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## Cosy UK Town That's Made for Book Lovers

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Sedbergh thrives as England's first official Book Town, mixing literary charm with rural regeneration potential.

A peaceful Yorkshire Dales town has carved out a unique identity, becoming a literary haven for bibliophiles and a shining example of how rural communities can harness culture to drive regeneration. Nestled in Cumbria but steeped in Yorkshire heritage, Sedbergh stands as England's first Book Town, a title attracting tourists and local investment since it was first adopted in 2005.

Positioned within the Yorkshire Dales National Park and beneath the rolling Howgill Fells, Sedbergh lies just 16.1 kilometres (10 miles) from Kendal and 45.1 kilometres (28 miles)

from Lancaster. Its picturesque streets and traditional market town charm have long drawn walkers and weekenders, but the town's literary appeal is now turning heads.

Inspired by the success of Hay-on-Wye in Wales, Sedbergh followed the global Book Town movement, a concept first sparked by bookseller Richard Booth in 1961. Unlike many U.K. towns where retail spaces sit vacant, Sedbergh has turned underused buildings into bookshops, bringing life back to the high street while conserving its historic character.

## Literary Landscape

Despite its modest size, Sedbergh offers a rich and eclectic collection of books through a mix of dedicated bookshops, community outlets, and book cafés. One of its best-known establishments is Westwood Books, located at the eastern edge of Main Street. Housed in a former cinema, it stocks over 70,000 titles across antiquarian, second-hand, and new publications. The shop also offers maps, stationery, puzzles, and other thoughtful gifts, with parking available for visiting customers.

Other outlets include Clutterbooks, a community-run charity bookshop that reinvests its profits into local projects through the Sedbergh Community Fund. Farfield Mill Arts and Heritage Centre, a short walk away, also features book stalls alongside artisan crafts. At the same time, shops such as Sleepy Elephant and Farfield Clothing often stock literary titles alongside their main offerings.

In a charming nod to grassroots culture, Sedbergh also boasts a “Book Shelter,” a repurposed bus stop where residents and visitors are encouraged to take a book and leave another in return, keeping the exchange alive without cost or profit.

Looking ahead, Sedbergh is preparing to host the second Death in the Dales Crime Fiction Festival from October 17-19, 2025. The event, which will feature bestselling authors, panels, and an evening “Film Noir at the Bar,” aims to cement the town's growing literary footprint further.

Author and trustee of the Sedbergh Book Town Literary Trust, Gerry Cotter, acknowledged the significance of this cultural identity. “Local people take great pride in their town, creating an active, enthusiastic community,” he said. Despite being on the periphery of both the Lake District and the Dales, Cotter noted that Sedbergh had successfully set itself apart. “One thing that Sedbergh was known for was its bookshops. The suggestion was made that

Sedbergh should set itself up as England's Book Town. It was about time England had one too.”

As the town celebrates its 20th year as a Book Town in 2025, organisers are pushing to enhance its national profile further. The area has long links to literary greats from nearby regions, including William Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter, and Sedbergh's place in that landscape is growing stronger each year.

The surrounding Lake District and Dales continue to host several respected independent bookshops, including Fred's Ambleside Bookshop and Bookends in Keswick. But Sedbergh's community-led approach and innovative use of space offer a blueprint for how rural Britain can embrace tourism, culture, and commerce without losing its soul.