

# STOKE-ON-TRENT

UK CITY OF CULTURE 2021

## Together We Make the City

A summary of Stoke-on-Trent City Council's bid to become UK City of Culture 2021



STOKE  
ON-TRENT FOR  
CITY OF  
CULTURE  
2021



STOKE-ON-TRENT  
CANDIDATE CITY



City of  
Stoke-on-Trent

# WE ARE STOKE-ON-TRENT WE MAKE THINGS

We make art from dirt. What we make here reaches the four corners of the globe. There is nowhere else like us in the UK. The city is uniquely polycentric – six distinct towns, one city – a radical idea of place. We are the place where art, technology and commerce come together to create beauty through craftsmanship.

We are at a crucial point in our history. Stoke-on-Trent still suffers from the legacy of decades of decline. But in our past success lies the basis of our recovery. Our ceramics manufacturing industry is growing once again; we are still the World Capital of Ceramics. New companies are forming at record levels. We boast world-class cultural assets in the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery and World of Wedgwood. Theatre, art and design flourish here. We have a rapidly growing creative sector in which digital production is prominent.

Nowhere but Stoke-on-Trent can tell a story that links the earth we walk upon to the process of creation, and from there to the social and economic development of a community and city. The history of Stoke-on-Trent is the core idea of the UK City of Culture writ large. For here culture and creativity have always been a catalyst for economic growth. As UK City of Culture, Stoke-on-Trent will be seeking to rediscover, in a new century and in new ways, the lessons and experience of its past.



“**TOGETHER  
WE MAKE  
THE CITY**”

Our vision for the 2021

## Why Stoke-on-Trent?

### History

Stoke-on-Trent has been shaped by the business of culture for over 250 years and is known nationally and internationally as a historic centre of craftsmanship and making. Culture and the creative economy lie at the heart of our identity. We know that culture can support employment, shape communities, instil pride and raise profile and reputation.

### Geography

Stoke-on-Trent boasts an unusual convergence of geography and cultural identity: it is still described as 'The Potteries' on Ordnance Survey maps and is widely known as such. The city lies at the intersection of north-south and east-west routes and is well-placed to attract a wide audience. There are 3.1 million people living within 60 minutes' drive of the city. Although the primary focus of the UK City of Culture will be the city itself, key cultural partners in the wider conurbation will also be involved, especially the New Vic Theatre in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Keele University.

### Assets

We have a strong cultural base with outstanding museums, theatres and creative spaces, all of which deserve a larger audience. In the RSA's Heritage Index for England, Stoke-on-Trent is ranked 35 out of 325 for museums, archives and artefacts. The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, the World of Wedgwood and the New Vic Theatre are internationally recognised. We have a thriving creative sector which encompasses everything from traditional making to digital production. We are currently investing £52m in improving our key cultural assets, reflecting our belief in the transformative power of culture.

### Expertise

Stoke-on-Trent has experience of hosting major cultural programmes and large scale events including the £8m Appetite programme, Art City, the British Ceramics Biennial and the European City of Sport. We have the expertise in our creative sector to deliver innovative arts programming to diverse communities in both traditional and non-traditional spaces.

### Need

In 2015 Stoke-on-Trent was ranked as the thirteenth most deprived local authority in England out of 326 districts. We have below average rates of educational attainment and life expectancy, and an above average rate of worklessness. We also suffer from a poor public profile nationally due to adverse media coverage in the past. Yet we also have one of the fastest growing economies in the UK; unemployment rates have declined faster than the national average; and the city has been rated as one of the best places in the country to start a business. The UK City of Culture would bring new energy to a process of regeneration that is already underway.

## Our Vision

Our vision for the 2021 programme is built on two principles, making and togetherness:

### Together We Make the City

Making is a deeply-held part of our collective identity. Stoke-on-Trent is a place for makers, artists, artisans, and producers. It is also a place where ordinary people can share in the experience of making. Traditionally, our makers worked with clay. Today, ceramics remain central to our identity but the practice of making extends across the arts and crafts. The UK City of Culture programme will celebrate our history and our current practice of making, while also asking what 'making' means in the 21st century in all areas of our cultural life.

Culture brings people together. From the outset, this bid has been shaped by listening to local people: artists, cultural organisations, businesses, civic leaders, academics, and above all the people of the city. Just as we are six towns that make one city, so we seek to be many communities that live together with respect. The UK City of Culture programme will bring people together to reflect on questions of identity and belonging. It will be inclusive, engaging and involving.

## Our Programme

In Stoke-on-Trent, we will always make ceramics. But in the UK City of Culture programme we want to link the physical experience of making to the deeper cultural currents that inform it. We want to explore questions of how the identity of the city is made and remade. We want to investigate the connections between ideas and practice, and between science and art.

There will be four core themes to the 2021 UK City of Culture programme:

### Identity

Identity is created not only in how we think of ourselves but also in what others think of us. The identity that is imposed on Stoke-on-Trent by others often confines us. But identity is not fixed, it is shifting and multi-faceted, open to interpretation. We will challenge perceptions of the city, enabling everyone to look at Stoke-on-Trent from new perspectives.

## Make

Two hundred and fifty years: a city of making. Thousands thinking with their hands: the saggar maker, the frame filler, the dipper, the glazer, the fettler, the finisher, the flower painter. Our industry has changed, but the makers are still here. We will reflect on and celebrate the joy of making. We will stand on the lessons of the past to get a better view of the future. We will ask what it means to make something in the digital age. What are we making, what can we make? In our online age who is a 'maker'?

## Landscape

Our city was built from coal and clay. But it is also a place of urban green space, of parks, canals and rivers. It's a place that is recovering from the scars of its industrial past. A place where nature is reclaiming the spaces where we stamped our identity with our slag heaps, marl pits, bottle kilns, factories and railway lines. This place has dark edges and liminal spaces. How do we respond to this energy? How do we resist homogeneity? How do we celebrate and harness our landscape in all its forms?

## Alchemy

We were and are a place of innovation and experimentation: 'Science with Art Reads Nature's Book' was the motto of The Wedgwood Institute. This motto will guide us now. What is the future for art and science? What constitutes a material in the future? What is modern alchemy? What happens if we merge the inorganic, organic, and biological worlds? Is there such a thing as a robot artist?

The programme itself will be ambitious, innovative, diverse, and full of surprises. It will include:

- An astonishing opening event Fired Up!, celebrating of our six towns geography and ceramics heritage.
- Music, theatre, film and dance of the highest international quality.
- Public art installations and trails that will transform the city's spaces, places, roads and waterways.
- Extraordinary cultural events and exhibitions in our industrial and post-industrial spaces.
- 'SuperStoked' festivals and events including a British Ceramics Biennial like no other.
- Innovative creative partnerships between artists, makers, scientists and engineers.
- Extensive opportunities for everyone to debate and communicate their experience of the year, including innovative approaches to digital participation for young people.

## Outcomes for the city

Stoke-on-Trent is built on a tradition of craftsmanship linked to mass production, so we know how profound the impacts of culture can be on society. Nearly 3,000 local residents have contributed to local consultations. We know that making, creativity and cultural activity can shape communities, bring people together, and underpin prosperity and wellbeing.

## What happens next

The government's decision on which city will be the next UK City of Culture will be made in Hull in December.

# GET INVOLVED

We want to build on the partnerships that have been forged to create Stoke-on-Trent's bid. If you want to play a part in shaping the future of the city's cultural life, please get in touch ....

