



Connecting the golden thread

Unlocking the UK's ambition for major events

Connecting the golden thread

Unlocking UK's
ambition for
major events

An expert advisory report from:
Warwick Business School

Initially Commissioned by:
Spirit of 2012

Writing team:
Jonothan Neelands
Haley Beer
Mark Scott

October 2025



Contents

Foreword.....3

Executive summary4

Methodology5

Major events in the UK.....6

Challenges to the
major events sector7

Opportunities.....11

The role of government
and regulation.....14

Recommendations17

Conclusion.....20

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of roundtables
and represented organisations 21

Appendix 2: Major Events Summit
objectives and programme22



UEFA Women's Euro 2022, Image Credit: UEFA

Foreword

"Major events matter. They bring people together in moments of celebration, pride and connection, while also acting as powerful drivers of economic growth, cultural expression and international reputation. From London 2012 to Eurovision in Liverpool, and recent sporting events, the UK has proven time and again that it can deliver events of global scale and significance, creating experiences that resonate long after the final whistle or last performance.

This report sets out a practical and shared ambition for how we can build on that track record. The UK is rightly recognised as a world-class host, but success cannot be taken for granted. Our international competitors are increasingly strategic, coordinated and ambitious. If we do not address the challenges of fragmentation, short-termism and inconsistent evaluation, we risk falling behind and losing opportunities for growth, influence and community benefit.

Connecting the golden thread: Unlocking the UK's ambition for major events responds to this challenge. It builds on the earlier work undertaken by Spirit of 2012 and Warwick Business School through the **Creating the golden thread: An ambition for major events in the UK** report and draws on consultation with event organisers, funders, local authorities and governments of the home nations. The report identifies both the barriers we face and the opportunities we must seize, and proposes a roadmap through its recommendations which are practical, evidence-based and designed to embed long-term value.

At the centre of this vision is the golden thread: the connective force that ensures major events are more than stand-alone spectacles. It is about weaving sport, culture and business events into the fabric of places and communities so that they leave behind a legacy of participation, pride, skills and opportunity. No single organisation can carry this responsibility alone. It must be shared across government, industry, civil society and communities.

The recommendations that follow call for a UK-wide ambition, a consistent framework for evaluation, funding models aligned to the full event lifecycle, stronger collaboration and delivery structures, and governance that embeds community voices. Together, they represent a powerful agenda for change.

I would like to thank Warwick Business School for continuing to lead this work in partnership with Spirit of 2012 as we head towards our closure at the end of 2025. I would also like to thank the many contributors across the UK who gave their time and expertise which shaped this report, especially Claire McColgan CBE and Dave Moutrey OBE who were both vital in the convening of the Major Events Summit in May 2025.

With a shared ambition and collective effort, we can ensure that every event strengthens communities, enhances our global reputation and leaves a legacy that endures."

Ruth Hollis OBE
Chief Executive, Spirit of 2012



Ruth Hollis OBE, Image Credit: Spirit of 2012

Executive summary

Across the UK, major events have become part of everyday civic life as well as a point of national celebration. They fill stadiums and city squares, animate museums and waterfronts, and connect local stories to global audiences. From London 2012 to Eurovision in Liverpool, recent sporting, cultural and business events have demonstrated the UK’s ability to deliver events of international scale with precision, creativity and community spirit. DCMS has played a central role in these successes, with talented teams whose skills and knowledge have grown through years of delivery, collaboration and learning. These moments create shared memories, attract visitors and investment, and leave skills and pride that endure.

This report, *Connecting the golden thread: Unlocking the UK’s ambition for major events*, sets out how to turn that proven capability into a coherent, long-term approach. The UK is widely recognised as a world-class host, but success cannot be taken for granted. International competitors are increasingly strategic and coordinated. Without improvement, the UK risks missing opportunities for growth, soft power and community benefit.

Building on the previous collaboration between Warwick Business School and Sprit of 2012, ***Creating the golden thread: An ambition for major events in the UK*** and informed by consultation with event organisers, funders, local authorities and governments across the four nations, the report identifies both the barriers to progress and the practical steps required to unlock greater value within the major events sector. A Major Events Summit in Liverpool in May 2025 brought more than 70 leaders from sport, culture and business events together to refine these priorities.

The analysis highlights persistent challenges that limit long-term impact: fragmented policy and an unclear national ambition, funding models that do not match the realities of the event lifecycle, inconsistent evaluation, fragile and temporary governance, and workforce and infrastructure pressures. These factors reduce the UK’s ability to compete internationally and to translate one-off successes into lasting benefits for people and places.

The opportunities are clear. A UK-wide ambition would allow the country to speak with one voice, aligning sport, culture and business events while respecting the strengths of each nation and region. A consistent outcomes and evaluation framework would build robust evidence of value for money and support better decision making. Lifecycle funding would sustain momentum from bid through legacy. Stronger collaboration and delivery frameworks would reduce duplication and spread know-how. Community governance would ensure events are created with local people and leave deeper social impact.

The report makes five core recommendations:

- 1. Develop a UK-wide ambition for major events that unites sport, culture and business within a shared framework.**
- 2. Establish a common national outcomes and evaluation framework to be applied consistently across publicly funded events.**
- 3. Align funding models with the full event lifecycle and embed legacy planning from the outset.**
- 4. Strengthen collaboration, governance and delivery frameworks, supported by practical playbooks and shared platforms.**
- 5. Embed local and community engagement in governance so events reflect and benefit their host places.**

Taken together, these actions provide a practical roadmap to ensure that major events promote, connect and enable. They will weave a golden thread through the moment of celebration and into the legacy that follows, sustaining economic value, cultural vitality and community pride across all four nations.

Methodology

This report builds on the foundations laid out in the 2024, ***Creating the golden thread: An ambition for major events in the UK*** report and develops its recommendations through further consultation and evidence gathering.

Between September 2024 and May 2025, Warwick Business School and Spirit of 2012 convened a series of roundtable consultation events across all four home nations with event organisers, funders, local authorities, devolved administrations and community representatives. A list of roundtables and organisations represented are included in Appendix 1 at the end of this report. These discussions were complemented by a further desk review of published evaluations, economic impact studies and international case studies of best practice.

The process concluded with the convening of a Major Events Summit in Liverpool in May 2025, which brought together over 70 key representatives from across sport, culture and business events. The Summit was convened by Claire McColgan CBE and Dave Moutrey OBE, as leaders in place-based major events in the Liverpool and Manchester alongside the respective wider regions. The Summit's objectives and programme are included in Appendix 2.

The findings presented here reflect the shared insights and priorities of this broad coalition. While not every perspective could be included in full, the recommendations are evidence-based, shaped by practical experience, and designed to be relevant across the diverse contexts of the UK.



Major Events Summit, Liverpool, May 2025,
Image Credit: ©Culture Liverpool, Photographer Corbyn McCallum

Major events in the UK

Major events are a defining feature of the United Kingdom's sporting, cultural, and civic landscape. From the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games to the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, from Derry/Londonderry, Hull and Coventry's UK City of Culture titles to Eurovision Liverpool 2023, the UK has demonstrated time and again its ability to host complex, high-profile events that capture global attention while engaging communities across the host location. These moments are more than showcases of performance and creativity: they are catalysts for regeneration, tourism, skills development, civic pride, and international reputation.

The scale of public investment into major events is significant. In 2022, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) reported to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee that they were spending in the region of £1 billion on major events in that year alone.

Based on published evaluations and impact assessments, those events generated at least £4.5 billion in direct economic impact for the UK economy (at a lower estimate), alongside a minimum of £128 million in monetised social value benefits. These figures represent a compelling return on investment and underline the ability of major events to deliver economic, social, and cultural dividends for host locations and the wider UK economy.

Yet the same Select Committee inquiry identified a major weakness: the absence of a coherent national vision or ambition. While individual events may be successful, the UK lacks an overarching ambition or framework that connects them, maximises their collective impact, and embeds long-term legacies. Without such a framework, opportunities are too often missed. Knowledge remains siloed between events and nations, funding is not aligned with the full event lifecycle, and communities may feel that events are 'done to' them rather than 'created with' them.

At the heart of the UK major events sector are three pillars: sport, culture, and business events. Business events, including conferences, trade shows, and exhibitions, are vital drivers of growth and innovation, contributing in 2024 an estimated £19.3 billion worth of expenditure into the UK economy.¹ Cultural events such as festivals, arts programmes, and national celebrations enrich the creative economy while fostering inclusion, identity, and pride of place. The economic power of these events is not to be taken lightly, Taylor Swift's 2024 Eras Tour, with just 15 UK dates across all four home nations, is estimated to have generated around £1 billion in additional spending into the economy, the majority of which making a positive boost to the hospitality sector.²

Sporting events remain the most visible and globally recognised component, stimulating visitor spending, inspiring participation, and showcasing the UK as a world-class sporting nation. In 2023, the direct economic impact of events supported by UK Sport alone was £373 million.³

Behind these headline pillars lies a complex ecosystem of planning, venues, hospitality, logistics, security, and technology, supported by professional associations that uphold standards and represent industry interests. Recovery from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic is still being felt five years on. The pandemic disrupted the events ecosystem, reducing employment and accelerating a shift towards freelance work, and many organisations are still rebuilding capacity.

Yet recovery is under way, supported by renewed demand for live experiences. With sustainability now central to delivery and global competition intensifying, the UK is at an important junction where it must sharpen its strategic vision to maintain leadership and recognition as a world-class deliverer of major events and ensure that sport, culture, and business events continue to act as powerful drivers of economic growth, cultural vibrancy, and social value.

¹ See – UK Conference and Meeting Survey 2024, available at: <https://www.ukcams.org.uk/news%20about%20ukcams.html>

² UK Sport (2024) *The Value of Events 2023*, Available at: <https://home.barclays/news/press-releases/2024/05/it-s-a--love-story---taylor-swift-s-eras-tour-to-provide-nearly-/>

³ See – UK Sport *Value of Events 2023*, available at: <https://www.uksport.gov.uk/-/media/files/events/uk-sport-value-of-events-2023-report-march2024.ashx>



National Paralympic Day 2014, London, Image Credit: Spirit of 2012

Challenges to the major events sector

Following the roundtables across the home nations, held since the publication of **Creating the golden thread: An ambition for major events in the UK**, and the Major Events Summit in Liverpool held in May 2025, a set of common challenges emerged across stakeholders.

Despite the many successes of recent years, stakeholders consistently raised structural challenges that limit the sector’s ability to achieve its full potential. The following issues were identified across all parts of the UK and across the diverse portfolio of event types, reflecting common shared pressures that must be addressed if the UK is to strengthen its soft power and remain globally competitive when it comes to hosting and delivering major events.

Fragmented Policy

The first and most significant challenge is the lack of a coherent national ambition or framework for major events which covers the entirety of the UK.

Scotland and Wales each have a national events strategy, but stakeholders described them as ‘sports heavy’ with cultural and business events ‘recognised but not prioritised’. Sport benefits from the Gold Framework, which provides clear strategic direction and coordination across the UK; there is no equivalent framework for cultural or business events, leaving them comparatively underdeveloped and lacking a unified national approach. In addition, Northern Ireland has a comprehensive strategy for attracting business events and improving the economy of Northern Ireland.

England has no equivalent overarching framework, resulting in fragmented and unstructured engagement with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and other bodies.

This fragmentation undermines the UK’s ability to present a coherent offer in international bidding, restricts knowledge-sharing on infrastructure and risk management, and creates inconsistent support across event types.

Stakeholders in the major events sector describe the impact as significant: the UK struggles to compete internationally, while countries like Australia can align sport, culture, tourism, and trade into bidding for major events through having strategic national ambitions for different event typologies which is then shaped by local strategies.⁴ In contrast, bids from the UK, often appear fragmented, with competing messages from different agencies or even competing bids from other places in the UK. This lack of coordination also prevents successful practices in one nation from being shared or scaled across others.

For stakeholders, the absence of a UK-wide ambition is not a call for centralisation but for coherence. They emphasise the need for existing strategies across the home nations and regions, each reflecting local priorities, but acknowledge that there would be benefits if these individual well-placed strategies align and contribute to a shared national ambition. This would allow the UK to speak with one voice when competing on the global stage.

⁴ For example, Australia’s national ambition for sporting events – <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sport/major-sporting-events> and local implementation through strategy – <https://www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/council/planning-and-projects/council-strategies/sunshine-coast-major-and-regional-events-strategy> <https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/events/gme/documents/item/8d588c766fcc167.aspx> and <https://teq.queensland.com/content/dam/teq/corporate/corporate-searchable-assets/industry/strategies/industry-strategic-plans/TEQ-Events-Strategy-2025.pdf> as examples [accessed 10 September 2025].

Misaligned funding cycles

Typically, major events unfold across five phases: bidding, build up, delivery, post-event, and legacy.⁵

Each stage requires different resources, yet throughout all of our consultations it was found that current funding models fail to reflect these realities.

Across the five phases, here are the key challenges identified:

Bidding: Preparing a credible bid is expensive and risky. Feasibility studies, technical assessments, and international presentations can cost millions, but there is little or no funding available. Local authorities and organisers shoulder these risks, despite often lacking capacity.

Build up phase: Once an event is secured, investment is needed to train volunteers, develop infrastructure, and embed accessibility and inclusion. But funding is frequently piecemeal, tied to narrow deliverables, and insufficient for deeper engagement.

Delivery phase: The focus on “getting the show on the road” often leaves gaps in critical areas such as community programming or volunteer support. Inflexible grant structures make it difficult to adapt.

Post-event phase: This is when public enthusiasm is highest, yet funding is minimal. Opportunities to consolidate participation, strengthen partnerships, or scale community projects are lost.

Legacy phase: Perhaps the most important phase for long-term perception, legacy requires sustained follow-up. Yet funding almost always disappears once the event closes.

As an example, a difference-in-difference (DiD) study of public funding for arts and culture in UK City of Culture host and shortlisted cities found that host cities typically experience a substantial increase in funding before and during their title year, followed by a marked decline in subsequent years, leaving funding levels lower than before the designation even after adjusting for inflation. In the case of Hull in 2017, funding rose sharply ahead of and during the year, but the DiD analysis quantified Hull’s relative post-title reduction in public funding for arts and culture by 2020 at -£3.27 million compared with the control group, placing it well below its pre-title baseline.

Funders themselves acknowledge that ‘current timescales and reporting structures make it difficult to accommodate the long lead times and post-event momentum of major events’. It was also recognised that once an event had concluded, funding priorities had shifted towards the next event, causing legacy funding to be minimal or non-existent. Funders also identified that places which had a stronger infrastructure to host events and maintain participation (either sporting or cultural) also performed better in gaining legacy funding rather than places with a weaker infrastructure. As a consequence, this creates a cycle of short-termism that undermines long-term impact and legacy.



Hull UK City of Culture 2017 Volunteer Programme.
Image Credit: Hey Volunteering/Absolutely Cultured

⁵ See page 15 of [Creating the golden thread: An ambition for major events in the UK](#) for further details.



UCI Cycling World Championships 2023, Womens Elite Road Race, Glasgow,
Image Credit: Alex Whitehead/SWPix.com

Inconsistent evaluation

Robust evaluation is essential to demonstrate value for money and to learn lessons for the future. Yet evaluation practices across the spectrum of major events and across the UK are inconsistent.

Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have embraced the eventIMPACTS toolkit,⁶ providing consistency across sport, culture, and business. This has recently been enhanced with environmental indicators, reflecting growing priorities within the home nations and work is ongoing on strengthening the link between events and wellbeing outcomes.⁷ However, stakeholders reported that the DCMS has underutilised this tool, preferring bespoke approaches for each event. The result is a fragmented landscape where data cannot be easily compared or aggregated to demonstrate the total value of events.

Stakeholders emphasise that without a shared framework, insights are lost. One event may measure audience reach, another may prioritise economic impact, and another may focus on volunteering — with little alignment between them. This makes it impossible to build a long-term evidence base.

The absence of consistency also weakens advocacy. HM Treasury and other central departments require clear, comparable evidence of value. Without it, the sector struggles to demonstrate its impact relative to other areas of public spending.

Fragile governance

Governance models for major events are often temporary and fragile. While efficient in some respects, current practice often relies on time-limited organising committees or delivery bodies that disband post-event.

Funding is often directed to the temporary delivery body established for a specific event, meaning that the funder’s relationship is primarily with that body rather than with the organisations that make up the local place-partnership. When the temporary body disbands after the event, this disconnect can make legacy funding more difficult, as funders may be asked to support organisations with which they have no established relationship.

Representatives from local authorities have noted that in some cases these temporary organisations are not efficient, as their transient nature disrupts existing and established place partnerships and limits the ability to build sustained collaboration. This stop-start model can leave gaps in knowledge transfer, weaken community trust, and undermine the continuity needed to deliver long-term benefits into a legacy period.

When bidding for certain events, in some cases, local authorities are placed in competition with one another for hosting rights, which can drive up costs and reduce opportunities for collaboration.

⁶ See – <https://www.eventimpacts.com/the-project/the-eventimpacts-toolkit>

⁷ As an example, the Welsh Government’s *National Events Strategy for Wales 2022 to 2030*, places an explicit requirement that events represent Welsh culture and language as well as clearly contributing to the achievement of as many of the seven wellbeing goals for Wales – <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-07/the-national-events-strategy-for-wales-2022-to-2030.pdf>



Hay Festival 2023, Hay-on-Wye, Image Credit: Sam Hardwick

Workforce and infrastructure pressures

The COVID-19 pandemic and wider financial challenges within local government funding have accelerated workforce challenges across the major events sector. Many experienced staff left for more stable or better-paid roles in adjacent industries. Local authority teams responsible for licensing and safety have been reduced due to budget cuts. Volunteers, once the lifeblood of events, are harder to recruit and retain.

Infrastructure pressures further compound the problem. The UK boasts world-class stadia and arenas in some locations, but provision is uneven. Rural areas and smaller towns often lack venues, accommodation, or transport connectivity. The Hay Festival, for example, which generates roughly £25 million annually to the local and wider UK economy has no immediate rail infrastructure geographically adjacent to event sites, restricting accessibility and growth (Hay on Wye has a population of 1,600 and is 25 miles). Alongside this, public transport is poor and broadband and mobile coverage provision does not compare with more urban and metropolitan centres.⁸

These pressures can also intersect with broader tensions between national and local priorities. National branding and tourism goals can in some cases overshadow local narratives, leading communities to feel that events are being ‘done to’ them rather than ‘created with’ them. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport’s recent announcement of a UK Town of Culture competition, to sit alongside the already established UK City of Culture programme, is welcome as it will celebrate local stories and the individuality of place.

⁸ See – <https://hwchamber.co.uk/research-reveals-70m-boost-for-area-from-hay-festival-visitors/>

Opportunities

Despite these challenges, stakeholders consistently emphasised that the sector is full of opportunity. With strategic reform, the UK can strengthen its international competitiveness and deliver deeper, more lasting benefits at home.

A UK-wide major events ambition

The most widely supported opportunity across stakeholders is the creation of a UK-wide ambition or framework for major events. This would not replace devolved strategies but would provide a unifying narrative that integrates sport, culture, and business events.

Such a framework would:

- Present a coherent national offer in international bidding.
- Align tourism, regeneration, skills, and trade agendas.
- Ensure more efficient use of infrastructure across sectors.
- Provide clarity and consistency for organisers and funders.
- Embed social, cultural, economic, and environmental goals from the outset.

Any UK-wide ambition should build on the proven strengths of Scotland and Wales’ national event strategies, as well as Northern Ireland’s strategy for tourism and business events.

Stakeholders consistently stressed that the absence of such an ambition is a missed opportunity. The UK has the raw ingredients, creativity, experience, infrastructure, and reputation, but lacks coherence.

A single framework would integrate sport, culture, and business events on equal terms, enabling more efficient use of infrastructure, encouraging cross-sector models, and aligning national branding with tourism promotion, skills development, and place-based regeneration. It would also provide a clear structure for bid coordination, funding, and evaluation — replacing today’s fragmented, personality-led approach with a transparent, outcome-driven system that allows major events to demonstrate their wider value. By embedding shared social, economic, and environmental objectives from the outset, a UK-wide strategy could raise delivery standards, strengthen the competitiveness of bids, and maximise the long-term benefits of hosting across all nations and regions.

Cross-sector event models

Integrating sport, culture, and business events offers enormous potential. International examples illustrate how blending sectors can broaden audiences, diversify funding, and extend impact.

Montpellier’s FISE Festival of Extreme Sports combines elite competitions with music, art, and community activities.⁹ The result is a festival that appeals across demographics, attracting diverse sponsorship.

Within the UK context, Eurovision 2023 in Liverpool paired the contest with a city-wide cultural festival beyond what normally takes place for Eurovision. This integration maximised reach and left a legacy of cultural participation in groups who would not have normally participated or engaged and has raised the standard for future host cities.¹⁰

Strengthened cross-sector integration in the UK, for example, could see major sporting championships paired with industry conferences, creative sector showcases or city-wide cultural festivals, which in turn would maximise the use of infrastructure, reduce delivery costs through shared resources, and extend the duration and scope of visitor engagement.

A pilot urban sport event which covers sport, culture and business is currently in development in Manchester with funding support from UK Sport and Arts Council England.

Maximising evaluation

Stakeholders across the events sector emphasised the urgent need for a consistent national framework for evaluating major events.

At present, evaluation practices are fragmented, varying not only between sport, culture and business events but also between nations and regions. While sport benefits from the partial consistency provided by the Active Lives survey, even sporting events apply different metrics, and there is no equivalent framework for cultural or business events.

A common outcomes framework, agreed at the UK level and covering economic, social, cultural and environmental indicators (as well as those related to the stability of the events sector), would enable meaningful comparison, aggregation of data, and stronger arguments based on demonstrated value to HM Treasury for future investment.

It would also ensure that local tailoring of evaluation remains possible, while still contributing to a coherent national evidence set capable of demonstrating value for money and long-term impact.

⁹ See – <https://www.montpellier-france.com/discover/festive/not-to-miss-events/fise-international-festival-of-extreme-sports/>

¹⁰ See – <https://cultureliverpool.co.uk/liverpool-calling-the-results-are-in/>



Eurovision Song Contest 2023, Image Credit: Chloe Hashemi/EBU

A strong endorsement from stakeholders at the Major Events Summit was for the events sector to continue to meet on a regular basis to share best practice and build on these collaborations through similar events to the Summit.

Delivery playbooks

Outside the sporting sector, there is no equivalent to the structured delivery playbooks used by major events such as the Olympic Games,¹¹ Commonwealth Games and other sporting events, which provide step-by-step guidance on planning, operations, stakeholder coordination, risk management and post-event legacy planning.

Cultural and business events are often delivered using bespoke approaches that rely heavily on the experience of individuals, meaning that successful methods are not systematically captured or transferred between hosts. As one stakeholder observed, ‘cultural events, in particular, lack the delivery discipline that sport has built into its playbooks’.

Developing tailored delivery frameworks for culture and business events, incorporating proven operational models, procurement guidance, volunteer management strategies, accessibility standards and community engagement approaches, would reduce duplication of effort, improve consistency in quality, and support less experienced hosts.

The recently formed UK Events Limited may help address this gap by supporting bids, safeguarding expertise, and promoting consistent delivery across events.

Community governance

Stakeholders repeatedly stressed that major events must be shaped around the needs and priorities of the host place if they are to achieve meaningful and lasting legacies. Without structured community involvement, events risk being ‘done to’ rather than ‘created with’ local people, which can undermine engagement and trust. One contributor to the Major Events Summit described the challenge and tension as ensuring ‘delivery must be aligned to the needs of the place, not just the needs of the funder or the rights-holder’.

Creating formal mechanisms for community governance, such as local advisory boards, co-creation panels, or partnership agreements with community organisations, would ensure that decision-making is informed by local perspectives from the outset. This would help embed local narratives, build community ownership, and increase the likelihood that legacies in areas such as participation, volunteering, and skills are sustained beyond the life of the event. Further research into community governance in events is encouraged to deepen understanding of this opportunity.

Need for greater collaboration

The UK major events sector contains proven examples of deep and effective collaboration, but these remain situational or place-based and are rarely embedded into long-term, repeatable structures. Stakeholders repeatedly stressed that where collaboration is deliberate, structured, and inclusive from the outset, the benefits are tangible across delivery efficiency, audience engagement, and legacy outcomes.

An example of good collaboration in the major events sector is the 2023 Eurovision Song Contest hosted in Liverpool, where, following the decision that the UK would host on behalf of Ukraine, timelines were compressed and reputational stakes were high. This urgency forced early and sustained alignment between DCMS, Liverpool City Council, the BBC, cultural institutions, the hospitality and tourism sector, and the events supply chain within the Liverpool City Region. Unlike many large-scale events where additional programming is treated as an adjunct, here it was integrated as a core element from the outset, with significant investment in a city-wide cultural festival running in parallel with the main contest. Community engagement was not a late addition; schools, local creatives, and community groups were woven into the narrative, ensuring that the event resonated locally as much as it did internationally.

¹¹ See – <https://gamesdeliveryplaybook.olympics.com/>

Stakeholders noted that ‘when everyone is in the room from the start, decisions get made faster and with better buy-in’. Post-event evaluation found that the economic benefit to the Liverpool City Region from hosting Eurovision 2023 was £54.8 million (net), benefiting restaurants, hotels, shops, bars, local attractions and the wider hospitality sector.¹²

A second strong example emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic response in Wales, where the existential threat to the events sector necessitated new forms of cooperation and the need to work together for the greater good. Event Wales convened a regular cross-sector recovery network, bringing together organisations from sport, culture, and business events that had historically competed for audiences, sponsors, and government funding. The focus was on collective survival, sharing health and safety protocols, aligning reopening strategies, pooling volunteer resources, and coordinating lobbying efforts to secure targeted support from the Welsh Government. Importantly, these relationships have persisted beyond the pandemic, evolving into an ongoing culture of shared problem-solving and peer learning.

Despite these successes, the overall pattern in the major events sector remains one of ad hoc cooperation, often dependent on the presence of an unusually high-profile event, an external crisis, or strong individual relationships. There is no consistent framework across the UK to formalise collaboration between home nations, between event types, or between different tiers of government and industry. This lack of structure means that valuable knowledge is often siloed, procurement opportunities are missed, and smaller or less experienced hosts cannot easily access the expertise needed to compete for or deliver events at scale. Often the knowledge exchange between events is provided through the good will of those who have worked on similar events.

Through the hosting of roundtables, several practical suggestions from stakeholders emerged which can be factored into the sections above:

- **Potential expansion of UK Sport’s Host City Network to encompass cultural and business events, creating a UK-wide knowledge-sharing platform. This would enable cities and regions to exchange intelligence on bidding, delivery, and legacy planning regardless of event type.**
- **Formal cross-nation and cross-sector forums convened on a regular basis, in order to consolidate and advance a UK-wide ambition, where devolved bodies (e.g., EventScotland, Event Wales) and English city-region authorities share lessons learned, explore joint bids, and identify opportunities for coordinated marketing or programming.**
- **Standing collaboration agreements for shared procurement, allowing organisers to jointly contract for staging, audio visual services, security, and logistics, achieving economies of scale and negotiating better terms with suppliers. This is particularly prevalent regarding security due to the introduction of the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, more commonly known as Martyn’s Law.**
- **Pooled bid support and feasibility resources within devolved nations, city regions and mayoral combined authorities to level the playing field for smaller cities or rural areas that lack in-house capacity, including access to market analysis, technical expertise, and international bid presentation skills.**
- **Centralised evaluation expertise to apply consistent methodologies across events of all sizes and sectors, enabling meaningful comparison, aggregation of data, and stronger advocacy to government and funders.**

Stakeholders agreed that embedding these structures would strengthen the UK’s competitive position internationally, reduce duplication of effort, and support a more equitable distribution of hosting opportunities around the UK. Without such measures, collaboration will remain personality-driven and rooted in place with stronger event ecosystems in place.

The recent creation of UK Events Limited (UKEL) in September 2025 and its joint venture with British Cycling to deliver the Grand Départ 2027 provides a strong example of how structured, cross-nation collaboration can be embedded from the outset, aligning national and devolved governments with governing bodies and event delivery expertise to safeguard long-term capacity and legacy for major sporting events in the UK.¹³ UKEL has been established to safeguard and enhance the UK’s ability to secure and deliver global events, acting with agility and flexibility to better meet the changing needs of the international sports event market.

¹² See – <https://cultureliverpool.co.uk/liverpool-calling-the-results-are-in/>
¹³ See – <https://www.uksport.gov.uk/news/2025/09/24/new-era-for-major-events-in-the-uk-as-team-appointed-to-deliver-tdf-2027>

The role of government and regulation

During the series of roundtables, major event organisers explained that they routinely engage with a wide range of government departments and agencies, depending on the scale and nature of the event

At UK level, the DCMS serves as the primary policy and funding interface, while the Home Office leads on policing, counterterrorism, and security planning. The Department for Transport (DfT) is critical for securing additional rail and road capacity, adjusting timetables, and planning for large-scale crowd movement. HM Treasury engagement is often required for major investment cases, while the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) become involved when events serve diplomatic, trade, or soft power objectives.

Despite this breadth of engagement, stakeholders consistently reported that responsibilities are fragmented and too often pursued in silos, with ‘departments not talking to one another’. This lack of coordination leads to competing priorities, inconsistent communication, and delays in decision-making. Organisers frequently find themselves acting as the conduit between central government departments, local authorities, and delivery partners, filling gaps in coordination that should be led by government. This not only creates inefficiencies but also places additional administrative and financial burdens on organisers, who must manage multiple government stakeholders in order to deliver a coherent plan.



Edinburgh Fringe 2022,
Image Credit: Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society

The relationship between central and local government has occasionally proven challenging. Local authorities hold responsibility for licensing, planning, highways, and public safety, yet they are often brought into the process late, often after key decisions have already been taken at national level. This limits opportunities to align events with local economic strategies, infrastructure planning, and community priorities. As one local authority representative expressed, ‘we are left trying to retrofit national ambitions and decisions onto the local realities of place’. Organisers are often caught in the middle, balancing national branding and policy objectives on one side, and local capacity constraints and community needs on the other.

Security is a further area of growing concern. Rising costs for policing, compliance with Martyn’s Law (Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025), and other protective measures are stretching both local authority and organiser budgets. Stakeholders noted that there is currently no single point of government leadership on security, forcing organisers to negotiate separately with the Home Office, local police forces, and licensing authorities. This fragmented approach increases costs, creates uncertainty, and exposes gaps in accountability at a time when public expectations of security are rising.

Opportunities for better collaboration

While the sector recognises examples of strong collaboration between organisers and government, these are often episodic rather than embedded in long-term structures. Organisers and local authority representatives stressed the importance of early engagement during the bidding process to ensure alignment with infrastructure, economic strategies, and community priorities. Too often, however, national agencies or rights-holders approach local authorities late in the process, leaving limited scope to shape the event around local needs. Competition between local authorities for hosting rights was also cited as a barrier. This rivalry drives up costs and leads to duplication of effort.

As one local authority participant observed, ‘we are sometimes bidding against our neighbours for events that could be stronger if we bid together’.

Stakeholders also pointed to gaps in coordination between national and local levels on key operational areas such as transport planning, security arrangements, and community engagement. National branding and tourism objectives, while valuable for profile and inward investment, were reported to sometimes overshadow local narratives.

Lessons from other models

Stakeholders consistently identified Scotland and Wales as offering more coherent and joined-up approaches to major events, supported by dedicated agencies — EventScotland and Event Wales — operating under clear national strategies. These agencies act as single points of contact for organisers, align funding streams with long-term development objectives, and provide structured support for feasibility studies, bid development, marketing, and evaluation.

Internationally, models such as New Zealand Major Events and Victoria’s Major Events Strategy (Visit Victoria) were highlighted for their streamlined approvals processes, integrated tourism promotion, and proactive bid development. These units operate with clear mandates, multi-year planning horizons, and the ability to invest strategically in events that align with national priorities. Stakeholders noted that such models reduce delivery risk, speed up decision-making, and improve the ability to compete internationally. Many suggested that England should establish an equivalent body, integrated into a UK-wide ambition, to overcome the current fragmented approach and ensure equitable support across all nations and regions.

Alongside these international examples, stakeholders also recognised the strength of individual teams within DCMS. Officials have developed considerable expertise through delivering major events in recent years, with skills and institutional knowledge continuing to grow.

DCMS has demonstrated positive examples of learning, collaboration, and knowledge exchange, which provide a strong foundation to build on when considering future models.



Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 Bridge of Brides.
Image Credit: Belfast Evening Telegraph



London 2012, Olympic Marathon, Image Credit: International Olympic Committee

Regulation

Recent and forthcoming legislation will have a significant impact on the delivery of major events in the UK, both in terms of compliance requirements and the financial sustainability of the sector. The most frequently cited concern throughout our work is the introduction of Martyn’s Law (Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025). Organisers recognise the importance of strengthening public safety but are clear that compliance will materially increase costs. Additional specialist staff time, new training requirements, enhanced crowd management procedures and more detailed documentation for licensing will all be necessary. Stakeholders stressed that while large-scale events may be able to absorb some of these costs, smaller and voluntary-led events, as well as local authority teams that have already seen capacity reduced, will face particular strain. Rising security costs were described as ‘a bigger issue every year’, with organisers often required to negotiate separately with the Home Office, police, and local licensing authorities rather than through a coordinated system.

Changes to accommodation and visitor taxation (tourist tax) are also expected to shape the environment in which events operate. In Scotland and Wales, new regulation of short-term lets and the introduction of tourism levies are already beginning to affect accommodation supply and affordability during peak event periods. While stakeholders acknowledged that such measures may generate useful reinvestment for destinations, the immediate impact is to reduce affordable capacity close to venues and force visitors to travel further afield, often into areas with already limited public transport.

Participants at roundtables also raised concerns about evolving restrictions on advertising and sponsorship, such as proposed revisions around alcohol sponsorship in Scotland. A lack of policy coherence and clarity around the timing and scope of such measures creates uncertainty for organisers, particularly where alcohol-sector sponsors have historically underpinned both sport and cultural programming. The risk identified is that restrictions, if introduced without transition periods, could narrow the pool of viable sponsors and increase reliance on public subsidy for major events.

In addition, there is an increasing policy and funder emphasis on environmental reporting and sustainability. While not yet driven by a single statute, devolved governments and agencies are moving toward requiring environmental indicators in evaluation, building on the existing eventIMPACTS toolkit. Organisers welcomed this direction of travel but stressed that without harmonisation across the UK, requirements risk adding administrative burden without producing comparable evidence.

Recommendations

This report follows and builds on the recommendations first published in June 2024 in the **Creating the golden thread: An ambition for major events in the UK**, which set out proposals for strengthening the UK’s approach to major events. .

That report argued that while the UK has an enviable reputation for delivering successful events, the absence of a unifying national ambition or framework risks diluting their long-term value.

Since then, through extensive consultation with event organisers, funders, local authorities and devolved administrations, culminating in the Major Events Summit in May 2025, those initial recommendations have been refined and strengthened.

The following revised recommendations are evidence-based, actionable, and designed to ensure that the UK can maximise the collective impact of future major events across all devolved areas.



Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod,
Image Credit: Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod

Recommendation 1:

Develop a UK-wide major events ambition

DCMS should convene a **cross-government working group** to lead this process, in **equal partnership with the devolved administrations**.

As an overarching vision for major events across the country remains lacking (as previously highlighted in the 2022 Select Committee inquiry), the UK needs a coherent, long-term national ambition that brings together sport, culture, and business events within one coordinated ambition.

While Scotland and Wales have national event strategies, stakeholders described them as ‘sports heavy’, and England currently has no equivalent strategy. This fragmented landscape weakens the UK’s ability to present a unified offer in international bidding, limits knowledge-sharing, and produces uneven support for different event types.

A UK-wide ambition would allow the UK to capitalise and maximise the regenerative, tourism, and skills benefits of major events, embedding shared social, cultural, economic, and environmental goals from the outset while recognising the strength of nations and places through their own strategies.

Recommendation 2:

Establish a common national outcomes and evaluation framework

DCMS should **mandate a common evaluation framework** for all **publicly funded events**, with **methodological guides** and a **shared outcome bank**.

Funders should **align reporting requirements** with this framework to **reduce duplication**.

Evaluation practice for major events remains inconsistent, with different sectors and nations applying varying measures that make comparison and knowledge transfer difficult. Even within sport, methods vary, although the Active Lives survey provides partial consistency. A UK-wide outcomes framework covering economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions would allow meaningful comparison and aggregation of data, strengthen the case for value for money with HM Treasury, and enable better demonstration of benefits to communities.

Recommendation 3:

Align funding models with the full event lifecycle

DCMS and **HM Treasury** should **adapt Green Book and business case guidance** to require **lifecycle funding** and **legacy planning**.

Lottery distributors, arms-length bodies, and funding bodies should **co-design grant models that secure delivery** as well as **legacy**.

Local authorities should be enabled to **align bids with place-based development strategies**.

Current funding structures are misaligned with the realities of the event lifecycle. Costs in the bid phase are often borne entirely by local authorities or host organisations, despite this being the riskiest stage.

The build-up and delivery phases require sustained investment in capacity, volunteers, and accessibility, yet funding is piecemeal and inflexible. Post-event and legacy phases, critical windows for consolidating momentum, are chronically underfunded.

Lifecycle funding should ensure that legacy planning is embedded from the outset, with delivery partners accountable for long-term outcomes.

Recommendation 4:

Strengthen collaboration, governance structures, and delivery frameworks

DCMS, in joint leadership with **UK Sport**, should **expand the Host City Network to encompass culture and business events**.

National forums convened by **DCMS** should **bring together devolved agencies, local authorities, and combined authorities**.

Regional event consortia should be supported to ensure **knowledge and resources are shared locally**.

While examples such as Eurovision 2023 in Liverpool and the Welsh cross-sector COVID-19 recovery network demonstrate what is possible, these remain exceptions. Stakeholders stressed that ‘when everyone is in the room from the start, decisions get made faster and with better buy-in’. Expanding UK Sport’s Host City Network to include cultural and business events, alongside standing collaboration mechanisms such as joint procurement and pooled feasibility resources, would reduce duplication, share expertise, and ensure equitable access for less-resourced places. The establishment of UKEL to deliver the Grand Départ 2027 illustrates how a permanent collaborative structure can align governments, governing bodies, and delivery expertise from the outset and is an encouraging step forward.

In parallel, the sector would benefit from the introduction of structured delivery playbooks. Developing tailored playbooks covering planning, operations, stakeholder coordination, procurement, volunteer management, accessibility, and community engagement would capture proven methods,

Recommendation 5:

Embed local and community engagement in governance

Local and combined authorities should lead on **embedding participatory governance**, supported by **event organisers and community partners**.

Funders should ensure evidence of **community engagement** is a requirement of applications for **public investment**.

Devolved administrations should **share best practice in community governance**, and **ensure lessons are cascaded across the UK**.

reduce duplication, and support less experienced hosts. This would complement stronger governance structures by embedding continuity and consistency in delivery, improving quality, and strengthening legacy outcomes. Events must be created with communities if they are to leave lasting legacies and foster stronger, more connected societies. Without structured mechanisms for co-creation, events risk being perceived as externally imposed, failing to deliver meaningful social impact, and missing opportunities to build cohesion between different groups. Community advisory boards, co-design panels, and participatory governance structures should be embedded in event planning to reflect the diversity of local voices and ensure delivery is aligned to local needs and priorities. This approach would build trust, strengthen civic pride, deepen social cohesion across communities, and maximise volunteer and participation legacies.



Black Dyke Band at the Big Brass Blowout, Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture.
Image Credit: Black Dyke Band/BBC Radio 2

Conclusion

The UK’s reputation as a world-class host for major events is well earned. From the unforgettable success of London 2012 to the vibrancy of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and Eurovision Liverpool 2023, the UK has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity to deliver complex, high-profile events that inspire audiences and attract global attention..

These events are catalysts for economic growth, cultural vibrancy, and civic pride, with benefits felt well beyond the moment of celebration. Yet reputation alone will not guarantee future success. International competitors are becoming more strategic, coherent, and ambitious in their approach. Without strategic reform, the UK risks missing opportunities for growth, influence, and community benefit.

This report has highlighted the strengths of the UK’s events sector but also the persistent challenges: fragmented policy, misaligned funding cycles, inconsistent evaluation, fragile governance, and mounting workforce and infrastructure pressures. These issues limit the sector’s ability to realise its full potential and weaken the UK’s position in an increasingly competitive international marketplace.

At the same time, the opportunities are clear. A UK-wide ambition for major events would allow the country to speak with one voice on the global stage while recognising the strengths of each nation and region which are already exemplified through their specific strategies. A consistent outcomes and evaluation framework would provide robust evidence of value for money, enabling government and funders to invest with confidence.

Lifecycle funding would align investment with the realities of bidding, delivery, and legacy, ensuring momentum is not lost once the event ends. Stronger governance and collaboration frameworks, supported by delivery playbooks, would reduce duplication and embed continuity, while community governance would ensure events are ‘created with’ people, not ‘done to’ them, building trust and lasting social impact.

The recommendations outlined here provide a practical roadmap:

- a UK-wide ambition for major events;
- consistent national evaluation;
- lifecycle funding aligned to legacy;
- stronger collaboration and delivery frameworks, and
- embedded community governance.

Taken together, these measures would ensure that major events promote, connect, and enable — acting as a golden thread running not only through the excitement of the event itself but also through its legacy.

With positive changes, the UK can maintain its global leadership, maximise economic and social returns, and ensure that every community benefits from the power of sport, culture, and business events.

Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, London, Image Credit: Wiktor Szymanowicz/Nur Photo



Appendix 1

List of roundtables and represented organisations

NORTHERN IRELAND ROUNDTABLE

September 2024

- Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council
- Arts Council of Northern Ireland
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland Executive
- Disability Sport NI
- Executive Office, Northern Ireland Executive
- National Lottery Heritage Fund – Northern Ireland
- National Museums NI
- Northern Ireland Local Government Association
- Sport NI
- Springboard Opportunities
- Tourism Northern Ireland
- Volunteering Now

WALES ROUNDTABLE

November 2024

- Counsel Ltd
- Disability Sport Wales
- Event Wales, *part of the Welsh Government*
- Hay Festival
- International Convention Centre Wales
- Run4wales
- Sport Diplomacy Alliance
- Sport Wales
- Welsh Sports Association
- Urdd Gobaith Cymru

SCOTLAND ROUNDTABLE

- Edinburgh International Festival
- EventScotland
- Glasgow Life
- Inspiring Scotland
- Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo
- Scottish Football Association
- Scottish Government
- sportscotland
- University of the West of Scotland
- Volunteer Scotland

ENGLAND ROUNDTABLE – FUNDING BODIES

March 2025

- Arts Council England
- British Council
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Spirit of 2012
- UK Sport

Appendix 2

Major Events Summit Objectives

The Major Events Summit 2025 brought together leaders and stakeholders from across the UK to shape a unified, outcomes-driven ambition for major events. Building on research from Spirit of 2012 and Warwick Business School's Creating the Golden Thread report, the Summit was a response to the 2022 Select Committee Inquiry's call for a more coherent national strategy to maximise the social, cultural, and economic impacts of major events.

With Scotland and Wales already operating national event strategies, and growing interest across English regions and Northern Ireland, the Summit provided a vital forum for collaboration across devolved governments, local authorities, event organisers, funders, and policy makers. Through panels, roundtables, and keynote sessions, the Summit explored how major events can:

- **Deliver collective benefits including civic pride, social cohesion, economic regeneration, and global soft power.**
- **Align national and regional strategies under a shared “golden thread” of common outcomes — economic value, sector stability, health and wellbeing, social and cultural value, and environmental sustainability.**
- **Strengthen governance, evaluation, and learning across the UK’s diverse events ecosystem.**
- **Share best practice to ensure equitable access, inclusivity, and long-term legacy benefits for communities.**

The Summit’s goal was to advance practical, collaborative steps toward a UK-wide ambition for major events — one that promotes excellence, connects stakeholders, and enables transformational impacts across the four nations.



Major Events Summit, Liverpool, May 2025,
Image Credit: ©Culture Liverpool, Photographer Corbyn McCallum

Appendix 2

Major Events Summit Programme

09.15 – 10.00	Registration and refreshments	11.45 – 12.30	How Can Events Showcase and Strengthen Local Identities? Chair: Helen Palmer, Palmer Squared Events of all kind and scale bring people together to interact, celebrate and express their social and cultural identities and local pride. Across the UK, there is a rich tapestry of local events that make up the fabric of the cultural and sporting life of Great Britain and Northern Ireland year in, year out. This panel will consider how place-based events provide the opportunity to showcase their city/place, attract visitors and have the potential to make the local exportable. ▪ Sam Hunt (Cultural Consultant) ▪ Claire Whitaker CBE (Southampton Forward) ▪ Nicky Homes (The Great North Run)	14.15 – 14.30	Break
10.00 – 10.10	Welcome: Jane, Lady Gibson OBE (Spirit of 2012)	12.30 – 13.15	Lunch and Networking	12.30 – 13.15	Lunch and Networking
10.10 – 10.30	Keynote introduction: From Local Roots to Global Reach: Shaping the Future Through Events Phil Batty OBE (Glasgow 2026)	13.15 – 13.30	Keynote: Making Live Sport Matter How we can work together to protect and widen the provision of live sport and its societal benefits in the UK Esther Britten MBE (UK Sport)	14.30 – 15.10	How Do We Build a Common UK-Wide Ambition for Major Events? Chair: Ruth Hollis OBE, Spirit of 2012 Currently only Wales and Scotland have national major events strategies in place which identify the intended national outcomes, governance and delivery plan. The Creating the Golden Thread report suggested a UK-wide ambition for major events based on a common set of outcomes. Recently UK Events has proposed a vision for a UK-wide major event strategy. ▪ Rebecca Edser (EventScotland) ▪ Ian Williams (Event Wales) ▪ Glenn Bowdin (UK Events) ▪ Jonothan Neelands (University of Warwick)
10.30 – 11.15	How Can We Maximise Impact Through Combined Major Event Strategies? Chair: Claire McColgan CBE, Culture Liverpool An increasing number of cities and Mayoral Combined Authorities are developing their own major event strategies, including those that combine sports, culture and business events. Through strong multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral ecosystems, they deliver inclusive economic, social and cultural benefits. This panel will consider what makes for a successful combined major event strategy. ▪ Dave Moutrey OBE (Manchester City Council) ▪ Julie Pearson (Glasgow Life)	13.30 – 14.15	How Can We Harness the Soft Power of Major Events to Tell Our Stories Globally? There is an important mutual relationship between major events and Public Broadcasters, the British Council, the Department for Business and Trade and other national and UK stakeholders. This panel will consider how to maximise the soft power potential of major events and the partnerships needed to ensure major events receive global attention and interest. ▪ Rebecca Simor (British Council) ▪ Phil Batty OBE (Glasgow 2026)	15.10 – 15.35	Roundtable discussions & framing provocation – for next steps towards a common UK outcome-based ambition for major events
11.15 – 11.45	Roundtable discussions and notes			15.35 – 16.00	Plenary: Horizon Scanning – What Next? Co-Chairs: Dave Moutrey OBE and Claire McColgan CBE
				16.00	Close of Summit