

Bristol Arena delays opening but size of venue to be increased

The opening of Bristol's long-awaited arena has been delayed until 2025 at the earliest, the developers behind the project have confirmed. The YTL Arena, which is being created from the conversion of the huge Brabazon Hangar at the old Filton Airfield, won't now open for its first gig until late 2025 or early 2026 – but the venue will be even bigger – YTL Developments has said.

The capacity of the arena is to be increased from 17,000 to 19,000 by “improving the design”, the Malaysian firm added. The YTL Arena was originally pencilled in for a 2024 opening, but that has since slipped and for the past year or so there had been no confirmed date for opening.

The company has blamed “delays resulting from the impact of Covid” and the general challenges in the construction market. Last summer, the mayor of Bristol's bid to bring the Eurovision Song Contest to Bristol included temporarily switching construction of the YTL Arena to a bespoke Eurovision venue, but Bristol never got into the shortlisting phase.

In the meantime, YTL have said they are yet to start actual work to convert the hangar into the arena, but said they have been “making good progress” on the arena's development and are “talking with major contractors”. YTL Arena chief executive Andrew Billingham said preparation work has been done.

“We have been making good progress on the development of YTL Arena Bristol and are now entering the final stages of design and talking with major contractors,” he said. “Work has begun on key pieces of infrastructure required including new road

connections, establishing new power supplies and site preparation works.

“The [train station at Brabazon](#) is an important element and discussions continue on how this might be brought forward,” he added. The logistics of the train station at the Filton Airfield development site have been controversial, with a debate about who will pay for it and how many trains will end up running every evening to transport people attending events at the arena.

Mr Billingham said despite the delays to the opening date, YTL was “totally committed” to opening the arena.

“Given delays resulting from the impact of Covid and the general challenges in the construction market, our estimated opening is now late 2025 to early 2026,” he said. “YTL is totally committed to opening Bristol’s first major indoor music arena and entertainment complex. We have been improving our design and have created the opportunity to increase the maximum capacity of the arena from 17,000 to 19,000, with over 2,000 premium seats.”

The arena will include exhibition and convention halls; banqueting capacity for 4,000 people; and a flexible hub for entertainment, film, TV and music rehearsals. YTL Developments also [received approval from South Gloucestershire Council](#) to create a 15-acre sustainable public park at the centre of Brabazon last year.

YTL has been working with Bristol-based interior designers Studio B on the arena plans. Studio B is a Clifton-based design agency which won the job to design the arena and the spaces around it. Its founder Kyle Clarke said winning the contract was the “highlight” of the year.

“Since we received the instruction, we’ve been completely consumed with designing selected spaces within the arena to completely blow the customer experience through the roof,” he

said. “There isn’t another arena in the country that will come close. Huge hats off to the YTL Arena team for working with our relatively small, young, ambitious Bristol studio.

“Together, we’ve got exciting plans to bring in other local artists and small businesses, harnessing Bristol’s endless skill and talent to ensure the arena feels proudly part of the city,” he added.

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