

UK cities of culture, 2025

Next year, Bradford will be lauded nationally and, to a degree, internationally as the 2025 UK City of Culture

And quite rightly so.

Its proposal was selected by the UK Government in May 2022 from a record-breaking 20 bids, following Derry-Londonderry (2013), Hull (2017) and Coventry (2021), to take on one of the most prestigious and transformative titles in UK culture.

Bradford2025 is set to spotlight the city's dynamic contemporary arts and culture, from dance and theatre to film, music and even food. At the same time, it will cement Bradford's reputation as one of the most welcoming places in the UK for artists, producers and creative entrepreneurs, with international exchanges, development programmes and new cultural investment benefiting the entire district.

But what of the other cities who bid for the 2025 title? How many of those - predominantly, post-industrial cities - have continued their bid to become a "must-see" UK destination of choice? How many have been successful? And which of them might be the next big thing in the years that follow Bradford's day in the sun?

That's partly what the UK City of Culture is all about. And it's one reason why Derby, these days, can so easily shrug-off a *Which?* survey which not only described it as the worst shortbreak destination in the UK, but also sparked a naming-and-shaming article in *Metro*.

But those old-fashioned preconceptions of Britain's post-industrial cities being places of little interest are now largely dead and buried, and are being replaced by those hailed as a City of Culture, or who simply go about their business - stealthily and steadily regenerating their city centres into centres of interest.

Derby's Museum of Making had to close its doors late last year, when the River Derwent had broken its banks in heavy and persistent rain. And, just as it did when it first opened in 2021, it burst forth once again as an all-singing, all-dancing celebration of what has made, and still makes, the city tick.

Based within the restored brick walls and on the site of the world's first factory, it's an unapologetic £17-million feast of Derby's past, present and - arguably most importantly of all - its future.

Developed by Derby Museums, the building itself has always been a key feature of the Derwent Valley Mills UNESCO World Heritage Site. Only now, it's also a contemporary space, showcasing 300-years of history, innovation and "making" in its own, creative way.

And it kicked off 2024 by being awarded a Special Commendation in the prestigious European Museum of the Year Awards (EMYA). Fifty different museums from twenty-four Council of Europe member states had been nominated for the top prize, including two other UK-based museums: the Museum of the Home (London) - which took home the Meyvaert Museum Prize for Environmental Sustainability - and The Burrell Collection (Glasgow).

Six Special Commendations were given by the Jury in 2024, with the Museum of Making being the only UK museum to receive the honour.

It was a great start to what has been another exceptional year for Derby - which now stands on the cusp of becoming one of the UK's newest shortbreak destination.

The Guardian, *The i*, and *Metro* all ran lengthy travel feature making a bit of a nonsense of the *Which?* survey. Dracula returned to the city where he first appeared on stage 100 years previously - much to the acclaim of the national press. Plans were made for the opening, in the Spring of 2025, of a new-look Market Hall and a massive entertainment venue, Becketwell Live. Derby was given a namecheck in *Condé Nast Traveller* magazine's list of some of the Best Places to Go in 2025; and VisitEngland included it on its own Hotlist for 2025.

All of which has amplified a soundbite from Derby - which is now also nicely poised to play a lead role in the celebration of 200 anniversary of the birth of the Railway - highlighting the fact that, as well as the £4.48bn worth of investment that has been made in the city's infrastructure since 2011, a further £2.6bn has already earmarked for future development.

One of the biggest transformations in the history of Derby's city centre will become a reality in Spring, 2025, when the new £45.8 million entertainment and conference venue, Becketwell Live opens for business.

The new venue is seen as a key part of the journey to transform Derby into a vibrant city centre with culture at its heart. As an events venue, it will be capable of staging a range of concerts, stand-up comedy, family shows and musical theatre, as well as conferences, exhibitions and events, to an audience of up to 3,500 people.

Perhaps most importantly of all, it is anticipated it will host over 200 cultural and commercial events each year, attracting an additional 250,000 visitors to Derby city centre annually.

The project forms the second phase of the £230 million Becketwell regeneration scheme, which is being led by property developer St James Securities who are now delivering on the vision to create a place where people can 'live, work and play'.

Derby's refurbished Victorian Market Hall, meanwhile, is all set to bring together the best of the region's independent shopping, eating, drinking and entertainment when it reopens to the public in the Spring of 2025.

More than 'just' a market, which has been on this site in the city centre since its opening on 29 May 1866, the majestic Victorian building will now become a venue and social hub - as well as a destination in its own right.

Occasionally referred to as Derby's 'Grand Old Lady' the iconic building has been given a long and loving £35.1-million facelift. And when it reopens in April 2025, the Market will become "the ultimate independent hangout" in the city centre: a seven-days-a-week destination for Derbyshire's culinary and creative businesses, housing nearly 50 independent traders.

All this... And more.

One of Derby's newest attractions, Electric Daisy is on the threshold of becoming a nationally known blueprint for a greener environment. Located in what was once, and probably would still have been, a derelict piece of land in a rapidly regenerating city centre, it is the brainchild of Jamie Quince Starkey - in his own words, one of the "Likely Lads" from a local allotment.

But dig just that little bit deeper, and what you'll soon unearth is an idea which captured the imagination of The Eden Project's Sir Tim Smit: a green and colourful space which now welcomes countless visitors to a well-curated programme of events; and a stronger sense of optimism for all our futures.

A David in a world of Goliaths, Electric Daisy has become a beacon for Nature regeneration - inspiring The Eden Project's Sir Tim Smit to say: "The nature-based

regeneration that's been achieved across Derby in the last 12 months shows the potential, together with the public support for more vibrant urban spaces. Derby is becoming an outstanding symbol of regeneration, famous across Europe".

Elsewhere, the city is hoping the 250th anniversary of J.M.W. Turner's birth in 2025 will reignite the debate over what made British art 'great'? The art historian Dr Bendor Grosvenor, best known from the BBC series *Britain's Lost Masterpieces* and *Fake or Fortune?*, has launched a new book recently: *The Invention of British Art*. And front-and-centre in his radical retelling of British art history is the role played by landscape and portrait painter Joseph Wright, of Derby, who has also been acclaimed as "the first professional painter to express the spirit of the Industrial Revolution".

And finally (for now), who knew that Lara Croft was "born" in Derby? It might be a little-known fact at present, but once Phoebe Waller Bridge's long-awaited new TV series hits the screens, the city will be making the most of its reputation as a "Pioneering City". Watch this space as we all watch Sophie Turner, best known for appearing in HBO fantasy drama *Game of Thrones*, portray one of the city's best-loved daughters.

So "All Hail Bradford": 2025 UK City of Culture, and this year's biggest driver in putting to bed once and for all that post-industrial myth that cities somewhere up north have nothing to offer to today's more sophisticated travellers.

And "God Bless Derby"...

(...and "all who sail in her" eco-friendly narrowboat *Outram*, which offers cruises along the UK's most bio-diverse urban river and a UNESCO World Heritage Site!).