

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

8 February 2024

Over £34,000 awarded to arts, culture and heritage organisations across Fenland

Local artists, museums and festivals are among 19 organisations set to receive a share of more than £34,000 from the first round of the Fenland Culture Fund, boosting arts, culture and heritage across the district.

The inaugural recipients have each received a grant of up to £2,000 to help develop local talent and deliver a range of cultural projects and activities to people across the district.

Fenland District Council received fantastic applications from no less than 42 community groups and individuals representing all corners of Fenland.

Due to the quality and high number of applications, over £11,000 of extra funding was made available in addition to the original £23,000 grant pot, to allow as many projects to go ahead as possible.

Given the high quality of the remaining projects that applied for funding, work will be undertaken to signpost groups to other opportunities to progress their ideas where possible. They will also be invited to apply for second round of the Fenland Culture Fund when it opens later this year.

The Fenland Culture Fund was launched in October 2023 with the aim of supporting the district's diverse creative sector while providing more opportunities for people to access and experience arts and culture in Fenland. It also supports the delivery of the district's [Creativity and Culture Strategy](#).

The grant scheme is managed by Fenland District Council with funding from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Arts Council England and is a partnership project with Arts Fundraising and Philanthropy.

Cllr Chris Seaton, Fenland District Council's Portfolio Holder responsible for Arts, Culture and Heritage, said: "We're delighted with the amount of interest in the first round of our Fenland Culture Fund and the large number of applications. The recipients capture the breadth and depth of cultural excellence in Fenland and reflect a growing recognition of the role that arts, culture and heritage can play in the vibrancy and economic prosperity of Fenland and the good health and wellbeing of our communities.

"I'd like to pay a huge thank you to everyone that applied and made the job of deciding which applications to support with funding incredibly difficult! We very much look forward to seeing the projects and activities progress and hope that local communities will really enjoy the benefits."

Hazel Edwards, South-East Area Director, Arts Council England, said: "We're really excited to see what amazing creative work is brought about as the Fenland Culture Fund welcomes onboard the first of its successful applicants. Arts Council England is extremely pleased to have supported the small grants programme with £25,000 of our own Strategic Investment Funding.

“As one of our 54 Priority Places from across the country, we’re always thrilled to be supporting cultural activity in Fenland with programmes like these, as well as our ongoing funding programmes such as National Lottery Project Grants.”

Local MP Steve Barclay said: “Many congratulations to the organisations that were successful in gaining support for their activities from the Fenland Cultural Fund. Up to £2,000 has been awarded to progress creativity and cultural offerings to new audiences, drive increased engagement, and build on existing talent.”

The **Wisbech & Fenland Museum** received a grant to support a programme of free public events linked to the Museum’s summer holiday exhibition ‘Beasts’, which will showcase epic creatures both real and imagined from across the Museum’s eclectic collection. The events will be created in partnership with young people aged eight to 19 taking part in the Arts Ambassador programme delivered by 20TwentyProductions.

Louise Haselgrove, Learning and Community Participation Officer at the Museum, said: “The Museum is delighted to have been awarded a Fenland Culture Fund grant that will support and extend our work with young people giving them the opportunity to shape and improve our programming.”

Local **photographer Andy Gutteridge** received a grant to support his documentary photography exhibition, ‘The Life and Soul of the Straw Bear’, which celebrated the volunteers who strive to maintain the tradition of the Straw Bear Festival in Whittlesey.

The annual event, which has close ties with the local community and its history, was revived in 1980 but dates back to at least the mid-19th Century.

Andy’s exhibition opened at the start of this year’s three-day festival last month. It documented the preparations leading up to the festival and brought to the fore the efforts of those who give up their time to ensure the event continues to inspire and captivate people from all over the world.

Thorney resident Andy, who was born in Whittlesey and been a photographer for over 20 years, said: “Although I’m probably better known for my sports photography, I have been developing documentary photography projects for a few years now. When the grant application opportunity was announced by the council, it became obvious that this project dovetailed with the aims and objectives of the Fenland Cultural Strategy, and I was delighted the panel decided to make the award in support of this project.”

Local **artist Lisa Banks** received a grant to curate a Women’s Art Exhibition at The Wisbech Gallery, a new exhibition space located in Octavia View in South Brink, Wisbech. The exhibition will celebrate local women artists and feature various pieces of work. It is hoped the exhibition will launch to coincide with International Women’s Day on Friday, 8 March.

Lisa said: “I am delighted to have been selected for a Fenland Culture Fund grant and can’t wait to put on the exhibition.”

The full list of Fenland Culture Fund recipients is as follows:

- **Dance tutor Teigan Liebscher, of March-based Teapots Dance Company** – to help fund delivery of ‘You Can Dance’, a new series of free dance classes to be offered to primary schools in March for children with additional physical and emotional needs. Funding will also be used for bursaries to enable children to attend additional dance classes outside of school.

- **Sarah Starr, Neale Wade Academy, March** – to deliver a student workshop with Mandinga Arts at Neale Wade, creating a Dragon’s Head for the St George’s Festival parade, taking place in March on 21 April 2024.
- **Mairead Wright, Longhurst Group** – to help deliver Wisbech Through My Eyes, a programme aimed at improving people’s wellbeing through participation with others in creative activities.
- **Wisbech Ukrainian Community** – to support the Ukraine Traditional Craft Hub.
- **Wisbech & Fenland Museum** – to deliver free summer holiday activities linked to the Museum’s ‘Beasts’ exhibition.
- **Robert Bell, Lilian Ream Exhibition Gallery Trust** – to support the delivery of ‘Lilian Ream: Faces and Places’, an exhibition of images from the Lilian Ream collection, at the Wisbech & Fenland Museum from 20 April to 13 July 2024.
- **Maureen Davis, Wimblington Parish Council** – to commission a local artist to paint the Pavilion and Toilet Block at the War Memorial Playing Field with graffiti-style murals, and work with young people in the community to see what murals they would like to see.
- **Keith Smith, Ferry Project** – to help deliver an International Food and Culture Festival at the Queen Mary Centre in Wisbech on 17 February 2024.
- **Alan Wheeldon, Friends of Wisbech Park** – to commission a local artist to create a large metal sculpture of an apple to sit in the centre of the Community Apple Orchard in Wisbech Park.
- **Photographer Andy Gutteridge** – to support the delivery of ‘The Life and Soul of the Straw Bear’, a documentary photographic exhibition at Whittlesey Library celebrating the volunteers who strive to maintain the tradition of the Straw Bear Festival in Whittlesey.
- **Godfrey Smith, Fenland Arts Association** – to deliver Banner and Pennant Screen-printing Workshops for St George’s Festival in March.
- **Finn Morrell, Temper Theatre** – to support the delivery of ‘My Home, My Future’, a programme of creative workshops, collaborative conversations, and the inception of a new show, aimed at fostering connection, empowerment, and cultural enrichment within the Fenland district.
- **Artist Lisa Banks** – to curate a Women’s Art Exhibition at The Wisbech Gallery.
- **Wisbech Youth Club** – to support Creative Youth Reflects, a new initiative that will bring together local young people to learn more about important places and objects in Fenland.
- **Joanna Melton, Chatteris Town Council** – to fund new attractions at the Chatteris Midsummer Festival, taking place on 22 and 23 June 2024, including bands in the parade and Furrowfields recreation ground and a main arena attraction.
- **Blackfield Creatives** – to improve access to creative resources in Fenland, by funding the purchase of equipment to deliver professional art courses to artists across the district.

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Notes to Editors

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