

Booker shortlisted Ali Smith backs new National Centre for Writing in England's first UNESCO City of Literature

Building work starts for summer 2018 launch

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Ali Smith CBE, Margaret Atwood, Nobel laureate JM Coetzee and Anthony Horowitz OBE are amongst those championing the National Centre for Writing as building work starts today in Norwich, England's first UNESCO City of Literature.

Due to open in summer 2018 the National Centre for Writing will celebrate the best in world literature. A programme of innovative collaborations will engage writers, literary translators and readers, in person and online, in projects that support new voices, new stories and respond to the rapidly changing world of writing.

Ali Smith CBE, one of the Patrons of the National Centre for Writing says:

“The National Centre for Writing won't just put Norwich on the map in a much needed reminder that the country's capital isn't the only place that British writing is thriving, it'll put the whole country on the map, because writing itself will thrive in such a versatile gift of a place. We've long needed a National Centre, and this combination of place, space and energy is ideal.”

When the new centre opens, Writers' Centre Norwich (WCN) will become known as the National Centre for Writing. Chris Gribble CEO of WCN says:

“We are thrilled to be providing a home for literature. We look forward to welcoming writers and literary translators from all over the world to a city recognised by UNESCO for its outstanding literary activity. This will be an inspirational space for writers and audiences. Together with our partners Arts Council England, Norwich City Council, the University of East Anglia, Norfolk County Council and some wonderful trusts and foundations, we are creating something very special and helping to write the next chapter for literature in this country.”

The opening programme will include collaboration with the British Council to showcase emerging UK writers to new audiences. A partnership with the prestigious creative writing course at the University of East Anglia will see hundreds of writers engage with an online campus. And cross art form projects such as The Story Machine will present live literature in cities up and down the country.

The initiative, supported by Arts Council England, will transform the 15th century Dragon Hall into a physical embodiment of Norwich's UNESCO City of Literature status: a new south wing will provide a high-tech education space for young people and school groups; the north wing will be home to community space for writers and translators; improvements to the Great Hall will create a 120 seat multipurpose cultural venue; and the onsite cottage will be refurbished as a house for writers- and translators-in-residence from the UK and around the world, with a particular focus on writers at risk within the ICORN network, reflecting Norwich's status as England's only International City of Refuge.

Hedley Swain, Area Director, South East, Arts Council England, says: "The breaking ground ceremony is always an exciting stage of a build, but for Writers' Centre Norwich it feels even more special. It not only signifies the development of the iconic Dragon Hall, but also the realisation of Writers' Centre Norwich's role as a National Centre for Writing; promoting excellence in literature through developing talent, supporting established writers and inspiring educational work. We're proud to be supporting this work with National Lottery funding and look forward to seeing its completion in summer 2018."

The work is being carried out by locally-based building firm John Youngs part of the RG Carter group, working to the plans of Norfolk architects Lucas Hickman Smith.

James Phillips, General Manager of John Youngs says:

"John Youngs is delighted to have been given the opportunity to collaborate on this culturally important scheme at Dragon Hall. Our focus is on delivering a successful project for The Writers' Centre and Building Partnerships, providing a quality facility that will not only serve writers within the local community but also nationally and internationally for many years to come."

Follow the progress of the build with regular virtual hard-hat tours and time-lapse footage at www.writerscentrenorwich.org.uk and follow developments on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram at #TheNextChapter @WritersCentre

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Notes to Editors:

1. About Writers' Centre Norwich (WCN)

WCN is a literature development organisation based in England's first UNESCO City of Literature. In summer 2018 WCN will become the National Centre for Writing. The National Centre for Writing at Dragon Hall will promote great literature, inspire communities through the power of writing, reading and literary translation, nurture literary talent and host world-class events. www.writerscentrenorwich.org.uk

2. For comment and photos contact Alice Kent, Communications Director at

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3. The Patrons of the National Centre for Writing are Margaret Atwood, John Boyne, JM Coetzee, Anthony Horowitz OBE, Jon McGregor, Ali Smith CBE and Rose Tremain CBE.

4. Additional quotes from Patrons:

JM Coetzee, Nobel Prize for Literature winner (2003) and National Centre for Writing Patron says: "I have seen at first-hand how warmly the Norwich reading community welcomes visiting writers. The goals of the National Centre seem to me entirely laudable".

Jon McGregor, IMPAC Prize winner and Booker Prize Short Listed Novelist says: "I'm really looking forward to the launch of the National Centre for Writing. It will be tremendously exciting to have a space where writers and readers can meet and collaborate; a place which will bring together writers and translators from around the world, develop talent and potential in new writers, and encourage dialogue, debate, exchange and experiment. I'm sure it will be an exciting place to visit, and a valuable resource to be connected with."

5. WCN gratefully acknowledges the support of:

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