

Cultural Purbeck CIO

A Proposal to Corfe Castle Parish Council, March 2026

Proposal

This is a proposal for:

- Start-up financial support for Cultural Purbeck CIO (CP).
- Support for CP submitting an Expression of Interest (EOI) to DCMS for Swanage and the Isle of Purbeck to be the UK Town of Culture 2028.

Background

In late 2024/ early 2025, Swanage Town Council and the Parish Councils of Corfe Castle, Langton Matravers, Worth Matravers and Studland supported a bid for Swanage and the Isle of Purbeck to be the Dorset Town of Culture 2026, with an agreement in principle to offer financial support if needed.

The area was shortlisted and although it did not win, the judging panel encouraged a future application, particularly if we could demonstrate stronger coherence between the organisations supporting arts and culture across Purbeck.

The Steering Group of organisations involved in the bid's development recognised the value of the work already undertaken and the momentum it had generated. They agreed to build on this foundation by developing an umbrella cultural network, to be known as Cultural Purbeck.

In November 2025, the group hosted a successful workshop attended by around 60 representatives from more than 30 organisations. Participants expressed strong support for establishing an umbrella organisation that would strengthen networking and communications, enable the sharing of good practice and support joint working on creative projects that benefit local communities. Such an organisation would also help celebrate what Purbeck has to offer, raise the profile of its cultural organisations, build capacity, and develop skills. In doing so, it would contribute to local economic and social objectives.

In December 2025 a proposal for Cultural Purbeck to be established as a membership CIO was submitted to the Charity Commission. Four initial shadow Trustees were recruited and additional Trustees will be recruited to ensure that local interests are covered, a Constitution and Business Plan were developed, and a funding proposal submitted to the Talbot Village Trust. In January 2026 the Cultural Purbeck Steering Group handed over their responsibilities to the prospective charity. In February 2026 a second workshop involving over 30 local organisations supported the work underway, proposed future projects and actions and a bid to DCMS for Swanage and the Isle of Purbeck to be UK Town of Culture 2028.

Start-up Funding

The Trustees of Cultural Purbeck request support for this initiative from Corfe Council Parish Council and ask for start-up funding of £500. Support from Swanage Town Council and from other Purbeck Parish Councils is also being sought. Swanage Town Council has signalled its readiness to support and this will hopefully be confirmed at their March meeting.

UK Town of Culture 2028

In January 2026, DCMS announced a competition to select a UK Town of Culture 2028. There are three bands depending on the size of population and a town can include its neighbouring areas providing the area has some recognisable coherence. Cultural Purbeck propose to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) by the closing date of 31st March 2026 for Swanage and the Isle of Purbeck as the named location. This area would be in the under 20,000 population category. The other categories are for towns with populations of 20,000 – 75,000 and above 75,000.

The initial evaluation will focus on the story of the area, its cultural heritage and identity and what makes it special. A workshop of the prospective members of Cultural Purbeck took place in Swanage on 27th February when a wide range of organisations approved a submission based on the theme of “From Stone to Sea”. The EOI will show how the proposal will reflect our unique story, how local needs will be addressed, the partnership basis of the bid, how we will ensure inclusivity and how we will make it happen in terms of programme and financial management.

The winning town will be awarded £3 million to deliver a cultural programme in 2028. Additionally, the two finalists from their category will each receive £250,000 to deliver elements of their bid.

The DCMS Guidance Document states that “Local government is foundational to the sharing of cultural opportunity across the UK, and to the successful delivery of UK Town of Culture. Local authorities should work with local people to ensure that their bid and creative vision is reflective of their communities.”

The Trustees of Cultural Purbeck:

- **seek the support of Corfe Castle Parish Council for their submitting an Expression of Interest to DCMS for Swanage and the Isle of Purbeck to be the UK Town of Culture 2028, and**

The Trustees are seeking the support and involvement of other relevant local authorities.

CP Trustees, March 2026

Annex: UK Town of Culture 2028 competition aims and criteria

Aims

1. Your story: tell us about the unique story and culture of your town.

2. Culture for Everyone: how you will design a cultural programme that provides visible, accessible culture and boosts your town's profile.

3. Making it happen: how you will deliver a successful programme.

Criteria

1. Vision: A strong, compelling local story that uses culture to bring people together, reflecting place, pride, and contribution to the national story.

2. Local Need: How your programme builds on local strengths while addressing specific local priorities.

3. Empower: Commitment to involving communities, grassroots artists, creatives, and local leaders in shaping the bid, programme, and legacy, devolving decision-making where possible.

5. Quality and Innovation: A high-quality, bold programme drawing on arts, heritage, and creative industries, demonstrating excellence, creativity, innovation, and use of technology to widen access.

6. Opportunity: Expanding opportunities for those who currently do not access cultural infrastructure, especially young people, while creating new opportunities for existing participants.

7. Accessibility: Ensuring the programme is accessible to all ages and underserved communities, providing a safe, supportive, non-discriminatory environment.

8. Communication: A well-resourced communications plan that reaches multiple audiences and shines a spotlight on the town's contribution to national life.

9. Partnerships: Strong, collaborative leadership with clear commitment from local authorities, community organisations, and cultural/heritage partners, including pursuit of new opportunities and lasting connections.

10. Programme Management: Evidence of capacity, capability, and effective processes to deliver the programme successfully.

11. Financial Management: A realistic, viable budget representing value for money, with clear monitoring processes and plans to attract appropriate funding.