

BEYOND THE HORIZON

Bristol International Balloon Fiesta
Impact Report

2025

BRISTOL
international
balloon fiesta

in partnership with



Photo credit: Paul Box

INTRODUCTION

The Bristol International Balloon Fiesta is one of the UK's most iconic cultural events. For 47 years, it has brought communities together to celebrate creativity, engineering, and the joy of flight.

In August 2025, the Fiesta returned to Ashton Court Estate with the theme Beyond the Horizon, welcoming hundreds of thousands of visitors across three days of mass ascents, immersive experiences, and community engagement.

This report outlines the impact of the 2025 Fiesta. It reflects the second year of our five-year strategy to secure the event's future and build towards our 50th anniversary in 2028. It also highlights the continued commitment of our voluntary board, partners, and sponsors to deliver a free-to-attend event that benefits Bristol and the wider region.

From the launch field to the classroom, the Fiesta continues to inspire. Our Schools Programme reached thousands of pupils, new event features further engaged visitors with the incredible world of hot air ballooning and our stewardship of Ashton Court Estate remained central to our mission.

The Bristol International Balloon Fiesta is more than a weekend of spectacle; it is a cultural asset, a platform for learning, and a symbol of civic pride.

We are proud to share the outcomes of 2025 and look forward to continuing our journey in 2026 – The Sky Is The Limit.

Don Cameron, Ben Hardy, Chris Allcock, Clive Bailey, Nick Dunnington and Maggie Cameron

Bristol International Balloon Fiesta,
Board of Directors



OUR STRATEGY

In 2024, we commenced a five-year strategy to allow the Fiesta to soar to new heights and into its 50th anniversary in 2028.

This new strategy has given us an opportunity to reimagine, refocus and revitalise the Fiesta, reflecting what makes it so special – the celebration of Bristol, and its heritage links to the remarkable world of hot air ballooning.

This year, we were able to start to explore new possibilities with new initiatives and features to widen community engagement and enhance the visitor experience while stabilising our finances.

The strategy is led by four overarching objectives:



FINANCIAL STABILITY

to close the funding gap by creating new revenue streams, manage expenditure and to start to build a reserve.



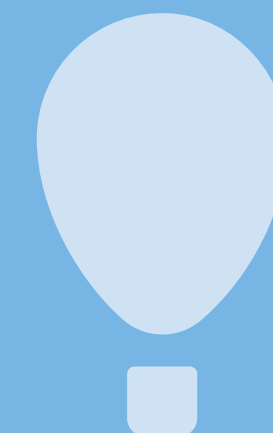
ENGAGEMENT

to engage more communities from across Bristol and further afield. We want to ensure this is an accessible and inclusive, free event for all.



EXCITEMENT

to share the magic of hot air ballooning, and to promote the sport. Make more of our temporary playground in Ashton Court, the novelty of the early hours, and embrace the unique unpredictability of will they, or won't they fly.



STEWARDSHIP

to keep the Fiesta as relevant today as it was when it was founded by improving relationships with all stakeholders, whilst helping to improve our home in Ashton Court.



FINANCIAL STABILITY

The 2025 Bristol International Balloon Fiesta marked the second year of a bold five-year strategy to secure the long-term future of the event.

With the theme Beyond the Horizon, the Fiesta welcomed a new headline sponsor, Albert Goodman, entering the first year of a three-year partnership. Their support, alongside contributions from over 30 sponsors and 12 partners, helped underpin the event's financial resilience.

Crucially, the Fiesta remained free to attend, continuing its legacy as one of the UK's most accessible large-scale cultural events. This commitment is made possible by a not-for-profit model that generates all required revenue independently, without public sector funding, a rarity among events of this scale.

After 2024, while greatly reducing its in-year deficit, the Fiesta's balancing sheet remained in the red at -£54,115.

In 2025, the Fiesta successfully made a modest in-year profit of £24,000, which has enabled it to double down on its focus of rebuilding reserves and repaying interest-free loans.

The financial discipline shown in recent years has enabled the team to reduce deficits and invest in innovations that enhance the visitor experience, while safeguarding the event's future.

Note: The above figures include the Bounce Back Loan taken out during the pandemic, but excludes amounts covered by an anonymous benefactor on a long term, interest free, loan basis.



Photo credit: Paul Box

ENGAGEMENT

Engagement with communities across Bristol and beyond was at the heart of the 2025 Fiesta.

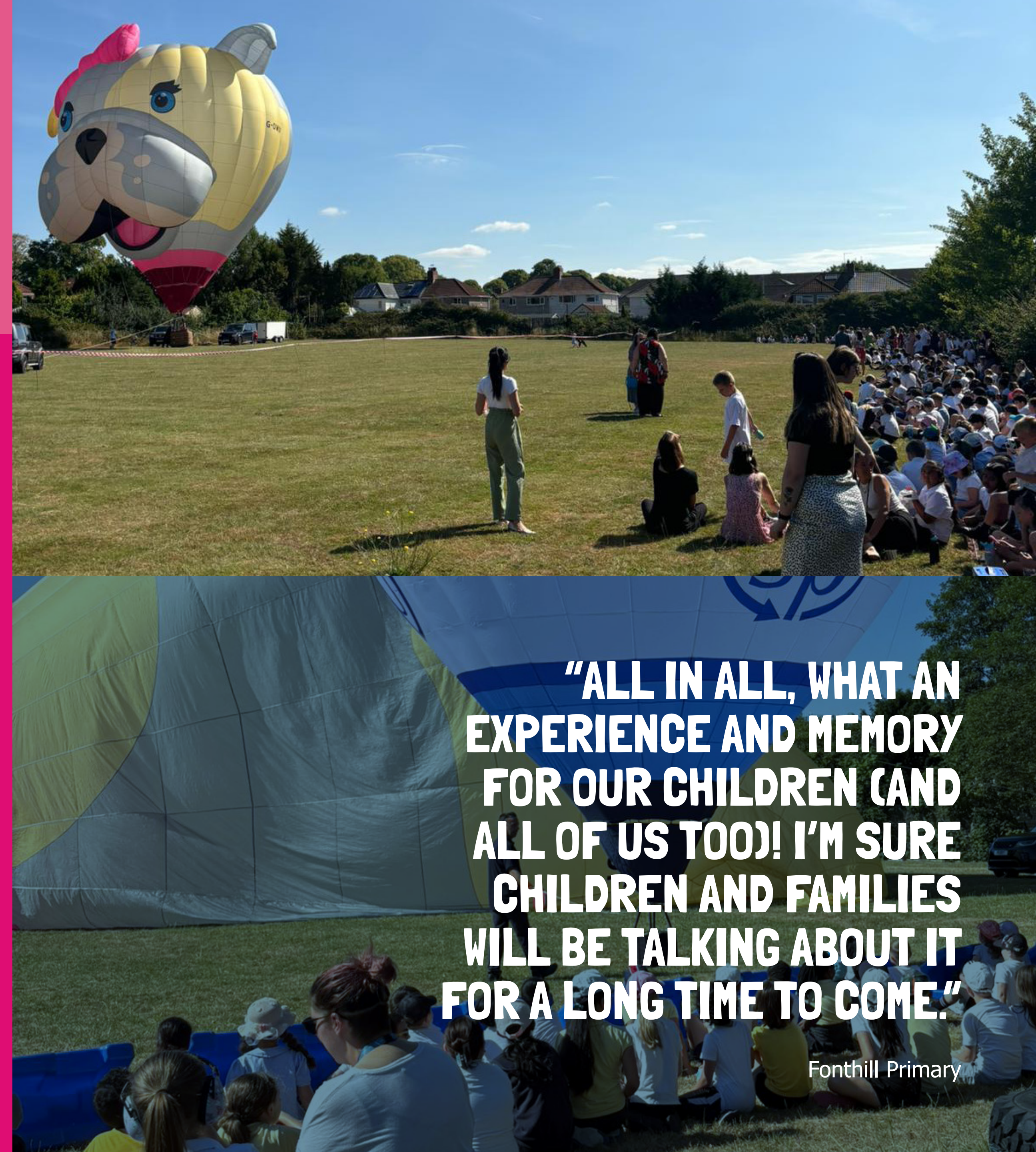
SCHOOLS TETHER ROADSHOW

The Schools Tether Roadshow, delivered in partnership with Albert Goodman, brought the wonder of ballooning directly to nine schools, engaging over 3,000 pupils. Each school hosted a full-size tethered balloon and met pilots and crew, sparking curiosity and learning around science, engineering and teamwork.

Beyond the selected schools, 400 others received Fiesta Schools Activity Packs, ensuring the reach of the programme extended city-wide. The initiative was designed to be inclusive and curriculum-aligned, inspiring the next generation of balloonists and engineers.

The Fiesta also renewed its partnership with Bristol-based charity Love Squared, supporting their work in mental health and special educational needs. With a presence on-site and a call for volunteers, the charity used the platform to raise awareness and drive fundraising efforts, connecting with thousands of attendees.

The introduction of Flight Control, a live balloon landing tracker developed with GWR, allowed visitors to follow balloon journeys beyond Ashton Court, reinforcing the Fiesta's regional impact and reach.



"ALL IN ALL, WHAT AN EXPERIENCE AND MEMORY FOR OUR CHILDREN (AND ALL OF US TOO)! I'M SURE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WILL BE TALKING ABOUT IT FOR A LONG TIME TO COME."

Fonthill Primary

ENGAGEMENT CONTINUED

EMPLOYMENT

The Fiesta creates 153 full-time equivalent jobs annually, supporting a wide range of roles across the event site. In 2025, the Fiesta continued its

internship programmes in partnership with UWE, offering young people hands-on experience in event management, communications and operations.



Photo credit: Paul Box

VOLUNTARY SUPPORT

Volunteering is the bedrock of the Bristol International Balloon Fiesta. As a not-for-profit organisation governed by a voluntary board, the event simply wouldn't happen without the dedication of individuals who give their time, energy and expertise year after year. Approximately 11,000 hours of voluntary time went into the delivery of the 2025 Bristol International Balloon Fiesta.

The Fiesta's board members each contribute over 200 hours annually, working behind the scenes to uphold the event's founding principles: to remain free for the people of Bristol and to promote the city and the sport of ballooning. Their leadership is supported by delivery partners who also volunteer significant time to ensure the smooth running of this large-scale event.

In 2025, the Schools Tether Roadshow was delivered almost entirely by volunteer balloon teams and crew, who gave up over 100 hours to bring the magic of ballooning to children across the city. Their contribution was instrumental in the success of the programme. Special thanks must go to Paul and Emma from Lighter Than Air, Rick, Mike, Ian, Nic, Maggie, Louise, Dean, Liam, Dan, Tom, Matt, Phil, Clive and Nick for their incredible contribution.

We also do not underestimate the voluntary capacity of the balloonists and crews who attend the Fiesta. Many are private operators who participate for the love of the sport and the community it fosters. Their commitment to mass ascents, Nightglows and public engagement is what fills Bristol's skies with colour, and hearts with joy and accumulates to more than 9,000 voluntary hours a year.



2025 interns Thalia, Eiri, and Ben with Ben Hardy and Cissy Badley from REM, and returning 2024 intern, Jess.

Photo credit: Paul Box

ENGAGEMENT CONTINUED

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The Fiesta continues thanks to the unwavering support of the city's business community. This year, special recognition goes to headline partner Albert Goodman, whose three-year commitment has helped secure the event's future. Their partnership, alongside contributions from more than 30 sponsors and 12 partners, including Butcombe, Thatchers, and GWR ensures the Fiesta remains free to attend and accessible to all.

The event's delivery is made possible not only by financial sponsors but also by those who offer in-kind and discounted services. From logistics and hospitality to creative and technical expertise, these supporters play a vital role in bringing the Fiesta to life and enhancing the visitor experience.

2025 also marked the celebrated return of the Business Breakfast, held on the opening morning in partnership with IOD South West. This ticketed event brought together more than 100 professionals, entrepreneurs, and membership organisations, including Business West, Bristol Junior Chamber of Commerce, Bristol & West of England China Bureau, Tech West England Advocates, and the Royal Aeronautical Society, for networking and thought-provoking panel discussions. The collaborative spirit of these organisations exemplifies the region's creativity, resilience, and entrepreneurial energy.

The Fiesta extends heartfelt thanks to every sponsor, partner, and supporter whose generosity and collaboration make this iconic celebration possible.



Photo credit: Paul Box

EXCITEMENT

THE SKIES ABOVE BRISTOL CAME ALIVE ONCE AGAIN AS THE 47TH BRISTOL INTERNATIONAL BALLOON FIESTA DELIVERED FOUR MASS ASCENTS ACROSS THREE DAYS, CAPTIVATING HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF SPECTATORS. ASHTON COURT ESTATE TRANSFORMED INTO A VIBRANT PLAYGROUND, WITH THE LAUNCH FIELD CENTRE STAGE FOR SCHEDULED BALLOON FLIGHTS EACH MORNING AND EVENING.

Two awe-inspiring Nightglow events lit up the estate on Friday and Saturday nights, with 25 hot air balloons choreographed to music, with a soundtrack produced by BBC Radio Bristol. Friday's Nightglow was also broadcast live on BBC iPlayer, enabling the spectacle to draw crowds both onsite and online, showcasing the magic of ballooning to a national audience.

Sunday introduced Special Shapes Sunday, featuring beloved icons such as Thomas the Tank Engine, Snow White, Sonic the Hedgehog, Wallace & Gromit's Moon Rocket and Slither the Snake.

New immersive experiences like In the Clouds invited visitors inside a cold-inflated balloon envelope, where film, light and sound celebrated Bristol's ballooning heritage. The Fiesta continues to innovate, ensuring each year brings fresh excitement while honouring tradition.



Photo credit: Paul Box



Photo credit: Paul Box

EXCITEMENT CONTINUED

MEDIA REACH

The Fiesta remains one of the most photographed and broadcast events in the UK. In 2025, media coverage reached over 6 billion people worldwide, with more than 1,000 published articles and broadcast hits. BBC Bristol continued its partnership, providing hosts and soundtracks for the Nightglows.

SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

The Fiesta’s social media channels are among the most followed in the city. In 2025, the team built on its 2024 strategy to educate, inform and inspire audiences, resulting in increased positive sentiment and engagement. Combined reach across platforms exceeded 3.6 million.



Photo credit: Paul Box

FIESTA COVERAGE IN NUMBERS

6 BILLION

reached through media coverage worldwide

1,000+

articles published



124,000

Facebook Followers

2.3MILLION

Facebook Reach



51,500

Instagram Followers

313,500

Instagram Reach



47,000

X Followers

1MILLION

X Reach



1,240

LinkedIn Followers (new platform)

26,000

LinkedIn Reach

STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship remains a cornerstone of the Fiesta's ethos. The event's founding constitution makes it clear that the Fiesta should remain free for the city of Bristol, promote the city's business community and celebrate the sport of hot air ballooning.

To uphold the founding constitution and strengthen the event's long-term purpose, the Fiesta is currently transitioning from a limited company to a Community Interest Company (CIC) as part of its future strategy. This change reflects the event's not-for-profit status and its commitment to delivering public benefit. It will formalise the Fiesta's social value, its community programmes and protect its founding principles for generations to come. With thanks to Burges Salmon for their support in making this transition.

ASHTON COURT ESTATE

Since its founding in 1979, the event has called Ashton Court Estate home and has consistently upheld its commitment to protect and enhance the site. For 47 years, the Fiesta has repaired any damage caused by the event and invested in infrastructure improvements, including water mains, re-seeding, gravel road maintenance, and tree protection for the SSSI status of the site.

In 2025, the Fiesta entered discussions with Bristol City Council regarding the event's use of Ashton Court Estate. We are hugely grateful to Cllr Tony Dyer, and his team in the presentation of a new partnership agreement, granting use of Ashton Court Estate until at least 2039 to help secure the events stability.

ECONOMIC AND TOURISM IMPACT

The Bristol International Balloon Fiesta continues to be one of the city's most valuable annual outdoor events, generating significant economic and tourism benefits for the region. In recent years, the event has injected over £22 million into Bristol's economy, with £14.7 million of that representing new expenditure that would not have occurred without the Fiesta.

Each year, more than 300,000 visitors attend the Fiesta, with 22% staying overnight and 30% travelling from over 50 miles away. The event drives demand across hotels, restaurants, transport and attractions, with hotel occupancy rates reaching over 80% during Fiesta weekend.

For every £1 invested in the event, an estimated £143.55 is returned to the local economy.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT

Hot air balloons are as synonymous with Bristol as the Clifton Suspension Bridge and Wallace & Gromit. The Fiesta is a cultural icon, blending creativity, engineering, and community spirit. In 2025, the event continued to celebrate this heritage, with colourful ascents creating a visual identity that connects Bristol to the world.

"THANK YOU FOR THE INCREDIBLE WORK AND DEDICATION YOU PUT IN YEAR-ROUND TO CREATE THESE MEMORIES FOR BRISTOLIANS AND VISITORS ALIKE. YOU HAVE CREATED MEMORIES THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME."

"YOU'VE DONE BRISTOL PROUD, EVERY YEAR. FOR THAT, WE WILL ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL."



PLANS FOR 2026 BEYOND

The progress made in 2025 would not have been possible without the sheer determination and passion from the Fiesta board and organising team, nor the support of contractors, suppliers, partners, sponsors, exhibitors, traders, advertisers, and of course the balloonists.

AS WE SIGN OFF 2025, THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO HAS GIVEN THEIR ALL – THE BEST IS YET TO COME.

WITH OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY ON THE HORIZON, WE'RE ONLY JUST WARMING UP. IN 2026, THE SKY IS THE LIMIT.



LET'S SOAR TO NEW HEIGHTS TOGETHER.

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WITH THANKS

Despite its history, scale and reputation the Bristol International Balloon Fiesta is run by a not-for-profit organisation, governed by a board of volunteers, and managed by a small organising team.

Each year this team works tirelessly to raise the funds required to host an event of this size and stature.

The Bristol International Balloon Fiesta would also like to thank the following organisations and people for their contribution to the Fiesta:

- Ashton Court Estate Team
- Bristol Ambulance
- Avon and Somerset Police
- Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust
- Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissionaire
- Leigh Wood Residents
- Avon Fire and Rescue
- Long Ashton Residents
- BBC Radio Bristol
- North Somerset Council
- Bower Ashton Residents
- South West Ambulance Service
- Bristol City Council
- Western Region British Balloon and Airship Club

It is with huge thanks to the support and generosity of our sponsors and partners that we were able to deliver the 47th edition of the Bristol International Balloon Fiesta.

