

# ABC25

ARMAGH CITY | BANBRIDGE | CRAIGAVON



UK CITY OF CULTURE  
BIDDING CITY

ABC CITY OF CULTURE BID // 2025



# Background to UK City of Culture

UK City of Culture is a UK-wide programme, developed in collaboration with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The competition is run by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), inviting places across the UK to set out their vision for culture-led regeneration every four years. Derry/Londonderry was the inaugural UK City of Culture in 2013 and the competition is now a permanent fixture in the UK's cultural calendar.

Armagh City, Banbridge, Craigavon is one of eight longlisted places bidding for UK City of Culture 2025. Others on the list include Bradford, Cornwall, Derby, County Durham, Southampton, Sterling and Wrexham County Borough. The shortlist announcement, when eight places will be reduced to three, is anticipated the week commencing 21 March 2022.

## ABOUT ABC25

ABC25 is the UK City of Culture 2025 bid from Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon. The bid has been written to encapsulate the borough's distinctive cultural mix with Armagh City, an ancient capital steeped in heritage and traditions; Banbridge, a bustling market town borne out of the linen industry; Craigavon, a manufacturing hub built around a 1960s new town; and a rural hinterland making for a powerful combination for UK City of Culture 2025.

So far, on this journey the bid has unlocked a huge passion for the borough, and a deep desire to use the great historical and cultural riches to frame a future full of possibility, through acknowledging strengths and weaknesses, and using this opportunity as a catalyst to create real impact and positive change. This bid offers a unique opportunity to highlight the borough as a fascinating and unusual backdrop for an exceptional UK City of Culture.



## THE VISION

The vision is to bring alive the spirit, the stories and the special qualities of the ABC borough through a programme for 2025 that is full of joy, imagination and adventure. Revitalising all of the elements of the regions placemaking past to develop a new model of city development for the 2020s. One which shows how smaller cities can create big impacts. Developing a new cultural geography for regions like ours, where a combination of outstanding natural landscape and thoughtful city development can nurture both the people who live here and the people who visit. A place that is not just smart, but culturally smart. Finding new ways to connect with people who think culture isn't for them. A place to create, to hope, to belong.

## WHO IS THE BID FOR?

This bid is for the 215,000 people throughout our borough. Reaching across cultural boundaries, literally shoulder to shoulder with Europe (as a border region) and across the Irish Sea, navigating the NI Protocol, from Britain to Ireland and back again, we reach across the globe with strong connections in North America, Europe and Asia, telling our authentic stories of innovation and character. For centuries, schools in the borough have educated writers, poets, film-makers, musicians, sports stars, diplomats, religious leaders, mathematicians, astrophysicists and politicians. A revitalised borough that, with the impetus of ABC25, will nurture many more.

## WHAT WILL THE BID ACHIEVE?

### 1. Speak up for Arts and Culture

Here in Northern Ireland, public investment in culture is the lowest of all of the UK regions and is significantly lower than our Irish neighbours. We need to level up: supporting and investing more in our cultural talent and systems. We need to enhance our existing cultural provision as well as developing new arts, economic and digital infrastructure to engage and excite more people who don't think that "culture" is for them.

### 2. Speak up for the Economy

Despite some of the great assets we have, our tourism economy is underperforming. We need to develop more hotel and accommodation provision and provide opportunities for training and jobs. We need to attract more public and private sector investment.

### 3. Step up for Placemaking, Infrastructure and the Environment

In NI we have the highest emissions per capita in the UK (and Ireland too) and our fabulous waters don't meet basic water standards. ABC25 will be the spark that ignites a stronger sense of care for our environment, bringing in a Green Manifesto that makes ABC25 the most sustainable UK City of Culture yet. We will truly nurture our nature, bringing back to life long neglected heritage assets like Armagh Gaol and bringing culture into the heart of communities.

### 4. Speak up for Social and Wellbeing

Putting things right for our younger generation is arguably the most important cultural issue facing the UK right now. Even before Covid-19, our young people were leaving, due to perceived or actual lack of opportunities. This must change. We will create spaces for the next generation to flourish in a nurturing environment. Our culture is rich and varied, but culture in NI can too often be divisive. Throughout our programme, we will celebrate the diversity of cultures, languages and communities that make up the rich tapestry of ABC.

### 5. Step up for Organisations and Partnerships

Smaller cities like ours get left behind. We need to be heard and to be seen, attracting investment, and being at the forefront of creative placemaking. Our delivery model with ABC Culture is not just for 2025. Flexible and generous partnerships will support us to show how smaller cities across the UK can have a contemporary and forward-looking approach to culture and heritage. Bigger is not always better.



## LEVELLING UP

If ABC25 is successful the investment that would follow the accolade would help level up public investment in cultural regeneration in the borough which is currently far behind comparative regions in both the UK and Republic of Ireland. Securing the title would aid the development of new creative projects, investment in economic and digital infrastructure, and engage and excite more people to experience all that the borough has to offer. In addition, a win would provide a voice for the smaller cities across the UK to be heard in the race for investment in cultural place making to create long-term generational change.

It would also help boost an underperforming tourism economy through the development of additional accommodation, the reimagining of public spaces, and by attracting both public and private investment. In addition, the title would champion a stronger sense of civic pride and the Green Agenda with environmental awareness a core theme within the planned year of events.

Crucially, success for ABC25 would stem the continuous flow of young people leaving the region by creating employment opportunities, and breathing new life into cultural places and spaces to build a vibrant economy for the next generation to flourish.

## PROGRAMME

The plans have been guided and shaped by artists, cultural practitioners, communities and even creative bureaucrats, as well as those who have made their mark on culture across the world. We have dared to dream, producing a programme that truly excites; one that revitalises and re-awakens the visionary nature of our place. Our ABC25 programme has been built around three interwoven themes that collectively reflect our rich heritage, character, and our forward leap into a new, shared and confident future. They have evolved through extensive creative and community consultation.

They are:

**Nurture and Nature, Traditions for the Future, and Provoking Thought.**

Events and activities are inspired by the themes, but the programme is curated across the year within the context of the four Celtic seasons: Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain:

### **Imbolc (1 Feb - 30 Apr)**

The 1st day of the Celtic spring with the promise of renewal and rebirth after long winters

### **Beltane (1 May - 31 Jul)**

Spring peaks and merges into summer with its fertile earth and mood of optimism

### **Lughnasadh (1 Aug - 31 Oct)**

Beginning of harvest when the fruits of our labour are most bountiful, harvesting our most creative minds and ideas

### **Samhain (1 Nov - 31 Jan)**

As darkness encroaches and winter arrives, endings take place. We look forward to a new Imbolc





## INSPIRING CREATIVITY

As part of ABC25, the internationally acclaimed poet and well-known local Armagh man, Paul Muldoon has written this poem celebrating our people, our place and our story.

# ARMAGH

Here a warrior queen would give birth to her twins  
at the finishing line of a chariot race.  
Here she would trace out a city with a bronze pin.  
A city in which each of us will find our place.

## BANBRIDGE

Here an explorer who ate from a lead-leached tin  
saw snow-linen bleached as far as the glacier face.  
Here the ice that encased his ship was wearing thin.  
The linen itself was now edged with cotton lace.

## CRAIGAVON

Here by the Lough shore we tried to put a fresh spin  
on a whirlwind future with which few may keep pace.  
Here grace and grandeur would rise above the din.  
And we would be granted a little breathing space.

Paul Muldoon (2021):  
'Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon'.  
Commissioned for ABC25.

## OUR ASK

The bid will only be successful if everyone gets on board and helps to promote the passionate desire that exists to win. We need your help to get this message out there in conversations with friends, colleagues and family, and by sharing, liking and commenting on social media     

Please show your support and help us win - so that together we can share our story with the world.

A new video promoting the bid will be issued on all social media channels the morning of the shortlist announcement please feel free to like, share and comment.

Follow the hashtags:

#ABCCultureNI

#ABC25

#TheWorldAwaitsOurStory





Press Release Issued 02.03.22

## **WINNING CITY OF CULTURE 2025 WOULD UNLEASH HUGE POTENTIAL FOR ARMAGH CITY, BANBRIDGE AND CRAIGAVON**

Being named UK City of Culture 2025 would propel Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon onto the world stage, unleash its huge creative potential and put in place the foundations for an inclusive, diverse and culturally-rich society for future generations, a London event showcasing the region has heard.

Attended by key stakeholders supporting ABC25 - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon's bid to be named UK City of Culture 2025 - the showcase heard how the borough's unique mix of a historical city, classic market town and 1960s New Town would provide a rich programme of events for the year, making a compelling case for a winning bid.

The event - held in the House of Commons in Westminster - follows news last year that the Borough's bid had reached the final eight in the race to take the title of UK City of Culture 2025, clearly demonstrating the significant benefits that a win would have for the region and Northern Ireland.

Attendees heard how the investment which would follow the accolade would help level up public investment in cultural regeneration in the borough which is currently far behind comparative regions in both the UK and Republic of Ireland by aiding the development of new creative projects, investment in economic and digital infrastructure, and engaging and exciting more people to experience all that the borough has to offer. In addition, a win would provide a voice for the smaller cities across the UK to be heard in the race for investment in cultural place making to create long-term generational change. It would also help boost an underperforming tourism economy through the development of additional accommodation, the reimagining of public spaces, and by attracting both public and private investment, while also championing a stronger sense of civic pride and environmental awareness by making sustainability a core theme within the planned year of events.

Crucially, success for ABC25 would stem the continuous flow of young people leaving the region by creating employment opportunities, and breathing new life into cultural places and spaces to build a vibrant economy for the next generation to flourish.





Lord Mayor of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough, Alderman Glenn Barr, said: "It is hard to over estimate how transformational it would be for Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon to be named UK City of Culture 2025. I firmly believe we already have all the ingredients needed to make a major impact on the world stage due to our historic foundations, cultural aspirations, and intriguingly diverse traditions. All we need is the opportunity that winning this title would bring, to allow us to reach our true potential.

**"Whether it is the deep rooted heritage, architecture and traditions of Armagh City, the bustling market town of Banbridge or the industrious new town of Craigavon, we have a diverse spread of conurbation and rural settings which will reap the benefits of ABC25. We can't wait to show the judges just what we have planned, not just for 2025 but for the generations which follow."**

Designed by artists, cultural practitioners, communities and even creative bureaucrats, the event programme for 2025 has been developed following extensive creative and community consultation and is built around the themes of Nurture and Nature, Traditions for the Future, and Provoking Thought. The Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport longlisted Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon as one of the last eight in the competition to be named UK City of Culture 2025 in October 2021. Others on the list include Bradford, Cornwall, Derby, County Durham, Southampton, Sterling and Wrexham County Borough.

The successful entrant will benefit significantly from millions of pounds of investment in social, economic and culture-led regeneration initiatives and events that will be extensively promoted across the UK and internationally.

The images taken at the event are available to view, download and share here:

<https://we.tl/t-ZMaMu5Ssow>



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