined within the parish boundary) is home to approximately 18,000 people and boasts a vibrant market, an eclectic cultural mix, a skatepark, an art centre and cinema, a Museum, gardens and play areas, a mix of shops and cafes and medieval architecture.

The name Saffron Walden comes from the valuable *Crocus sativus* crop which was cultivated here between the 15th and 18th centuries and was used for dye, cooking, and medicine. Farming continued to be important into the 19th century, but the saffron industry was superseded as the town’s main source of prosperity by the malting and brewing industries. In recent years, saffron has been grown again in the kitchen garden area of Bridge End Garden.

The town has long-established links with the Quakers, and it was one of its wealthiest Quaker families, the Gibson’s (1800’s), who became great benefactors, founding the museum, library, the former bank at 12 Market Place, and the hospital, now home to the District Council offices. A decorative moulded plasterwork, known as pargeting, is typical of this part of the country and can be seen all over the town. There are many other interesting historic buildings in the town; at the heart lies St Mary’s Church, the largest parish church in Essex. Nearby, Saffron Walden Museum is of particular interest; the collections are housed in one of the oldest purpose-built museum buildings in the country, completed in 1835 – and in the grounds of the museum are the ruins of the Walden Castle which dates to the 1130/40’s.

At a glance of Saffron Walden, the town is considered an affluent town – and in parts it is.

ONS statistics (2021) evidence a greater number of people over the age of 40 than the English average, this imbalance increasing with age. These statistics further evidence:

- Average earnings are 1.23 x the national average;
- Uttlesford District is in the highest percentile of gross disposable income;
- Lower than average unemployment rates;
- Higher than average number employed in a managerial/professional capacity.

These statistics however mask a substantial demographic to whom basic day-to-day needs are their priority, potentially excluding them from taking part in the arts and culture offering.

There is evidence of a growing and significant chasm between the financial 'haves' and the 'have-nots' in Saffron Walden. The Trussel Trust identifies a disproportionate increase in emergency food parcels in Saffron Walden, aligning with a national increase in child poverty. It is this inequality and inaccessibility which forms the basis of our TOC bid – to make culture relevant, applicable and accessible to everyone.

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)?*

A long-established radical commitment to democracy, tolerance, and coexistence is in our DNA. We are non-conformists, philanthropists, blending time-honoured tradition with unconventional. Liberal and conservative. Grassroots and establishment. A 'market town' certainly; but look a little deeper....

A key point (perhaps *the* point) on the journey to democracy took place in 1647 at St. Mary's Church, Saffron Walden during the English Civil War. Representatives elected from the New Model Army rank and file petitioned for their rights to Parliament at the end of the first civil war. This kind of democratic representation hadn't happened before, and there were risks for those involved. This wasn't a random event or location – it sprung from Saffron Walden's nonconformist nature. Those who petitioned for their rights knew this and were emboldened. Cromwell and Parliament, although on the New Model Army's side, were not happy and this radical grassroots action had to stop.

Saffron Walden has a history of holding multiple and opposing voices and a mix of communities and traditions including Quakers, Methodists, Baptists, Plymouth Brethren, Catholics, Protestants. The town has also sustained a strong conservative tradition for over a century. If there is a story here that feels particularly British it is how a place can be both liberal and conservative and continue to function well. At a time of polarisation, we have found ways to sustain balance. This frames our cultural vision and will run through our programme with a core ethos of culture everywhere and for all.

To support this we have Saffron Hall, a philanthropically delivered world-class concert venue; dual use in design and shared with the High School - a thriving centre for music and culture, working across Essex on inclusive musical development. Audley End stands as a leading tourism destination with a major programme of outreach, volunteering and skills development and its own unique stories. Saffron Walden Museum, one of the UK's first purpose-built, engages audiences with creative programming, rooted in its diverse collections. Fairycroft House is a successful grassroots arts and community space celebrating its Motorhead connections, and our Saffron Screen cinema is hyper-locally run and independent.

The Fry Art Gallery's Northwest Essex Collection champions 20th-century artists who worked outside London's establishment reshaping British modernism from the margins. The artists had a collaborative ethos, integrating art into everyday life with a commitment to local identity and craft – a perfect concept for our TOC 2028 programme.

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?*

We'll draw upon Saffron Walden's cultural, heritage and civic strengths as we have much to celebrate and share. We're tapping into the town's powerful heritage of as a home of democracy, dissent, and nonconformist spirit to fire up fresh conversations about representation, civic participation, and pride. What does this mean in practice, for legacy from TOC investment? There are four areas of focus – young people (meaningful engagement and skills development); pop-up culture, mass participation and events; nighttime economy; retention of local creative talent.

Volunteering is a real strength, with many cultural and heritage institutions supported by dedicated and experienced volunteers. However, a common challenge is bringing the younger generations through in a way that gives real agency, supports skills development and long-term survival of all our local institutions. Establishing a town Youth Futures Forum (in 2026 to prepare for 2028) will create a mechanism to establish an informal 'radical cultural college'. Young people set out their frustrations (the town has been known by younger people as 'Suffering Boredom'), ambitions and interests supported by TOC partners through our Network (see below), and a resulting programme of skills development covering all disciplines required to manage TOC. This matches the town's strength as a place where many have excellent creative industry experience and the capacity to support young people.

Related to this, we need to retain creative talent of all ages, recognising the town suffers from migration of young people and access to cultural space (studios etc.) is limited. TOC provides a canvas for creativity and everyday participation, across all spaces in the town, and this will be led by our many talented cultural practitioners working with local institutions and national partners. A locally-relevant commissioning framework will be well-established by 2027, and all partners will work together to create pop-up spaces for cultural programming that can become permanent – learning from local successes like Fete-de-la-Musique, a community-led and inspired music festival. This will feed into a commitment by all partners in the Network to support a programme that develops the evening economy, with regular (and pop-up) curated events across public spaces, pubs, cafes, shops, and the library. Tourism is important to our economy, and culture can drive new opportunities to diversify our offer and audiences (day and night), with business collaborating with creatives and cultural/heritage organisations, supported by the Business Improvement District.

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?*

Our cultural, heritage and civic institutions are part of the town's fabric and DNA, democratic and totally interconnected to local communities whilst also having national relevance and appeal. It is difficult in Saffron Walden to take a 'top down' approach given the thriving grass-roots culture, although we take nothing for granted. To maintain a spirit of openness, collaboration and shared endeavour, the Town Council has overseen a Tourism, Culture and Heritage Network for the last few years, ensuring that everyone (individual creative practitioners through to curators and managers) has a chance to share their ideas, learn from each other and build relationships that will support the local cultural ecology long-term. This is our starting point for TOC and a devolved programme oversight, but there are many more opportunities to explore.

TOC is a collaboration between Town Council, District Council and everyone else in the town and wider area. This will be a unique challenge of TOC 2028 – to be hyper-locally relevant and to reach out across the UK. We are well placed for this. Businesses will be at the forefront of collaboration and our Business Improvement District will lead on bringing creatives together with hospitality and retail to explore the high street and town centre as cultural spaces for everyday creativity and participation.

It's important to make 'culture' relevant for everyone. We will work creatively to ensure everyone is involved; making culture real and relevant.

Our Youth Cultural Board and the 'radical culture college' ensure TOC is not all older people working out ways to engage younger people. Informed by the Enterprise Allowances scheme of the 1980s, which contributed to the development of Community Arts for social engagement in UK. This will be a forum for collaboration, a 'take-over' spirit and a cutting-edge programme that explores our core themes, and a model for other towns. TOC will not happen behind closed doors – it will run through the town with our streets and open spaces as arteries of excitement and discovery. A curated and relevant 'pop-up' spirit where everyone take part and develop the skills and confidence to be creative and collaborate with others. Fun and academic. Choirs, classical, folk, jazz, heavy metal and rap. Making culture accessible and real is key. Open studios and paint splattering. Author talks and poetry on the streets. Civil war history and an exploration of how to unite different views and traditions through immersive culture.

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*

Open, democratic, accessible and a deliberate mix of the traditional and innovative – a programme that embodies Saffron Walden.

Our programme will take place over the year and across multiple venues and spaces, drawing upon the wealth of heritage, culture, environment, hospitality and food/drink. A focus on civic participation and how culture can support this. Naturally we'll have classic heritage-related events including living history, particularly themed on the civil war period that is so important to our story and the nation. Our Gibson Library has one the UK's best collections of contemporary documents, many of which are being digitised. This will support creative inspiration for programme entitled 'Disturbing the Peace'; exploring the relevance of the period today – theatre, spoken word, art commissions (in the town and online) – considering how civil war narratives and folklore still resonate.

We'll celebrate taking part across every aspect of culture. In Saffron Walden this includes Food and Drink. Jamie Oliver shops at the Saturday market and promotes the town's culinary credentials. There are many local producers (and a successful food tour) contributing to the local scene, keeping an independent spirit alive. Saffron will feature prominently for obvious reasons.

Everyone can relate to music. Given Saffron Hall's leading national position as a venue and charity dedicated to musical excellence for all, and the depth of grassroots music culture in the town (so many bands across genres), we'll be celebrating with ambitious events. Community on the Common - summer stage every Friday night with local food/drink, live music free for all and a platform for young people, amateurs and professionals. Community Cohesion – new music inspired compositions by professional composers across all genres exploring relevant themes with communities.

We'll explore the historic built environment of the town (listed buildings, churches), looking at sustainability, craft and skills needed to preserve and conserve. A critical examination of the 'market town', and its relationship to rural areas and how this remains important while changing over time. Also, how a town can become resilient in relation to climate change and nature recovery, celebrating local grassroots environmental action that is having a positive impact on rivers and chalk streams and the importance of stories to inspire collective action. We'll consider the concept of 'permissive paths' that are

important locally for connecting people to nature, whilst also a metaphor for vibrant and diverse cultural programming as a gateway to broader civic participation and pride.

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?*

Our programme will include a significant element of Living History given the Civil War heritage locally. We have a good track record of working with reenactment groups and this kind of activity really engages people of all ages. This will include reenactments of the events of 1647 and a wider curated programme to explore this period and what it means today.

There will be dance, music, theatre and spoken word events at spaces that are dominated by young people, exploring perspectives on belonging, place, taking part, hanging out - overseen by the Youth Futures Forum. This includes the One Minet Skate Park (one of the UK's best). We know expecting people to come to formal events doesn't increase participation, so there will be a spirit of pop-up and a commitment to access and reducing thresholds. All schools will take part across music, drama, spoken word, and we'll have an open invitation for schools across the UK who want to visit for specific events.

We'll explore the enduring relevance of youth clubs/movements (in all their guises); their importance to cultural and civic participation across the UK. This is relevant to all towns and there is an interesting history (and future) to explore culturally and socially. The Youth Futures Forum will curate a programme with artists, local charities and public sector to reimagine this concept and the importance of real social spaces (whatever that means in the 21st Century).

Our spirit of pop-up across the town (and across spaces of all kinds) will offer opportunities for meaningful and sustainable participation. The TOC programme creative commissions will take inspiration from the wealth of existing archives and collections (Museum, Fry Gallery, Gibson Library). It can be a radical act to engage with and explore local heritage and culture, and to want to share it with new and diverse audiences far and wide. Our TOC programme is an opportunity to facilitate long-term engagement with our institutions.

Climate change and environment will also be a significant feature of the programme, and for this we will be building on the work led by Uttlesford District Council over last few years to invest in the growth of grassroots groups taking action on rivers, nature reserves, low carbon technologies and more. We'll work with Cambridge University and other research organisations to develop creative materials/programmes and Saffron Hall will lead the musical programming (building on the community opera Uprising).

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?*

In the spirit of our core themes around democracy, participation, environment, we are working on ambitious strategies to open spaces around TOC that belong to everyone in the town, and that feels progressive and genuinely relevant across the UK. We acknowledge relying upon existing audiences is not the way forward (although important), and this would be true regardless of our TOC ambitions. We need people involved, otherwise the future of many cultural and heritage institutions and movements (locally and nationally) is bleak. Inspiring people to care about civic participation and democracy doesn't come from talking about it; it comes from encouraging and supporting people to take part in something they genuinely care about. Our independent 'Residents for Uttlesford' party exemplify this spirit.

We'll work with community and voluntary sector partners, something that Saffron Walden is well placed to deliver on. We have excellent examples of SWTC working with community partners to ensure important spaces are kept open for a wide range of activities. In the spirit of Raymond Williams (lived in Saffron Walden) – culture can be 'ordinary' and part of everyday life, and therefore relevant to everyone.

Our plan for accessibility and relevance includes working with our local charities to develop programming that supports their ambitions for engagement and outreach and builds everyday opportunities across the town (in parks, community centres, library, bandstand, football club). What we learn from this will form our collective long-term strategy for cultural participation, and those we engage will be supported to stay involved. Our partners include Citizens Advice, MIND, Uttlesford Food Bank (who have worked on creative programmes), UCAN and Mencap.

Given our market town credentials and ambition for mass participation, we will explore our connection to the rural and agricultural economy through time and look into the future, with events themed around food, harvest, produce, making, craft. We'll host accessible events to showcase the work of our artisan producers, ranging from quintessential village fetes (grow the largest marrow competition!) to noisy, loud, interactive musical offerings; this eclectic offering will reach those from all walks of life, encouraging mass participation in crafts / making events led by our many artisan producers. We'll mobilise the U3A and our allotment societies to create TOC produce and get young people engaged (with the support of Young Farmers). We'll invite Gardeners' World and Countryfile to take part (Gardeners' World already holds an Autumn event at Audley End).

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?*

Through our well-established Tourism, Culture and Heritage Network we have many organisations that are very effective at marketing, promotion and reaching many different audiences. We will develop a communications strategy that builds on the strength of organisations in the town, and we'll collaborate with strategic partners including DCMS, Arts Council England, English Heritage (manage Audley End House & Gardens), the Combined Mayoral Authority for Essex (will be established by 2028) and many of our delivery partners on the ground.

The value of working through Network partners is that they can reach large, diverse audiences while also showcasing the town's wider cultural and heritage offer. For example, Saffron Hall has excellent reach for music across the region. The Fry Art Gallery has national appeal and connections. Audley End (English Heritage) already host major events during the year including summer and winter and can promote across the region and UK. Our local community groups have strong, established hyper-local connectivity and contacts, supporting the more 'local' feel and promotion.

The Tourist Information Centre (TIC) will be a key base for promotion of events and programmes, and for welcoming visitors to the area and supporting them with wayfinding. The TIC already has well over 100,000 visitors each year, and the Town Council team that runs it will be able to scale up capacity and resource across the year (and in the run up during 2027).

We will make good use of social media, particularly for targeting younger people (although relevant to all ages). Our Youth Futures Forum will promote integration and participation, and their curated ideas will be supported by our local creative sector businesses - to develop and deliver a social media strategy for TOC 2028, working in partnership with the Business Improvement District. This will work with existing promotional platforms such as Visit Saffron Walden and Discover Uttlesford, and we'll collaborate with Visit Essex throughout.

Through the Network there is also a good understanding of engaging the national press, and it was only last year that the Sunday Times rated Saffron Walden the 'best place to live in the UK'. We know how to get national attention!

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?*

This EOI represents a strong collaboration between Saffron Walden Town Council (SWTC), Uttlesford District Council and the cultural, heritage and business groups in the town (represented through the Tourism, Heritage and Cultural Network). SWTC is experienced at staging events and has excellent relationships with other organisations in the town through the Network as well as a dedicated Events programme and forum.

TOC provides a unique opportunity for collaboration and town-wide programming that offers creative scope for exploring all the key themes in a way that is hyper-locally relevant and of national interest. The Network is an established space to explore how culture and heritage are crucial to the wider economy and sense of place. The Network is experienced, qualified, ready and well-placed to deliver a programme of national significance with culture as convener around so many relevant issues and subjects. We are grassroots, voluntary, independent, local, regional, national and international – all working together.

Building on our combined ability to engage national organisations including the BBC (Gardeners World at Audley End for example), we will engage with national organisations to support our local partners in preparation for 2028 and before. Issues such as curation, interpretation, education materials, outreach and promotion will be for collaboration – for example Saffron Walden Museum working with the British Museum on interpretation and outreach strategy. We will coordinate our programming and events with national/international events such as World Book Day, Black History Month, Pride International Women's Day, Young Farmers - putting TOC at the centre and creating lasting partnership for our local institutions.

We already have world-leading partners including Saffron Hall which attract international artists as well as hosting 'foyer' sessions including folk, jazz and blues. Saffron Hall will be an important event space throughout 2028 (one of the UK's best acoustic music concert halls), as will Audley End House and Gardens (for large events and music, as well as food/drink themed programming). SWTC manage the large common in the town centre which will host many events.

TOC provides an additional 'challenge' and opportunity to explore new ideas and connections, building upon the existing solid foundations.

Existing Network partners include English Heritage, Audley End, SW Museum, library, Fry Art Gallery, Fairycroft House, SW Initiative, Business Improvement District, sporting clubs and organisations amongst others.

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)?*

We have the experience needed to deliver a successful and ambitious TOC programme, with SWTC able to provide oversight through the Network that will develop and deliver the programme. We have an established working group for TOC 2028, including the main heritage, cultural and public sector organisations as well as the Business Improvement District and the District Council. We are keen to collaborate with national partners on planning ahead and on delivery, including ACE, English Heritage, BBC, and we have good collective experience of working with media, government and strategic bodies. If successful at the TOC EOI stage, we will establish a national body liaison committee of the Network to ensure consistency of messaging and dialogue with government and other national stakeholders in TOC.

Other Network committees will include research and academic liaison to inform the core themes of the programme, archive research and the wider creative commissioning strategy; cultural sector liaison and creative commissioning strategy; events and outdoor programming (licencing/access/risk assessments etc.); business liaison and engagement; youth engagement (including establishing the Youth Futures Forum and the related skills development programme); volunteering development, funding and financial management (including working towards combined budgets for 2028).

Through the established partnership there is significant experience of managing major events and programmes, and in working at a hyper-local grassroots level. Both will be important if we are to deliver in the spirit of our overarching themes and enable mass participation.

SWTC manages several key spaces and venues in the town that will be utilised for the TOC programme. This includes one of very few remaining Tourist Information Centres in the UK, demonstrating local commitment to welcoming visitors throughout the year.

The TOC accountable body will be SWTC, working with wider partners through the committee. SWTC will scale up its capacity in preparation for 2028 with key roles relating to event management, curation, marketing and promotion, volunteer mobilisation and support. SWTC is ambitious for the town, working in partnership to support events as well as demonstrating competency in terms of financial management, project management and core functions such as management of the Tuesday and Saturday markets as well as marking key national anniversaries and commemorations. SWTC holds the National Association of Local Council's Gold Award, demonstrating commitment to high standards of governance, community engagement, and continuous improvement. In 2026 it was nominated in the top five of Town/Parish Councils in England (out of 10,000).

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)?*

£60,000 if shortlisted. The Network will oversee the TOC programme. Building upon existing progress through the Network, additional capacity and time is required to develop a technical plan, making all spaces come alive through culture.

- Event and technical development – analysis of spaces, venues and places (evaluate risks, infrastructure, legal/licensing, transport connections)
- Civil war programme development
- Public and business engagement programme, focusing on the evening economy
- Commissioning strategy for creative output across all core themes, cultural disciplines and budgets – engagement with local cultural/creative sectors
- Academic programme – development of talks/lectures, panels and conferences
- Youth Futures Forum – establishment and developing the ‘college’ concept through recruitment of local talent
- Evaluation programme – legacy in all core themes. Work with HE partners.
- Volunteering strategy
- Staffing strategy – identifying additional needs
- Funding strategy – programme costs and additional funding (including commitment to a combined funding strategy for all partners)
- Communications, digital and engagement with national culture, media and government (utilising existing strengths of English Heritage/Audley End)
- Engagement with national travel providers – development of accessibility plan for TOC
- School engagement programme – local role for schools in the wider Uttlesford/South Cambridgeshire area, and strategy for school visits over the TOC year

Delivery of TOC 2028 programme: Total £3.5m programme delivery

£350,000 planning and development

£3,150,000 programme content delivery

- Delivery of core programme – events across locations, commissions, living history/reenactments, music, food/drink and shared making events, including:
 - Music mass participation piece – young people and the community
 - Community on The Common; including re-enactments, music
 - Theatre pieces to reflect our story
 - Commissioning of poetry / spoken word
 - Documentary film
 - Food and drink festival

- Art commissions with local nature groups
- Inclusion of National events; Pride, World Book Day,
- Upscaling TIC offering
- Youth programme – managing Youth Futures Forum and ‘college’ programme
- Volunteer expenses
- Communications and marketing – creation of digital resources for promotion and sharing creative output from the programme
- Talks and lectures – consideration of key themes relating to the programme – civil war, democracy, pride, cultural participation, youth engagement and leadership, tourism/hospitality and market towns
- Additional staff capacity
- Evaluation and reporting programme (including sharing with government and other towns)

The additional £500k is from existing / reallocated budgets by key partners, income from business sponsorship, and in-kind support from key partners.

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?*

In 2025 the District Council established a short-term partnership with the University of Essex Business School to support the development of Sustainable Uttlesford CIC (SUCIC) - the newly established organisation that will support direct action on local nature recovery and climate change beyond local government reorganisation. This has built a strong relationship with University of Essex Business School that will enable us to continue working together.

Key elements of our programme focus on how a town can be a collaborative space for new (and radical) ideas, and how culture and sense of place are a key part of this. We will investigate the civic importance of culture and heritage institutions, analysing how a spirit of outreach and engagement supports long-term community development and civic pride. This requires building specific evaluation processes that can not only track participation and whether people enjoyed themselves, but also the longer-term impacts of that engagement in culture. Issues like rates of volunteering, participation in creative/heritage activities and nature recovery/environmental action, the involvement of people in supporting youth activities, and the increase in cultural activity across community spaces that have been stimulated through the TOC programme.

Our work with young people will also be evaluated, considering the immediate impact on confidence and skills as well as volunteering and employment roles secured. We will maintain this well beyond TOC to track progress of young people in subsequent years (focusing on a key cohort from across the town).

As SWTC's commitment to the tourism and hospitality sector demonstrates, the visitor economy is important to Saffron Walden. We will not only track visitors to the town through events but ensure we capture the economic impact of the cultural programme for TOC and more detailed experience analysis of visitors and local communities. This includes an analysis of the impact on the all-important evening economy. We want to understand the impact of TOC on perceptions of Saffron Walden, sharing this with all towns across the UK.

We are keen to understand the wellbeing impacts of the TOC, recognising the importance of cultural, heritage and environmental volunteering and participation to public health. We will work with the National Centre for Creative Health on a comprehensive evaluation programme to track the impact of participation on health outcomes.

Our major partners including English Heritage (Audley End) and Saffron Hall will support the collection and collation of data, utilising their extensive experience and systems.