

Dear Torpoint Town Councillors,

Thank you for taking the time to consider this proposal at your D&L meeting. I'm very mindful of the pressures on Town Councils and the many competing priorities you hold on behalf of your communities.

This note is shared in the spirit of opportunity.

My name is Jonny Birkett and I'm a placemaking practitioner and strategic adviser working with towns across the UK on high street renewal, cultural strategy and community-led regeneration. I'm supporting Torpoint's UK Town of Culture Expression of Interest on a voluntary basis, at the request of Matthew Pointin and local partners, to help strengthen the town's vision and bid confidence.

Torpoint is a town that consistently punches above its weight. It is a place with real heart, a town that has achieved a great deal with limited resources, and where the strength of community spirit, local pride, and creative energy is genuinely exceptional. Yet it is also a town that is too often overlooked: by funders, by investors, and sometimes even by Cornwall itself.

The UK Town of Culture 2028 competition offers Torpoint a rare chance to shift that story.

This is not simply a bid for a year of activity. At its best, Town of Culture is a platform to **unlock long-term change**: to build civic pride, support young people, activate heritage assets, grow the town's profile, and strengthen the role of culture in shaping Torpoint's future development.

Importantly, this Expression of Interest stage is intentionally light-touch. No financial contribution is requested from Torpoint Town Council, and no officer capacity is expected beyond supportive engagement. What is being asked for is your endorsement, your voice, and your belief in Torpoint's ambition, so that the bid truly reflects the whole town.

Whether or not Torpoint ultimately wins the title, there is value in the journey: a powerful opportunity to bring people together, to set out a shared vision, and to confidently tell Torpoint's story on a national stage.

Thank you again for your time and consideration, and for everything you continue to do for the town.

Warmest regards,

Jonny Birkett on behalf of,

TAC and Torpoint Partners

Briefing Note

UK Town of Culture 2028 – Expression of Interest (EOI)

For: Torpoint Town Council

Purpose: Information + request for support

Date: [Insert]

Prepared by: Jonny Birkett – The Placemaker / on behalf of TAC & Stakeholders

1. Purpose of this note

This briefing note provides Torpoint Town Council with a clear overview of the **UK Town of Culture 2028** programme and outlines:

- what the competition is and why it matters
- the potential value to Torpoint
- the application stages and timeline
- what support is being requested from Torpoint Town Council
- confirmation that **no Town Council financial contribution is required**, and **no officer time commitment is being sought beyond light-touch engagement/endorsement** at this stage

This is intended as a practical summary to support informed discussion and decision-making.

2. What is UK Town of Culture?

The **UK Town of Culture** is a new national cultural programme supported by the UK Government (DCMS). It will award one town the title **UK Town of Culture 2028**, alongside development support for shortlisted places.

The competition is designed to celebrate and invest in towns with:

- a compelling local story
- a strong sense of identity and community
- ambition to use culture and heritage to drive long-term transformation

Importantly, this is **not simply an events programme**. It is about how culture can act as a tool to:

- strengthen civic pride and belonging
- improve quality of place and public realm
- support wellbeing and participation
- create opportunities for young people
- activate heritage and under-used assets
- increase profile, visitation and inward investment

For Torpoint, this aligns strongly with emerging local cultural ambition and the shift toward embedding culture as a driver of long-term place change.

3. Why this matters for Torpoint

Torpoint is widely recognised locally as an exceptional town with an unusually strong community spirit, but it is also frequently overlooked and undervalued.

Despite limited investment and resources, Torpoint has demonstrated that it can:

- organise, collaborate and deliver
- create cultural activity from the ground up
- sustain an active and engaged creative community
- show resilience and ambition well beyond its size

Torpoint's proximity to Plymouth brings opportunity, but also creates economic and profile challenges, including:

- leakage of spend to the city
- perceptions of being a "pass-through" town
- lower visibility compared with other Cornish towns that more naturally attract visitors and investment

A UK Town of Culture EOI is therefore a powerful opportunity to say:

Torpoint has achieved so much with so little, imagine what it could do with national recognition and targeted investment into culture and, our town.

This could act as:

- a rallying point for the town
- a first major step in delivering cultural transformation
- a platform for a stronger Torpoint identity and pride
- a mechanism for unlocking future funding and partnerships

Even if Torpoint is not ultimately successful, the process itself has value: it will build a shared vision, strengthen partnership working, increase confidence, and raise the town's profile.

This is a chance to **turn the town's existing strategy and vision into a shared rallying point**, building confidence and momentum across Torpoint. It aligns with the Neighbourhood Development Plan and *A Vision for Torpoint*, bringing culture and heritage to the forefront of how the town grows, regenerates and tells its story.

4. What the process involves (stages and timelines)

Stage 1 – Expression of Interest (EOI)

Deadline: 31 March 2026

The first submission is an EOI document (a short application form). The EOI focuses on three main areas:

1. **Vision** – what Torpoint could become through culture
2. **Local need** – why this matters now
3. **Empowerment** – community involvement and collaboration

This stage is intended to be **light-touch** and does not require detailed delivery plans or extensive research.

Torpoint Town Council role at this stage: support, endorsement, and light-touch participation (see Section 5).

Stage 2 – Full Bid (if shortlisted)

If Torpoint is shortlisted, DCMS will provide £60,000 to support the development of a full bid.

This funding is intended specifically to enable:

- community engagement and co-design
- partnership development
- programme planning and costing
- governance and delivery design
- preparation of the full submission

This means that **resources are made available to develop the bid**, and do not fall on Torpoint Town Council.

Torpoint Town Council role at this stage: continued support and engagement (still not requiring financial contribution).

Stage 3 – Delivery (only if Torpoint wins)

If Torpoint is successful, the town would deliver UK Town of Culture 2028 with significant national profile and investment.

At that stage, the Town Council would be invited to consider becoming the **Accountable Body** (i.e., the organisation that formally holds funding and governance responsibility).

Important: This is not a commitment required now.

It is a decision **only if Torpoint is successful**, and would be fully explored at that time, with options and implications clearly laid out.

5. What support is being requested from Torpoint Town Council (and what is not)

What Torpoint Town Council is being asked to do

At this stage, the request is **supportive not resource-heavy**:

- Provide **in-principle support** for Torpoint submitting an EOI
- Contribute light-touch local insight (e.g., short conversation / feedback on the vision)
- Enable the bid to credibly represent Torpoint as a partnership town
- Consider providing a simple statement of endorsement / support

This will ensure the EOI is truly town-wide and collaborative, incorporating the voices of the Town Council, community groups, the creative community, residents and the business community.

What Torpoint Town Council is NOT being asked to do

- No financial contribution is requested
- No officer time commitment is required beyond light-touch engagement
- No additional staffing requirement
- No delivery commitment at EOI stage
- No decision now on accountable body status

We recognise the Town Council's limited resources and wide-ranging responsibilities. This proposal respects that reality.

6. Features and benefits of submitting an EOI

Submitting an EOI offers Torpoint multiple benefits:

A. A town-wide rallying point

- A unifying, hopeful programme for the town
- A positive shared ambition people can get behind

B. Stronger identity and profile

- Raises Torpoint's visibility locally and nationally
- Reinforces Torpoint as a gateway, cultural town and proud community
- Helps shift perception from "pass-through" to "place to stop and belong"

C. Acceleration of cultural strategy

- Creates momentum and purpose behind existing cultural planning
- Helps move from ideas to delivery
- Anchors culture and heritage as central to how Torpoint develops

D. Future funding leverage

- Unlocks funding for bid development (£60k if shortlisted)
- Strengthens the town's position for future external funding bids and partnerships

E. Community empowerment

- Increases confidence and pride
- Expands participation and voice
- Helps young people feel Torpoint is "for them": a place to create, produce and build futures

7. Recommended next steps

1. Town Council to confirm **support in principle** for the EOI submission
2. Arrange a short discussion / input session with Town Council representatives
3. Draft EOI completed collaboratively and shared for final comment
4. Submit EOI by **31 March 2026**
5. If shortlisted, use DCMS development funding to begin full co-design process

8. Summary

Torpoint has a rare combination: a strong cultural fabric, deep community cohesion, real heritage assets, and ambition, but it is often overlooked.

UK Town of Culture is an opportunity for Torpoint to:

step forward confidently, set out its vision, galvanise the community, and put itself on the map.

This request to Torpoint Town Council is simple, respectful, and light-touch:
support the town's ambition, without requiring resources, financial commitment, or officer capacity.

About the Author

Jonny Birkett has been recognised as one of the UK leading placemaking practitioners and strategic place management advisors with 20 years' experience supporting towns and high streets through regeneration, cultural development and partnership-led place transformation. He was most recently Managing Partner at Genecon, one of the UK's most respected placemaking, economic development and town centre consultancies, before founding The Placemaker Ltd in 2025.

Jonny's support for Torpoint has been offered voluntarily at the request of Matthew Pointon at TAC and a wide range of partners in the town, providing technical guidance and experience to strengthen Torpoint's ambition and confidence.

Prior to advisory & consultancy, Jonny spent four formative years living and working in Cornwall in Helston and the Lizard, helping establish and develop the town team and partnership model, work which was nationally recognised through industry awards for ATCM Town Team of the Year and ATCM Partnership of the Year, as well as being referenced in national future high street report and included the Portas Review as an exemplar.

He was personally recognised, for his work in Helston, winning the 2010 ATCM Chairmans award for Contribution to the Industry of Place Management and was made an Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Place Management (IPM).

That experience gave Jonny a deep appreciation of both the challenges and the extraordinary potential of Cornish towns, and it remains some of the most rewarding and influential work of his career, shaping a community-led approach rooted in craft, trust and long-term place stewardship.

www.theplace-maker.co.uk

Project examples:

Chief Executive – Stratford-upon-Avon Business Improvement District (BID), Greater Cambridge Cultural Infrastructure Strategy, Eden Project North, 16 Levelling Up Fund Round 1 and Round 2 successful applications, Shrewsbury Town Centre Strategy / Regeneration Programme (including The Big Story), Wigan & Leigh Pride in Place and Long-Term Plan for Towns Strategy, Blackburn Cultural Growth Strategy, Helston Business Improvement Partnership & High Street Transformation, Author of the National Guidelines on Diversification and the Night-Time Economy, Programme Director – Purple Flag Night-Time Economy Accreditation Scheme, International Academies for Night-Time Economy Development (Ireland & Sweden), Multiple Business Improvement District development and Town Management Partnership programmes, Thurrock, Grays and Romford (Havering) Integrated Place Management programmes and organisations, Lead Director – Essex Growth Hub Transformation, Stoke-on-Trent Heritage Asset and Museum transformation plans, Bradford City of Culture bid, Barbican Research and Insight Report, Raffles Community Place Plan. Among others.