

**CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL**  
**COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES**

<b>COMMITTEE:</b>	<b>Community Committee</b>		
<b>MEETING DATE AND TIME</b>	<b>16<sup>th</sup> April 2026</b> <b>7.00 pm</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>Congleton Town Hall</b>
<b>REPORT FROM</b>	<b>Cathy Dean, Communities Manager</b>		
<b>AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE</b>	<b>13</b> <b>UK Town of Culture</b>		
<b>Background</b>	<p>Department for Culture, Media &amp; Sport (DCMS) in October 2025 announced the UK Town of Culture Competition, building on the success of City of Culture, with the aim to celebrate towns and help to create a lasting cultural legacy. The best small, medium and large towns will be selected and invited to make a full application to be named the first UK Town of Culture in 2028.</p>		
<b>Updates</b>	<p>Although the competition was announced in October 2025, it was not brought to the Council's attention until late January 2026, when Congleton Community Projects (CCP) made contact. The deadline for submitting an expression of interest was 31 March 2026, providing a relatively short timeframe in which to prepare a bid.</p> <p>An initial meeting was held with representatives from Congleton Partnership, CCP and Congleton Town Council to consider whether to proceed with an application. To gauge local support, an email was circulated to community groups, businesses and organisations across the town, resulting in 78 expressions of interest.</p> <p>A community meeting took place on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2026, bringing together 26 participants to share ideas and help shape the bid.</p> <p>A small working group met on several occasions to develop the submission, and the expression of interest was completed and submitted on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2026.</p> <p>The guidance states that the shortlisted town will be announced in spring 2026.</p> <p>The expression of interest is attached in Appendix 1.</p>		
<b>Financial Implications</b>	<p>Apart from officer time, there were no financial costs involved with the expression of interest. If Congleton is selected for shortlisting, a £60,000 development grant will be given to support a full application. The winning town will receive £3million to deliver a full programme of cultural activities in 2028, two runners-up will receive £250,000 to deliver elements of their application.</p>		
<b>Environmental Implications</b>	<p>The Town of Culture bid places environmental responsibility at the heart of its vision, recognising the role that culture can play in promoting sustainability, influencing behaviour and supporting the transition to a low-carbon future. Environmental considerations will be embedded across all aspects of programme development, planning and delivery.</p> <p>The Council will seek to minimise the environmental impact of all cultural activities by adopting best practice in sustainable event management. This will include reducing waste, prioritising reuse and recycling, limiting single-use materials, and encouraging suppliers and partners to adopt environmentally responsible approaches. Where possible, local supply chains will be used to reduce transport emissions and support the local economy.</p>		

<b>Equality and Diversity Impact</b>	Accessibility and inclusion are central to the Congleton Town of Culture programme. Over the past year, Congleton Town Council has worked closely with the Equal Access Advisory Group to improve both the built environment and communications, following the social model of disability. The group will be a key supporter of the bid.
<b>PROPOSALS</b>	To note this report.



Department  
for Culture,  
Media & Sport



## 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](mailto: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.

Cathy Dean  
Communities Manager (Including Partnership Officer)  
Congleton Town Council  
T: 01260 270350 ext 7  
M: 07977 065 647  
Cathy.dean@congleton-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.

Congleton Town Council will be the accountable body for the programme, and Congleton Partnership will be the delivery body.

The Congleton Partnership is a community-based, volunteer organisation which draws on and utilises the skills and expertise of residents and organisations in Congleton. Since its inception in August 2008, The Partnership has had an outstanding record of project delivery, including Town Signage, Cycleways & Footpaths, Youth & Schools Projects, Art Skills Workshops, Sustainable Living in Congleton course. With some of its projects, Congleton Apple Juice, Beartown Branding and Bearmania in 2011 won national and regional awards.

Through the Partnership’s network to date, 78 organisations have confirmed their commitment to support the bid. This is a mix of local businesses, community groups, volunteers, services and residents. Key partners include Clonter Opera Theatre, Community Projects, Congleton Climate Action, Congleton Community TV, Congleton High School, Congleton Hydro, Congleton Museum, Congleton Musical Theatre, Daneside Theatre, East Cheshire Chamber of Commerce, Prickly Peach Films, and Siemens - to name a few!

### 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.

For the competition, the Congleton Town Parish Boundary will be used as agreed in 2024, while recognising that the surrounding civil parishes will also be involved, as Congleton is the main service centre. The population of Congleton is 31,000.

## 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

Congleton is a historic market town defined by its independent spirit. In the 17th century, it famously diverted money set aside for a new town Bible to buy a bear for the Wakes celebrations. Whether myth or embellished truth, the story endures because it captures something fundamental about Congleton: a self-reliant community, unafraid to take action and make bold decisions in response to the challenges of its time.

That spirit has echoed through centuries of change — from our textile mills and ribbon weaving heritage to today's businesses, community organisations and creative groups. Congleton continues to evolve, but its character remains constant. Proudly known as Beartown, it is a place where tradition, creativity and community still go hand in hand.

We are home to Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, a suffragist, and John Bradshaw, the judge who presided over the trial of Charles I. By celebrating the stories of the town, we will ignite a cultural revival that empowers our community to lead in environmental action and social resilience.

On the edge of south-east Cheshire, Staffordshire and the Peak District, our landscape, dominated by the River Dane and the iconic Cloud, is not just a backdrop but an active participant in our culture. Our TOC programme will celebrate this identity through three connected themes:

**Bear Town Stories** - will use grass-roots arts to celebrate Congleton's tradition of civic action, from the Bear legend to the community leadership that defines the town today. Residents will shape the programme through participatory arts, youth commissions and community storytelling, connecting heritage, environment and imagination. Congleton's bears will appear across the town as interactive storytellers, revealing hidden histories, celebrating creativity and highlighting our natural assets, including 30 biodiversity sites.

**The Flow of the Dane** - will celebrate our industrial past and environmental future. Once powering textile mills, the river now generates clean energy through Congleton Hydro, a community energy scheme supplying renewable electricity to local industry. We will animate the river through environmental arts, celebrating nature and sustainability, to inspire the next generation of artists, engineers and environmentalists.

**Bear Town's Cultural Heart** - will establish a new hub in the town centre, as a permanent physical legacy- a welcoming "living room" where community groups can meet, connect, and exhibit. A home for a revitalised museum, performance and exhibition spaces, a youth zone and business incubator.

Congleton is a town where heritage, creativity and environmental innovation shape the future.

### 2.2 Local Needs

Like many market towns across the UK, Congleton has experienced significant structural shifts over the past fifty years. The decline of the textile industry - once the backbone of the local

economy - reduced traditional employment opportunities and weakened some of the social bonds that historically connected communities.

The town also faces demographic pressures. Congleton has a growing ageing population, and the absence of further education provision means many young people leave the town to study or pursue careers elsewhere. There are also areas of deprivation, including areas such as Bromley Farm and Buglawton. In these neighbourhoods, residents may experience barriers to opportunity, participation and access to cultural activity.

Congleton is currently experiencing rapid growth. The Cheshire East Local Plan has delivered significant housing development on the edge of the town and in neighbouring parishes (Congleton being the main service centre). While this growth strengthens the town's future, it also creates a challenge: ensuring new residents feel connected to Congleton's historic town centre and part of the town's civic and cultural life, rather than simply commuting to nearby cities such as Stoke-on-Trent or Manchester.

More widely, participation in cultural life can be affected by cost, accessibility, travel and awareness. At the same time, some older residents experience social isolation, while new residents may have limited knowledge of local traditions, organisations and community networks.

In 'Connecting Through Culture', we will prioritise widening access to culture and strengthening connections across the town. Particular focus will be placed on engaging young people aged 0-25, older residents who may be at risk of isolation, new residents in recently developed neighbourhoods, and communities that are currently under-represented in cultural participation. (including people with disabilities, lower-income households and minority communities.) Activities will be delivered across neighbourhoods as well as in the town centre, ensuring cultural opportunities are visible, accessible and inclusive.

It supports the objectives of the Cheshire East Local Plan and emerging Congleton Neighbourhood Plan by strengthening community cohesion, supporting town centre vitality and ensuring that rapid growth is matched by stronger social connections. It also contributes to priorities identified in the Cheshire East Town Centre Vitality Plan, including celebrating heritage, increasing visitor activity, activating public spaces and strengthening connections between neighbourhoods and the town centre.

## **2.3 Empowerment**

Congleton's strong voluntary sector, with more than 150 community organisations, provides a powerful foundation for this work. Artists, community groups, schools and local businesses will work together to co-create projects that celebrate the town's heritage, explore its evolving identity and bring people together through shared cultural experiences.

The ideas within this bid have been developed through collaboration with residents, community organisations and local partners. Congleton Partnership, the proposed delivery body, was created in 2008 and has evolved into an umbrella organisation that connects local groups, businesses, residents and Congleton Town Council. Through this network, more than 78 organisations and individuals have already expressed interest in supporting the development and delivery of a Town

of Culture bid. The Partnership has a strong track record of delivering town-wide initiatives and coordinating collaboration across the community.

Community engagement has also been informed by wider local consultation. In late 2024, Congleton Town Council undertook a six-week public consultation on the emerging Congleton Neighbourhood Plan, receiving more than 400 responses from residents. The priorities expressed through that process - including strengthening community life, celebrating local heritage, supporting a vibrant town centre, environmental concerns and youth provision — closely align with the ambitions of this bid.

Direct engagement has also taken place specifically around the Town of Culture opportunity. On 20 February 2026, a public meeting brought together representatives from more than 25 community groups, schools, cultural organisations and businesses to explore ideas for the programme.

Young people are playing an active role in shaping the bid. Congleton Town Council has recently re-established its Youth Council, bringing together young people aged 10–18 to represent youth perspectives within local decision-making. The Youth Council is supporting the development of the bid and will continue to play a key role in shaping youth-led elements of the programme.

Local volunteers will be supported to take part through a cultural volunteer programme, helping deliver events and activities. Congleton Community TV has a delivery infrastructure enabling continuous storytelling, participation, and real-time cultural visibility.

Accountability to the community will be built into the governance structure. A steering group made up of representatives from community organisations, cultural partners, local businesses, and young people will guide the programme's development and delivery.

By building on Congleton's strong culture of volunteering and partnership working, the Town of Culture programme will not only be delivered for the community but also created with the community.

## 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

Congleton benefits from a strong but distributed cultural and heritage infrastructure, rooted in community ownership and participation. Key assets include Daneside Theatre, a volunteer-run venue supporting local performance groups (including 4 local theatre groups & 3 youth theatre groups); Clonter Opera Theatre, presenting opera and live events; Electric Picture House Artists Cooperative, an artist-led centre offering studios, exhibitions and workshops; and Congleton Museum, which delivers exhibitions and participatory heritage projects.

Congleton Town Hall and Congleton Park provide important civic and outdoor spaces for events and festivals. This infrastructure is strengthened by active organisations including Congleton Live (Unplugged and Jazz & Blues music events), Congleton U3A, Congleton Town Council, Congleton Pride, Congleton White Ribbon Group, local choirs and music groups, Congleton Sustainability Group and the Equal Access Group. Together, they demonstrate great civic pride and participation. However, these assets are not always connected or visible as a cohesive cultural offer.

The Town of Culture programme will bring these together through a coordinated, town-wide approach, activating venues, public spaces and neighbourhoods to create a more visible, accessible and joined-up cultural infrastructure.

A flagship project will be Bearmania 2: #TheNextGen - an evolution of Congleton's popular public art trail, reimagined through digital innovation and immersive storytelling. Artist-designed bear sculptures will be located across the town centre, neighbourhoods and green spaces, each acting as a gateway to deeper content accessed via a mobile app.

Using augmented reality and digital storytelling, visitors will be able to experience Congleton's past in the present, from its textile heritage to its historic streets - while discovering hidden stories, local voices and community memories. A Green Bear Trail will connect over 30 biodiversity sites, encouraging exploration of local habitats through interactive content.

This highly visible, accessible programme will appeal to all ages, encouraging exploration, increasing town centre footfall and connecting communities through a shared cultural journey.

The programme will be supported by partnerships with leading organisations, including HOME Manchester, Factory International and Cheshire Dance, bringing national-quality work to Congleton while supporting local creatives. Lead artist Petra Lea will help coordinate the programme, ensuring a coherent and ambitious cultural offer.

Crucially, the programme is designed with legacy at its core: Developing a new cultural hub in the

Town Centre will be the central connection between our existing cultural infrastructure — securing long-term cultural, social and economic impact for Congleton.

### **3.2 Opportunity**

The Congleton Town of Culture programme has been shaped through ongoing engagement with residents, schools, community groups and young people, ensuring opportunities are closely aligned with local needs and interests. Feedback highlights a lack of youth provision, limited access to creative pathways and a need for stronger connections between communities.

A central legacy of the programme will be the creation of a new cultural heart for Beartown: a vibrant cultural square within the redeveloped Market Area, as identified in the Congleton Neighbourhood Plan. This space will bring together Congleton’s cultural infrastructure into a visible, accessible hub, including a dedicated youth zone. Located in the heart of the town, this inspiring space will provide opportunities for disadvantaged young people to connect, create and develop skills, ensuring they feel part of Congleton’s future.

The wider programme will embed learning, skills development and career awareness throughout. This will include artist-led workshops in schools, creative apprenticeships, mentoring and opportunities to work alongside professional artists and organisations such as HOME Manchester, Factory International and Cheshire Dance. These initiatives will build confidence, raise aspirations and create pathways into creative careers.

Opportunities will also respond to wider community needs. Intergenerational projects will bring together older residents and young people through storytelling and heritage activity, reducing isolation while strengthening shared identity. Community-led initiatives, including the development of “Friends of” groups for over 30 local biodiversity sites, will encourage residents to take ownership of green spaces, supporting environmental awareness, wellbeing and community cohesion.

The programme will also contribute to economic growth. By expanding existing festivals and introducing new flagship events, it will increase visitor numbers, extend the cultural offer and strengthen the evening economy. This will directly benefit local businesses, independent retailers and hospitality venues, supported through partnerships with organisations such as Beartown Brewery.

Sustainability is a further opportunity. Building on the work of Congleton Hydro, including plans for a second scheme near Congleton Park, the programme will highlight how heritage and innovation can support the transition to net zero, positioning Congleton as a forward-thinking market town.

Together, these opportunities will deliver lasting impact: improved well-being, stronger

community cohesion, increased skills and aspiration among young people, and a more vibrant, inclusive and economically resilient town centre.

### **3.3 Accessible**

Accessibility and inclusion are central to the Congleton Town of Culture programme. Over the past year, Congleton Town Council has worked closely with the Equal Access Advisory Group to improve both the built environment and communications, following the social model of disability. Members bring lived experience across wheelchair use, visual impairment, neurodiversity, deafness, mobility challenges, and dementia. Chair Dr Deborah Lawson, a UK-based multi-award-winning Disability Inclusion Consultant, will advise on the programme to ensure inclusion is embedded at every stage rather than treated as a tick-box exercise.

All events and activities will be designed to be genuinely accessible. Festivals and public events will feature step-free access, accessible viewing areas, quiet and sensory-friendly spaces, and clear, easy-to-understand information for neurodivergent visitors and those with sensory needs. The Disability Welcome initiative (local business award scheme) will support local businesses and cultural venues to improve physical access, staff awareness, and inclusive customer experiences.

To reach the widest possible audience, activities will be delivered in familiar, accessible community spaces, with free or low-cost entry, flexible timings, and multiple formats to enable participation by families, young people, working adults, and older residents. Outreach will target those who may not ordinarily engage with arts and cultural activities, working with partners such as Ruby's, Visyon and Friends for Leisure to reach families and individuals facing barriers to participation.

The programme will also engage schools, youth groups, older people's organisations, community groups, and cultural organisations such as Electric Picture House Artists Cooperative, Congleton Museum, Dementia Friends and No Tier Snooker Society to connect with existing networks and underrepresented audiences. Activities will be co-designed with participants wherever possible, ensuring accessibility solutions reflect real needs and that all residents feel welcome and empowered.

By embedding accessibility across planning, delivery, communications, and evaluation, the Town of Culture year will be inclusive by design. It will provide equitable participation, meaningful engagement, and a lasting legacy of improved social connection, ensuring that Congleton's cultural life is accessible and welcoming to everyone, regardless of age, ability, or background.

### 3.4 Communication

The Congleton Town of Culture programme will be supported by a comprehensive, multi-platform communications strategy designed to reach diverse audiences across the town, surrounding areas, and the wider North West. The plan will combine traditional, digital, and community-led channels (including Congleton Community TV) to ensure messages are accessible, inclusive, and engaging for all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.

Key elements include:

**Digital and social media:** A dedicated programme website, alongside the new website for Congleton Town Council (built to the latest accessibility standards) and mobile app will serve as the central hub for event listings, heritage trails, interactive content, and updates. Social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X, will be used to share engaging multimedia content, highlight flagship projects such as Bearmania 2, and encourage user-generated content, particularly from young people and local schools.

**Traditional media:** Press releases, local radio, newsletters and printed guides will ensure accessibility for residents who prefer offline channels. Our existing resident newsletter, 'Bear Necessities', will be expanded to reach more homes. Congleton Chronicle, a local independent newspaper, is a key backer of the bid. Other news outlets and community publications will be leveraged to promote events and showcase stories of local participants, volunteers, and businesses.

**Community networks:** The programme will work closely with partners, including Congleton Town Council, schools, community groups, cultural organisations, and voluntary networks to share information through newsletters, noticeboards, parent networks, and youth forums. Targeted outreach will ensure engagement with underrepresented groups, families, and residents in outlying neighbourhoods.

**Inclusive communications:** All materials will follow accessibility best practice, including clear language, alt text for images, captioning for videos, and easy-read versions where required. Multi-lingual and culturally sensitive content will be used where appropriate to reach diverse audiences.

**Interactive and experiential communications:** Flagship projects such as Bearmania 2 will integrate communications into the experience itself. Augmented reality, QR codes on public art, and location-based storytelling will encourage audiences to explore the town, creating a living communication channel embedded in the cultural programme.

**Monitoring and engagement:** Audience feedback, participation metrics, and social media analytics will inform the ongoing development of communications, ensuring that messages remain relevant, effective, and responsive to community needs.

Through this integrated, multi-channel approach, the programme will maximise visibility, strengthen engagement across age groups and communities, and ensure that Congleton's cultural offer is accessible, celebrated, and widely experienced, both during the Town of Culture year and beyond.

## 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

The Congleton Town of Culture programme will be delivered through a strong, collaborative partnership model that brings together cultural organisations, artists, businesses, funders, voluntary groups and residents. Delivery will be led by Congleton Partnership, an established umbrella organisation with a proven track record of coordinating town-wide initiatives and connecting stakeholders across sectors. A new working group will be set up to deliver the programme, the board being made up of the key delivery partners.

We have already secured strong local interest, with over 75 organisations, creatives and community groups expressing a desire to be involved. Building on this foundation, we will expand partnerships at local, regional and national levels. Cultural partners such as HOME Manchester, Factory International and Cheshire Dance will bring high-quality artistic expertise, while local organisations, including Electric Picture House, Community Projects, Daneside Theatre, Clonter Opera, Congleton Museum, and Congleton Community TV, will ensure delivery remains rooted in place.

We have received valuable feedback through a residents' survey exploring what people value about living in Congleton and what they would like to see in the future. This insight will play a key role in shaping the programme.

Local residents will be central to delivery, building on the strong community spirit already demonstrated through initiatives such as Congleton In Bloom. Residents will be encouraged to take ownership of activities within their own neighbourhoods, contributing to small-scale projects that collectively create a significant impact across the town.

Engagement will be ongoing throughout the programme, with residents supported and encouraged to get involved at every stage. As well as delivering cultural activity, this approach aims to strengthen community connections and foster lasting friendships, leaving a meaningful social legacy beyond the Town of Culture year.

Ensuring that partners are representative of Congleton's population is a core priority. We will take a proactive approach to partnership development, working with organisations such as Ruby's, Visyon, Friends for Leisure and the Equal Access Advisory Group to engage people with disabilities, young people, families and underrepresented groups. The Congleton Youth Council will ensure young people's voices are embedded in decision-making and programme design.

The new cultural square will be developed in partnership with a local developer who owns the site and local business owners. Open calls, transparent commissioning processes and targeted outreach will ensure opportunities are accessible to a diverse range of artists, creatives and organisations, including those who may not traditionally engage with cultural programmes.

## 4.2 Programme Management

The Congleton Town of Culture programme will be delivered through a transparent governance structure, led by Congleton Partnership as the delivery body and Congleton Town Council as the accountable body. The Partnership has a strong track record of coordinating town-wide initiatives and will oversee strategic delivery, financial management and stakeholder engagement.

Governance and delivery structure:

- **Programme Working Group (Strategic Oversight):** Representatives from Congleton Town Council, Congleton Partnership, Community Projects, Equal Access, cultural partners, community organisations, businesses and the Congleton Youth Council. Responsible for vision, accountability and key decisions.
- **Programme Director (Leadership):** Responsible for overall programme delivery, reporting to the Board.
- **Core Delivery Team (Operational Management):**
  - Producer (programme coordination and delivery through Congleton Partnership)
  - Community Engagement Lead (participation and outreach through Community Projects)
  - Marketing & Communications Lead (audience development and visibility through CTC Marketing Manager)
  - Volunteer Coordinator (recruitment and support of volunteers through Congleton Volunteer Action)
- **Delivery Partners (Implementation):** Local organisations, artists, schools and community groups delivering activity across the town.

Delivery will follow a distributed model, working with partners to co-create and deliver activity. Clear commissioning processes, partnership agreements and reporting structures will define roles and responsibilities across all contributors.

A comprehensive risk management framework will be in place, with risks reviewed regularly by the Programme Board. Key risks include:

- **Capacity and delivery risk (Amber):** Risk of over-reliance on volunteers or limited staffing capacity.  
*Mitigation:* Early recruitment of the core team, clear role allocation, and phased programme delivery supported by partners.
- **Financial risk (Amber):** Potential shortfall in funding or sponsorship.  
*Mitigation:* Diversified funding strategy including grants, sponsorship and in-kind support, with contingency planning built into budgets.
- **Engagement risk (Green/Amber):** Risk of not reaching diverse or underrepresented

audiences.

*Mitigation:* Targeted outreach through partners such as Ruby's, Visyon and Friends for Leisure, alongside inclusive programme design.

- **Delivery risk (Amber):** Coordination challenges across multiple partners and locations.

*Mitigation:* Strong project management processes, clear communication channels and regular monitoring.

- **Reputational risk (Green):** Risk of programme not meeting expectations.

*Mitigation:* Ongoing community engagement, transparent communication and responsive programme development.

Through strong leadership, clear governance and effective risk management, Congleton will deliver a high-quality, inclusive and well-coordinated Town of Culture programme with lasting impact.

### 4.3 Financial Management

The £60,000 development grant will strengthen the full application through detailed programme planning, feasibility work, partnership development, and community co-design, ensuring all flagship projects are fully costed, viable, and deliverable at scale.

A key focus will be Bearmania, funding research and technical feasibility for new bear designs, including innovative and sustainable production methods, prototyping, mounting, and artist commissions. It will also support early development of the digital platform, app design, and testing of augmented reality and interactive heritage storytelling.

The grant will also support costing and development of the Green Bear Trail and biodiversity network, covering over 30 sites, and scoping the Flow of the Dane art trail connecting the existing Congleton Hydro scheme at Havannah with the proposed second installation in Congleton Park. Feasibility work will explore public art, lighting, and interpretation to showcase Congleton's industrial heritage alongside its net-zero ambitions.

In parallel, funding will support design and feasibility work for the reimagined Market Area as a new cultural square, as identified in the Congleton Neighbourhood Plan. This will include concept design, spatial planning and community consultation for a flexible cultural space incorporating a youth zone - a key priority identified through Youth Council engagement - alongside potential features such as a climbing wall and a new, more visible home for Congleton Museum.

Funding / Resource	Source Amount	Value / Purpose
UK Town of Culture Investment Arts Council / DCMS	£3,000,000	Core delivery of the full programme, including flagship projects, digital heritage platform, youth zone, accessibility measures, festivals, artist

		commissions, and programme management
Business sponsorship/investment	£1,000,000	Match Funding – redevelopment of market area
Public funding/grants: Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund	£150,000	Artist commissions, workshops, intergenerational activities, and community engagement
Bear Sponsorship 80 x £500	£40,000	Sponsorships of Bears
Local authority / reallocated budgets	£50,000	Civic events, venue support, and staffing contribution
Earned income/fundraising/local grants	£50,000	Ticketed events, merchandise, crowdfunding
In-kind support	£200,000	Volunteers, venue and expertise

Congleton benefits from strong philanthropic support through Congleton Inclosure Trust, John Holford Charity, Congleton Young People’s Trust and Congleton Town Trust. Building on established partnership working, a Town of Culture award would enable us to align and pool resources with these organisations, alongside the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses, to maximise impact and deliver shared ambitions.

#### 4.4 Monitoring, Evaluation and Legacy

**Participation and Engagement:** Track attendance and participation across festivals, workshops, Bearmania 2 trail, youth programmes, and digital experiences, including geographic spread across neighbourhoods such as Bromley Farm and new housing developments.

**Community Cohesion and Inclusion:** Measure engagement across age groups, neighbourhoods and underrepresented groups, with a focus on reaching residents in areas of higher deprivation and new communities on the town’s outskirts.

**Health and Wellbeing Outcomes:** Working with Congleton and Holmes Chapel Care Community, we will use local health data to monitor indicators such as social isolation, hypertension and depression. With approximately 25% of residents living in higher deprivation (IMD Quintiles 1 & 2), and areas such as Bromley Estate within the top 20% most deprived nationally, the programme aims to contribute to improved wellbeing and reduced reported isolation and depression.

**Youth Skills and Development:** Monitor participation in school workshops, creative apprenticeships, mentoring and youth-led projects to assess skills development, confidence and

awareness of creative careers.

**Environmental and Community Ownership:** Track the creation and growth of “friends of” groups linked to over 30 biodiversity sites, including membership numbers, volunteer activity and long-term stewardship of these spaces.

**Economic and Visitor Impact:** Measure town centre footfall, visitor numbers, and feedback from local businesses to assess economic benefits.

**Baseline Information:** Use existing data from resident surveys, local health profiles, event attendance, school engagement and voluntary sector participation to establish a clear starting point.

**Evaluation Methods:** Combine quantitative data (attendance, demographics, digital engagement) with qualitative insights (surveys, interviews, case studies). Digital platforms, including the Bearmania 2 app, will provide real-time engagement data.

**Targeted Reach:** Monitor participation from priority groups, including residents from deprived areas, young people, and new residents, ensuring the programme is inclusive and representative of the town’s changing population.

**Legacy Measurement:** Evaluate long-term outcomes including increased cultural participation, sustained community networks, continued use of biodiversity sites, and improved wellbeing, ensuring lasting social, cultural and environmental impact.