

Bank of England to redesign banknotes - and wants your help

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Banknotes issued by the Bank of England are about to get their first major redesign in more than 50 years.

Notable historical figures, such as Sir Winston Churchill on the current fiver, have featured on these banknotes since 1970 but could be on the way out. The public are being asked for their views on new themes, such as nature, innovation, or key events in history. It raises the possibility of British birds, bridges, or bangers and mash featuring on the next series of £5, £10, £20 and £50 notes.

The monarch has appeared on Bank of England notes since 1960. Images of historical characters, starting with William Shakespeare, were first seen on the reverse side a decade later. At times the choices have landed the Bank in hot water. The absence of any women, apart from Queen Elizabeth II, on notes in 2013 prompted a huge backlash. Now, the Bank is proposing that designs on the next series of notes could move on to a new theme. While notable historical figures remain an option, other possible subject matters suggested by the Bank include:

- architecture and landmarks, such as famous buildings or castles
- arts, culture and sport, including food, film and novels
- noteworthy events in history, which could include events or movements
- innovation, such as technology or discoveries
- nature, celebrating plants, animals or natural landscapes such as rivers or coastal scenes

The public are being invited to give their views. They can also suggest their own themes, which may prompt plenty of jokes - Notey McNoteface will undoubtedly feature - and debate. "Banknotes are more than just an important means of payment. They serve as a symbolic representation of our collective national identity and an opportunity to celebrate the UK," said Victoria Cleland, the Bank's chief cashier, whose signature appears on notes. "I am really keen to hear what themes the public would like to see represented." Ms Cleland said banknotes were "little pieces of art in our pocket", but there were some extra considerations over what can go on them, such as accessibility and security features. She told the BBC she was "open minded" over what theme should be introduced, but said continuing with historical figures was not being ruled out.

However, she was keen to widen the choice, albeit it needed to be enduring, and not divisive, she said. Banknotes issued in Scotland and Northern Ireland already carry images of landmarks and animals such as otters. Euro banknotes feature architectural styles. Some notes around the world are incredibly colourful. It is predominantly pink and carries images of a blue marlin, dolphins and tuna fish as well as a profile of King Charles III. The back of the vertically designed note combines butterflies, flora, Horseshoe Bay, and a boat passing beneath Somerset Bridge. The Bank of England's notes have been less dramatic, featuring abstract geometric designs, lions or Britannia in years gone by. The crop of historical characters on the current series of circulating notes, in ascending order of note value, are Churchill, Jane Austen, JMW Turner and Alan Turing.

This public consultation relates to the Bank's next series, which will also continue to include an image of the monarch. People can submit their view via an online form on the Bank's website, or by post, by the end of July. The final decision on what exactly features on a banknote lies with the Bank's governor. More than 4.7 billion Bank of England notes are in circulation, collectively worth around £86bn. Cash use has fallen to 12% of transactions as payments technology evolves, but the Bank has said it is committed to providing cash for those who wish to use it.