

**CITY CENTRE EVENTS REVIEW:  
REPORT SEPTEMBER 2006**

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- Appendix 1 : Report of on-street interviews conducted
- Appendix 2 : Report of self-completion surveys returned
- Appendix 3 : Report of Talkabout Panel questionnaire no. 25 on arts  
entertainment and city centre events
- Appendix 4 : Statement from First Stop York tourism partnership's Product  
Development Group
- Appendix 5 : Extract from the York City Vision & Community Strategy - Chapter  
4.3: 'York: A City of Culture'

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

The review of events taking place in York's city centre spaces has been conducted by City of York Council in association with York City Centre Partnership. This is the first such exercise to be conducted and responds to growing usage of our city centre spaces for public events, awareness of the importance of events and city centre vibrancy to both the economy of the city and the cultural well-being of its community, along with the need to improve the overall management and co-ordination of the events held in our open spaces.

The current events programme has developed over a number of years without clear strategy or direction. This has led to an annual diary lacking in a coherent shape, with lack of variety from week to week at certain times of year, limited fresh events and with spaces sometimes dominated by a small number of regular income generators, often perceived as 'down-market' by critics. There are also some issues relating to a lack of quality control, with buskers, charities/community groups, income generators and the city's festivals being perceived as a city centre event.

The review's key aims are to examine and improve the content, quality, organisation and co-ordination of York's city centre events (both individually and as a whole programme) and to develop a policy and standards for these areas. The objective is to produce a high-quality programme of events for York's city centre open spaces which meets the needs of residents, businesses, participants and visitors to the city.

### **Objectives**

In setting down the scope of the review the following objectives were agreed:

- To develop a mission statement, detailing the key aims of events taking place in city centre open spaces and in the context of events not covered by the scope of the review
- To produce a strategy for a researched, sustainable and effective programme of quality activities within the city centre which meets the aims listed in the mission statement and works with the aims of relevant partnerships
- To safeguard income streams relating to events with a view to increasing the income generating potential of civic spaces
- To address issues relating to set-up arrangements which hinder the development of the city's events and to act as a catalyst for change
- To review operational procedures to ensure that all events on civic land operate safely and safeguard the council's liability position in the light of an increased compensation culture
- To follow a practical timetable for the development of the events programme, taking into consideration the need to sustain activities and minimise disruption to mid-term booking arrangements with partners (e.g. specialist markets, festivals, etc) and income generators
- To develop quantitative processes for the long term operation of the city's events, including performance monitoring and review procedures

## **Research & Consultation**

In order to ascertain what public opinion was on the current events offer in York city centre, several research exercises were undertaken. Research reports are attached as appendices 1 to 3, with a summary of findings included in Section 2 of this document.

### **Public Self-completion Questionnaires**

The public were invited to complete questionnaires to ascertain opinion on past events and areas of interest for future events. Questionnaires were made available at local libraries, council receptions, sent to targeted groups and also online with press notices circulated to invite residents to submit their opinions. Response rates were disappointing with only 175 completed questionnaires received by the closing date. The questionnaire is being left in council receptions and libraries so as to offer an ongoing opportunity for residents to comment on the city's events.

### **On-street Interviews**

326 face-to-face interviews were conducted in York City Centre to investigate the awareness of, and attitudes towards, events held in York city centre and perceptions of current and preferred event locations. Fieldwork and reporting conducted by an independent research consultancy firm.

### **Talkabout panel**

City of York Council's Talkabout panel No. 25 investigated residents' opinions on Arts, Entertainment & City Centre Events and offers the most representative cross-section of residents' opinions, with 1473 respondents and the results weighted to reflect the demographic profile of York residents.

### **Consultation**

In addition to public research, it is important to ensure that the city's events contribute to the cultural development of the city and also meet the needs of the city's economic development, in particular those of the tourism economy.

First Stop York's Product Development Group have provided a statement which summarises why, broadly, events are important to the tourism economy and offering comments on issues such as quality, marketing, resources and evaluation. This statement is attached at Appendix 4.

York's Cultural objectives are listed in the York City Vision & Community Strategy, Chapter 4.3 'York: A City of Culture', attached at Appendix 5. The York@Large Partnership, responsible for progressing the priorities set out within that document support the work of the review. Their input will be particularly valuable in developing new events.

Colleagues in the council's planning, markets, leisure and network management departments have also been involved in discussions relevant to their activities and will directly be consulted with in the future development of the programme to ensure that our events work in conjunction with their activities.

**Outcomes**

In accordance with the objectives listed above, this report includes, at section 3 of this document, a draft mission statement for the city centre's open air events. It also lists a series of proposals at section 4 relevant to the other objectives agreed at the initial stages of the review. Key priorities for the next year are listed as part of these objectives.

The City Centre Partnership Board is asked to consider these proposals prior to the council's next executive member meeting.

## RESEARCH & CONSULTATION : SUMMARY OF RESULTS

### **Majority in favour of events taking place in the city centre**

96% of those interviewed on the street were in favour of events taking place in the city centre. Respondents to Talkabout Questionnaire No. 23 (August 2005 on Royal Ascot at York and the Streets Alive! Festival) were also largely in favour of holding events in the streets of York seeing street festivals in particular as an attraction for tourists, helping the city to be more vibrant and lively and a way of bringing the community together.

First Stop York's Product Development Group list their key reasons for supporting events in York's city centre spaces. These are attached in a full statement at Appendix 4 but their key message is that large-scale events can attract visitors to the city in their own right, while a series of smaller events add to the vibrancy of the city and collectively add to York's attraction as a visitor destination.

### **Are events the primary reason for visiting York city centre?**

Results indicate that events are unlikely to be the primary reason for visiting the city centre (the most likely being shopping), though around 40% of those interviewed via the on-street interview did claim to come to the city centre specifically for some events. Those aged 35+ or those with children are the most likely to do so.

Some large-scale events have a track record of attracting large numbers into the city centre: St Nicholas Fayre, the Jorvik Viking Festival and the York Festival of Food and Drink being three festivals which do attract large numbers of visitors. Product Development Group note also that, regardless of whether events are a primary driver, visitor surveys demonstrate that visitors enjoy vibrant and lively destinations and this is among the top three reasons that visitors like coming to York.

### **Awareness of and Participation in events**

Specialist markets and food and drink events fare best both in terms of recall and participation. These were also among the most popular. Lighting installations were fairly well recalled also. Recall of company promotions were fairly low, suggesting that they are not an imposing element in the use of city centre spaces, though increasing their frequency would presumably raise the level of awareness.

Lowest participation was for Colourscape (14%), The annual funfair at St George's Field, Dance Week and Cultural diversity events including the Chinese New Year.

Participation seems to be highest among 35-54 yr olds. In terms of socio-economic groups, C1s participated the most. ABs & C1s were more likely to have attended specialist & continental markets while DEs were the most attracted to the children's fairground (56%), Dance Week (21%) and the fun fair at St George's Field (21%).

Of particular interest in the context of York@Large's City of Festivals initiative, launched in 2005, participation in festivals appears to have increased with a larger proportion of the 2006 panellists reporting that they had attended a festival, in comparison with previous survey results.

## **Public opinions of events currently held in city centre spaces**

In general, overall assessment from every research group was positive. The most popular event throughout all research was the Farmers' Market, with the food and drink festival, Residents 1<sup>st</sup>, specialist markets and Christmas events also rating highly.

Events rated as 'poor/very poor' were the annual fun fair at St George's Field, the Parliament Street children's fairground and the Chinese New Year Festival.

Examining responses by socio-economic group, AB's were the most positive about events, displaying particular satisfaction with food and drink events, the Festival of Angels (top ranking among ABs on the Talkabout panel), and were most positive about cultural diversity events, illuminations, the ice rink and artistically specialist events such as Colourscape and Dance week. C1s were the most positive about the Farmers' and Continental Markets and St Nicholas Fayre. DEs were the most critical about events with the exception of the ice rink, continental markets and Residents' 1<sup>st</sup>.

Breakdowns of all opinions, including according to gender and age-groups, are detailed within the appendices.

In addition to the research and consultation activities, some city centre food traders have expressed concern that some city centre events, specifically specialist markets, are increasingly competing with their own business activities. It is important that this is addressed while still maintaining the appeal of specialist market events in providing added value to the city's offer. A dialogue has been opened with the markets team to address this issue.

## **Children's Events**

Opinions of the children's events held in Parliament Street were generally positive but not overwhelmingly so, with little difference in ratings for inflatables, fairgrounds or trampolines.

Although participation was higher from those with children, research results did not demonstrate any significant difference between the opinions of those with children and those without.

## **Future interests**

To help with the future development of the events programme, we asked what types of events people would generally like to see more of in the city centre. Interest areas covered were music, dance, street entertainers, art and specialist events – these were presented with sub-categories. All areas raised some interest, though overall no particular type of event appealed to a significant majority.

Music : More jazz was requested, particularly among Abs who also requested more classical and brass bands. Brass Bands are generally viewed as desirable, mostly from

55+ year olds and mostly from C2 classification. At least a quarter of respondents would like to see more music of any genre, excluding rock/metal.

Dance : Dance events appeal to more female more than males. Over half ABs and nearly half of over 55s would like to see more cultural/world dance events. About a third showed an interest in Morris Dancing, though half of these were over 55.

Street Entertainers : Comic and circus entertainers appeal to around a third of the self-completion respondents, but fewer than a quarter of the Talkabout panel expressed an interest in seeing more street entertainment, mostly among younger respondents, though with no socio-economic significance.

Art : An area currently under-represented in York's out-door spaces when compared with other activities, art appeals to around half of those questioned. In particular, a greater number of temporary installations and exhibitions were requested. This area appears to be most of interest to ABs and C1s and young people.

Specialist Events: Out of the choices offered, self-completion respondents were keen to see more open air theatre, specialist markets, illuminations, food/drink events and historical events.

During the on-street interviews, we asked those who do not come in to the city centre for events, what would encourage them to do so. Around half said they would come in if the events were different or something they were particularly interested in. Around a fifth asked for better quality events and almost a third asked for better publicity.

### **Event Locations**

The best known event space is Parliament Street, although Museum Gardens was noted as an area that should be used more for events, especially among 16-34 year olds.

**DRAFT MISSION STATEMENT**

As part of the events review, it is felt important that the key aims and principles of the events programme should be summarised in a statement that can be used as a point of reference in the future development of the programme. This mission statement should be considered in the context of and where possible supporting other aims and objectives of the council and its various partnerships.

“York’s city centre open spaces are a prominent platform reflecting York’s diversity and vibrancy. They are an important vehicle for showcasing the city’s lively events offer, for supporting community activities and for bolstering the city centre’s retail and visitor economies by providing an additional draw into York city centre. City of York Council and York City Centre Partnership are committed to working with York’s festivals and events organisers to achieve a balanced and varied programme of high quality, well-presented and safe events for York city centre which respond to the interests of both residents and visitors.”



## OTHER OBJECTIVES

The Partnership and Council are asked to approve the following approach to achieving the review objectives in the long term.

### **1 To produce a strategy for a researched, sustainable and effective programme of quality activities within the city centre which meets the aims listed in the mission statement and works alongside the aims of relevant partnerships**

The following principles are proposed for the development of the events programme. These should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations for reinvestment listed in Objective 2 below.

The city centre team should strive for a sustainable and flexible calendar of events which offers residents and visitors variety, vibrancy and freshness to York's city centre spaces. The team should focus initially on improving presentation, scheduling and the overall operation of events with the view to building the programme into a sustainable and flexible calendar of events.

In response to research findings, it is proposed that the most popular events be maintained within the programme but that the city centre team work with organisers to address issues of quality, presentation and marketing as raised via the research and consultation process, particularly feedback received from the First Stop York Product Development Group.

The city centre office's historical agreements for supporting some events should be reviewed. A transparent policy should be put in place giving guidance as to what events should be supported financially, and to what degree, and detailing what the city centre's expectations from supported event should be. This policy should be developed in communication with the Arts & Culture and Product Development Group events funds.

In developing existing events or introducing new ones, it is proposed that the key areas of future interest noted above (in Section 2), particularly art activities, should be expanded within the programme as much as possible. New events should be developed in conjunction with the Arts & Culture team and meet the strategic aims listed in the York City Vision & Community Strategy, Chapter 4.3 'York: A City of Culture' where these are relevant. The first key action listed in the document is particularly relevant ("We will strive to ensure that York has a plentiful and diverse calendar of events throughout the year").

It is also proposed that the scheduling of events be looked at so that a clear comprehensive and identifiable programme can be established that can be communicated easily to the public, and that marketing and publicity be developed in particular in partnership with local press and marketing vehicles.

The specialist markets programme is clearly popular and should remain part of the events programme. The city centre team should work with the council's markets team to fine-tune the content, marketing, presentation and timings of the specialist markets programme and on the advice of the city centre office reinvest incomes made in infrastructure. Market events, particularly food and drink ones, should strive to support the city centre economy and not be in direct competition with the business community. The opportunity for local businesses to be involved in specialist markets should be continued and better promoted.

## **2 To safeguard income streams relating to events with a view to increasing the income generating potential of civic spaces**

A significant financial investment is required in order to improve the current events offer, increase publicity activity and to expand the programme with new events. With the council unable to increase its funding, it is vital that the income generation of our open spaces is exploited further on the understanding that this income can be channelled back into event activities.

The two particular areas that should be investigated and developed are the use of spaces by corporate promoters and their use by 3<sup>rd</sup> party activity organisers such as Warrington's (children's fairground). Promotions and events should operate in sympathy with the fabric and character of the city. The current, pricing structures should also be reviewed. Until the number of paying users are increased to an appropriate level of income generation, current relationships with the fairground organiser will need to continue. Council officers are, however, already working with the regular 'users' to improve their offer, especially in light of the findings of our research which will be presented to them.

Charity organisations and not-for-profit groups currently use city centre spaces free of charge. It is proposed that this support is continued on an indefinite basis.

## **3 To address issues relating to set-up arrangements which hinder the development of the city's events and to act as a catalyst for change**

The financial approach, noted above, is the key issue that has hindered the development of events in the past. In addition, the city centre office is working with York@Large on improved city-wide promotion, including banners and signage. It is also recommended that the city centre office open dialogues with both the Network Management department and the city's Planning department to agree a way forward for temporary and permanent signage within city centre spaces highlighting key events of interest to the public. The proposal to build a new Visitor Centre on Parliament Street will provide an opportunity for a permanent notice board/poster area.

#### **4 To review operational procedures to ensure that all events on civic land operate safely and safeguard the council's liability position in the light of an increased compensation culture**

The booking and operational procedures currently in use are currently being revised. It is proposed that all events involving city-wide or wider promotion, or those involving complex infrastructure or medium risk activities, be required to provide a full event manual, including risk assessments from suitably qualified persons, 28 days in advance of the event. Events involving wider use of carriageways, including processions and marches, will need to submit plans for approval by the Network Manager 3 months in advance of the event. These deadlines are in line with the council's protocols for its parks and rural open spaces and have also been agreed in consultation with the council's network management department.

Revised procedures and booking forms will be submitted to the York Events Safety Advisory Group (ESAG) for final agreement.

In addition to new operational procedures and booking forms, the city centre events co-ordinator will provide event/festival organisers with support and advice in planning their event, using HSE guidelines and ESAG guidance notes as references.

#### **5 To follow a practical timetable for the development of the events programme, taking into consideration the need to sustain activities and minimise disruption to mid-term booking arrangements with partners (e.g. specialist markets, festivals, etc) and income generators**

It is proposed that the following priorities and action points should be achieved before the end of 2007.

Priority 1: Developing income earning potential:

1. Agree revised but realistic rates for the hire of open spaces, both for promotional use and for 3<sup>rd</sup> party event organisers.
2. Research and develop a database of potential corporate clients, including PR/marketing agencies regularly hired for promotional activities by corporate clients
3. Produce and circulate a marketing card highlighting the benefits of using York city centre for promotional purposes, including footfall numbers and available tourism statistics.
4. Research new 3<sup>rd</sup> party event/activity organisers and liaise as appropriate.
5. Increase income by an agreed percentage

Priority 2: Supporting community events and festivals:

1. Working in conjunction with the council's Arts & Culture team, the city centre office will continue to develop its relationship with community event organisers, helping them produce safe and high-quality enjoyable events.

2. In the context of the city of Festivals initiative, the city centre office will continue to develop its relationship with Festival organisers and encourage the inclusion of the city centre in the development of festival programmes.
3. The city centre events co-ordinator will act as a point of contact and advice for event organisers and help ensure public safety for all events.
4. Continued support should be given to charity stalls and organisations wishing to use the city centre for fundraising or promotion.
5. The busking registration system should be sustained in principle according to the desires of the Safer York Partnership.

Priority 3: Working with organisers of larger events and specialist markets to improve the overall standard of events

1. The event co-ordinator will work alongside the markets team to address quality issues relating to content, goods on sale and the appearance of markets.
2. The event co-ordinator will work with festival and large-scale event organisers to help them develop and improve the offer of their own events programmes.
3. During this process, the events co-ordinator will identify areas, particularly in relation to visual impact, where resources made available by priority 1 could be spent supporting the improvement of non-city centre organised events.

Priority 4 : Developing new events

1. The city centre team should strive to respond to the findings of research by developing events which meet the interest of the public. In particular, art should be developed as an event platform and Renaissance York should be supported in their work to bring temporary and permanent lighting installations to the city.
2. The city centre team should work with the council's Arts & Culture team to use city centre events as a platform for developing the key actions listed in the community strategy. Opportunities for combined projects and efforts should be exploited as much as possible.

## **6 To develop quantitative processes for the long term operation of the city's events, including performance monitoring and review procedures**

New performance indicators should be established, in accordance with the council's usual protocols. These should assess performance in relation to quality, the number of events, the breadth of the programme's offer and include realistic income targets, with an agreed annual growth rate over a 3-5 year period. The indicators should reflect a planned growth of the programme content.

The programme should be reviewed periodically by the council and other key stakeholders.