

CULTURAL PROVISION REVIEW GROUP

24 October 2013

PRESENT – Councillors Carson, Harman, Lawton, Long (in the Chair) and EA Richmond.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baldwin, Cossins and L Hughes.

OFFICERS – Steve Petch, Lead Officer, Place Scrutiny Committee, Stephen Wiper, Creative Darlington Manager, Mike Crawshaw, Head of Culture and Abbie Metcalfe, Democratic Officer.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – John Deane, Darlington for Culture and Alice Maynard, A Level Politics Student.

Declarations of Interest – Councillor Long declared an interest in that she was a member of Darlington for Culture and a Director of Theatre Hullabaloo, Councillors Lawton and Harman each declared an interest in that they are members of Darlington for Culture.

Purpose of the Meeting – To receive feedback following the consultation by Darlington for Culture on how the money received from the sale of the Arts Centre should be spent.

Points Discussed and Considered -

- Following a question by a member the Review Group were advised that proceeds from the Art Centre sale were based on the 2011 process during Summer and Autumn. However these figures of £800k to £1.2/£1.3m varied depending on whether the building was cleared or retained with furniture.

(Note- The Chair of the Review Group advised that as a Planning Applications Committee member and a near neighbour of the Arts Centre she would declare an interest and not take part in any discussion or voting on this issue when considered by that Committee).

- Concerns were raised at the varying values from the same developer and the comment was made that it was believed that the building was worth substantially less than the site itself.
- The Group were advised that it was hoped to raise more as these figures were determined by the 2011 market and Officers were unsure whether the situation had changed.
- John Dean of Darlington for Culture (DfC) addressed the Group and advised that the consultation exercise had been undertaken in July via a short questionnaire, which was also available on the DfC website, and one consultation meeting.
- Out of five available options two were dismissed quickly – to cover Darlington Borough Council cuts and to provide a small theatre and children's theatre. A

third option of giving 45 per cent to help running costs with local Arts was also dismissed.

- The remaining options were to spread the money around various arts facilities in Darlington which was favoured by 79.9 per cent of respondents to the DfC consultation and 68 per cent of respondents to the Darlington Citizen Panel (DCP) and to provide a small theatre for children and young people, with the proviso of community use, which was favoured by 49.6 per cent of DfC respondents and 46 per cent of DCP respondents.
- Mr Dean advised that both options were possible and that with Option 2 it was envisaged that Theatre Hullabaloo would take the lead, however there were concerns as to whether sustainable running costs would be an issue. There was also a strong belief that some of the money should be used to provide and sustain arts in other venues such as schools, public houses and forums.
- The Group were advised that discussions were taking place between the Council, DfC, Creative Darlington Board and the relevant Cabinet member to reinforce the two options. With regards to the provision of a small theatre the venue was of concern as it needed to be robust and would need capital. It had been suggested that the old fire station next to the Civic Theatre could be a suitable venue and that Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funding linked to the Civic Theatre refurbishment could be utilised. It was also highlighted that the venue needed to be available to the broader Arts community.
- With regards to Art Council funding this would need to be applied for by Theatre Hullabaloo as they have the relevant permission to do so.
- Following a question details were given of the Darlington Citizens Panel and their role in the consultation exercise. A member stated that market surveys were only satisfactory if the options were liked and/or preferred however there should always be an option for comments and further information as there was a better take up of cultural experiences when they were made available to everyone rather than the few. He also stated that he would prefer the Council to retain funding of the arts to ensure access for all residents.
- It was reiterated that the Council was working in partnership with Creative Darlington and that a proportion of money was to be used to ensure access to the arts for all in the long term. The location of Option 2 (a children and young people's theatre) next to the Civic Theatre was a good possibility, with opportunities for audience development of the arts in that area of Town.
- Members reiterated that in the current economic climate it was difficult to find a robust financial model and that must be taken into account, it was also stated that the use of schools could be extended possibly with a small hire charge.
- Discussion ensued on ways of capitalising the revenue budget and possible renting of buildings as rental monies would be put back into the revenue budget. It was also stated that revenue funding and sustainability would need to be included in any Arts Council funding applications. There was an urgent need to find ways of sustainability for the future provision of arts and it was stated that

the Civic Theatre was beginning to show signs of breaking even.

- Mr Dean stressed that it was very competitive to get Arts Council funding in the current economic climate and that Theatre Hullabaloo has to be strengthened by the application. It was highlighted that staff would still be required for Option 2 no matter what occurred.
- The Creative Darlington Manager stated that this was a one-off opportunity which was viewed as a good chance, Arts Council funding would not be used for maintaining organisations' running costs and it would be unlikely that this opportunity would arise again for decades. He highlighted the recent successes of the Festival of Thrift which had been well attended by the public and facilitated by local businesses, the voluntary sector and the Council and the Jabberwocky Markets which had encompassed the Town's assets. The Arts Council were applying pressure on organisations not to create a new building which would require further costs. The Group were advised that both Options needed to be covered so that if the Arts Council funding application was unsuccessful existing projects and organisations could be supported, although it was expressed that each organisation needed to be sustainable in the future as the Council could not support it. Part of the Arts Council funding needed to be reserved for match funding for the future.
- A member expressed the view that the subsidy for the Civic Theatre had been reducing and it was envisaged to be around £50k for the next year and that the subsidy could be shared between the Civic Theatre and Theatre Hullabaloo. Members reinforced their commitment to the Arts for the next 20 – 25 years and felt optimistic about the future.
- Mr Dean stated that a very small amount of money could achieve a lot and there was a need to push up the quality of the Arts, as it was felt that Darlington sometimes missed out on the 'excellence' of theatre and that the town needs to be able to attract the high quality performances.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) The Review Group accept that there is support for Option 2 with a Theatre Hullabaloo, Darlington Borough Council and Darlington for Culture joint approach.

(b) The Review Group accept that compromise is needed but understands why.

(c) The Council needs to be aware of non users of the Arts and the leadership role of the Council which needs an input.

(d) The Group are aware that this is a one-off opportunity for Arts Council funding and believe that the Council has a lot to offer.

(e) The Group recognises that there are many imponderables and consideration needed to be taken especially as the amount of money was uncertain.

(f) That imaginative ways of using capital receipts be monitored by Efficiency and Resources Security Committee.

(g) That, as support for other venues has already been established, consideration be given as to whether match funding opportunities' could be explored.

(h) That contributions to other national and regional Arts Organisations be explored to ensure Darlington remains in the pot for funding in the future.

(i) That the next meeting of the Review Group give consideration to the Creative Darlington Model and how priorities are to be considered.