

## **Town Centre Vitality Report – Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

### **Leisure and Cultural Services**

#### ***Arts Development***

As Arts Officer I generally follow the Corporate Strategy, the Directorate Business Improvement Plan and a yearly Arts Development Plan in order to guide future work.

The Business Improvement Plan (attached) includes little detail as regards town centre based activity, the Corporate Strategy has town centre vibrancy as a key theme and this has been implemented through the Market's improvements and other public realm works and the Arts Plan has some areas that can contribute to town centre issues.

There are some main points to note with town centre cultural activity.

#### *Midsummer Arts Festival*

The midsummer arts festival has run for around five years and comprises free street performances of music and street theatre. It aims to increase footfall and add some life and vibrancy to the town centre.

#### *Venue issues*

Many of the events that cultural services run are outdoor events and so we have some problems with running things in the town centre. The town square is in a poor position and so we cannot use this area for events and performances and the space outside of the market is OK but it is small it's not a dedicated space. This limits what sort of things we can do. Any larger events that happen on the highway generally require road closures which result in animosity from some traders.

#### *Chorley Little Theatre*

Chorley Little Theatre and CADOS need to be recognised as the largest contributor to cultural activity in the town centre and also to the night time economy. They have recently begun experimenting with their programming and have a new professional comedy venture alongside their more traditional amateur dramatic offer. I try to support the theatre as best I can with promotion, keeping them in the loop with local issues and opportunities and I am currently supporting them with funding applications for renovation work.

#### *The Lancastrian Suite*

The Lancastrian Suite is the largest cultural venue by some margin in the town centre. In order to begin more cultural activity here, especially marketing it to events promoters would mean looking at issues around wheelchair access to the stage, lack of a back stage area, poor in house sound system and it would also need a review of the pricing. The current cost is simply too high for promoters given the local market.

#### *Reach & Xmas Lights*

Reach the disability awareness event and the Xmas lights event are probably two of the biggest events in the town centres calendar. Reach attracts around

1,500 and the Xmas lights event up to 3,000. I currently lead on the Reach event while the Xmas lights event is lead by Louise Finch in the Communications Service.

### *Empty Retail Space*

I have previously used empty retail spaces for visual art and music workshops and community radio broadcasting. The work was mentioned in a DCMS report on 'looking after our town centres' in 2009. We still plan to do further work in empty units although there are costs involved such as licenses, insurance and legal costs.

### *2010 Plan*

A key priority in the plan is identifying and developing independent events organisers/promoters. It is hoped that in the future the town will have a strong and sustainable programme of events run independently of the Council. I am currently speaking with funders to invest in this plan.

### ***Sport and Play development***

Very similar to the work of the Arts Development the Sport and Play Development deliver a lot of activity. This impact on many communities's and groups within the borough.

The majority of the work that is delivered does not include town centre work or venues etc. This is mainly due to the nature of grassroots activity and development outreach work where we cover in some capacity almost every area of the district in some capacity, along with specified funded projects and their requirements.

Our main Town centre events are as follows.

### *Summer Play Day*

This event is held the first Wednesday of August each year at Coronation Rec. Last year it attracted in excess of 2500 people and is a strong example of multi- partnership work, with many voluntary groups assisting. The Council is the main organiser and is supported by the Chorley Play Partnership.

The venue has been used for its superb location to the town centre and to attract people who would not normally engage in play activity.

Despite the size of the venue not being the largest park in the borough, its accessibility, effective compact nature makes its ideal. Activity each year expands and is varied.

### *Winter Play Day*

This is a far smaller indoor event staged in the Lancastrian Suite, but works well with the same partners and concept of free play and promoting play. Each year there is a theme attached, Last year it was safer streets and this year it will look at healthy lifestyles. Again without the support of the partners,

it would not be possible. Last year we attracted over 500 people to the Town Hall.

#### *Chorley Sports Awards*

This has been held in the past at many venues such as Lancashire College, Chorley FC etc. Last year it was successfully held at Chorley Town Hall, However numbers do not get over 100, so making it quite a challenge to ensure the event is not lost in the Lancastrian Suite. Many local people attend this event and last year was the best received.

#### *Activity Sessions*

The Lancastrian has been used in the past on several occasions, to stage holiday time activity such as street dance etc. This however has not been developed in the evening as this activity lends itself to being staged directly in young people's community. However older people sessions such as Tea Dances etc are being developed via the Active Generation Project.

#### *Future activity*

There is an aspiration of staff and the service user to utilise the Town Centre more and some good ideas have recently been generated. Our new street games project, Active generation and Play Rangers, are investigating how we could stage activity in outdoor and indoor spaces. However as the Arts Development Officer reports there are limitations and innovation will be the key.

Astley Park has recently seen us be able to develop more activity, one example is how we still hosts the Sport Relief Mile hoping to attract 300-500 people, via the Town Centre.