

Report from the Executive Member for Leisure, Culture and Social Inclusion

This year promises to present the city with a wide range of opportunities in Leisure, Culture and Social Inclusion. The past year has seen an amazing range of events, activities, and programmes, some of which are listed below.

Leisure

Oaklands Gym

The facilities at the Oaklands Centre have been recognised this year when the gym received the first ever IFI mark in the country for having all our ancilliary facilities available to the disabled.

Pools

Work is now well underway at the Oaklands School site to provide a replacement for the much loved but aging Edmund Wilson Pool. Completion is set for autumn 2009. I am working with officers to ensure that the public understand that this is a public pool and not a school pool, as this is plainly key to the pool's success.

The revamp of Yearsley Pool has been a huge success with a substantial increase in visitor numbers.

Users April/May/June 07	25,534
Users April/May/June 08	34,396

% increase year on year 34.7%

We can also be proud as a city of the reduction in energy bills that have come about as a result of the changes to the plant room, walls and roof. It is my understanding that energy bills have been cut by more than half, with accompanying reductions in CO2 emissions.

The university has confirmed its commitment to a public pool on the university site and we are now working with the university to finalise exactly what will be built, where and when.

Climbing rocks

An initiative that will I trust be supported by all parties is the installation of climbing rocks at the Rawcliffe Country Park, with funding from a lottery award. While many primary school children are able to go away together on an adventure course for a few days during their final year before moving on to secondary school, not all parents can afford this. It is therefore to be welcomed that the city is developing its own adventure course closer to home. The tendency to remove all risk from children's activities cannot help their long term development and providing challenging activities such as the new climbing rocks will help to redress the balance.

Football

During the year the council reached an agreement with the Football Foundation on a programme to improve football pitches and expand provision across York. This will also see improvements to changing facilities to encourage participation in sport across the city.

While we have seen improvements in the participation rates in sport and exercise by young people, there is plainly much work to do for young and old alike, here in York as everywhere else. The city has recently indicated to government that it wishes to introduce free swimming for the over 60s. We have also expressed an interest in providing free swimming for under 16s. We are waiting to here is government funding will be sufficient to enable us to offer this.

Community Stadium

Last week the executive agreed to the immediate appointment of a project manager to develop and deliver a community stadium by 2012. It can only benefit the city to have clarity about where the stadium might be situated, what facilities it might contain, who might use it, how much it might cost, etc.

Active York

Active York was awarded the regional building capacity award by Sport England for being the best community sport association in the region. A.Y. has also been chosen by the National Association for Voluntary Community Action for a six month national pilot to work with CVS to support the voluntary sport sector. A.Y. is currently giving out the first tranches of funding for the young and gifted, and has been given funding to distribute to support young people's participation in sport. York is the only area where a Community sports Network has been given this responsibility.

Lastly, on sport: City has comfortably exceeded the target for young people (5-16) participating in at least 2 hours of high quality PE/School sports per week. We set ourselves a target of 87% by next year – we hit 90% a year early

Culture

It has been a very busy year culturally in York.

From the Illumination week last winter, with its fantastic use of the Minster for a new interactive lighting work; to the acclaimed York Youth Mysteries; the Grand Tour, with its outdoor exhibition of paintings across the city; and the numerous other events that have taken place across the city, the culture departments of the council have shown flair and imagination in making the most of the resources available to them. I have also been delighted to see the way in which CYC has worked with other organisations, such as Visit York, to create a vibrant environment that is attractive and exciting to residents and visitors alike, with initiatives such as City of Festivals and Making York More Eventful.

Culture is not just about events though. The Arts departments have worked hard to promote artistic activity among community groups, in our schools and in the many opportunities they provide for young people to participate in arts, theatre, dance and music. Earlier in the year I attended the launch of the York Arts Academy. The work on show demonstrated what our young people are capable of, with some stunning works of

art on display in the basement of the Merchant Adventurer's Hall, along with some engaging performances of early music, and works for string quartet and orchestra. The city's Music Manifesto, providing wider opportunities for young people to make music has to be welcomed.

To this work must be added the work officers are doing to advance the 2012 Cultural Olympiad, the Childrens Centre Arts Programme and the inter-partnership work on creating a cultural quarter for the city. All this contributes to the opportunities for the years ahead to showcase local talent and attract national and international talent to the city.

The York Youth Mysteries earlier in the year demonstrated this city's commitment to allowing new voices to present their responses to our traditional mystery play cycle. I believe this plays a vital role in ensuring that the plays will continue to be performed for many years into the future, both in their traditional form and in new ways that reflect contemporary response to these wonderful stories.

Major Events

Meetings have been held with Yorkshire Forward to explore what new major events might be hosted in York.

CYC and Universities

Officers and I are working with the universities to see how we might better promote the work of arts undergraduates and graduates in the city. With 500 arts graduates a year emerging from our universities it is clear we have a resource we need to champion both for cultural reasons and economics reasons. I believe this may offer us exciting ways of developing the evening economy and promoting our peripheral streets.

Cultural Quarter

Through the year I have had a number of meetings with the stakeholders in the Cultural Quarter. These include the National Railway Museum, the Minster, the Theatre Royal, the York Museums Trust, Visit York and others. It is clear that there is a recognition that team working offers a way for all those involved to communicate to funding bodies the coherence of the city's plan for the years ahead. I am happy to see this because York's cultural offer is vital to the economic success of the city. No city can rest on its laurels and assume that people will visit tomorrow because they visited yesterday. Planning new attractions and new ways of presenting our existing attractions is key to the cultural quarter initiative.

Big Screen

A number of meetings have been held over the past year to explore the viability of York being host to a Big Screen. The idea will now be included in the Options and Issues paper for the City Centre Action Plan. This has to be a good move, offering the opportunity to contribute to what residents tell us time and again that they want – a vibrant city. Obviously there has to be clarity not only about where such a screen might be situated but also what content it would show.

The Barbican

I am assured that the planning issues that had delayed progress on the refurbishment of the Barbican are all but resolved. There are two minor issues that should be sorted within days. I would then expect CYC to obtain from Absolute Leisure a firm date as to when the refurbishment will commence. I understand that Absolute Leisure are still confident that the works can be completed before Easter 2009.

Libraries

This has been an exciting and challenging year for libraries. York has shown just what can be achieved in modern library services by its refurbishment and redesign of the Acomb library. This has proved so successful that there is a continual struggle to maintain a large enough book stock at the library. Against a national backdrop of declining use of libraries, Acomb has seen usage figures treble, while adding a full adult education curriculum to activities in the building. We are increasing the numbers of new members at a rate considerably above the targets we have set ourselves, a result that puts us in the top 5 nationally, I understand. The new library at New Earswick follows the same template as the new Acomb Explore Library and, adjoining the school, provides adult education opportunities for residents. Since its re-opening visits are up 20% and issues up 30%.

Against that, we are now advancing plans to transform our central library. Here the numbers of visitors has declined and it is clear that we need to bring this building into line with what York residents now expect. To that end we are developing a £5m programme that will see this building bring together the best of the old and the new to create a space fit for the 21st century.

The Summer Reading Challenge this year saw 3,527 children participating – 20% of the 4-12 population, nationally in the top quartile. 2,200 people took part in the Big City Read initiative over the summer, reading the Railway Children, to co-incide with the very successful production of the play of the Railway Children, produced by a partnership of the NRM and the Theatre Royal (which drew an attendance of around 20,000 I understand).

A number of other initiatives, such as self-ticketing, will be trialled in our libraries in the months ahead to ensure that York is ahead of the game and that libraries across the city continue to thrive.

York's 3rd Literature Festival is planned for March 2009.

The Archives

The city archives, currently being reviewed by Richard Taylor who is on secondment from the NRM, have won funding for a project looking at the nuclear history of York in partnership with the bunker in Acomb.

Lastly on libraries, library subscription to ancestry.com now gives free access to the site for library members - over 40,000 hits so far. Our Family and Local History Librarian is offering sessions on starting family history and how to use ancestry

Parks & Open Spaces

York Parks continue to receive Green Flags in recognition of all the excellent work that goes into maintaining them (Rowntree park, Glen Gardens and West Bank park). I was able to attend the award ceremony at the Royal Armoury in Leeds last year and saw for myself the pride our parks teams have in the work they do.

It is hoped that the Rawcliffe Country Park will be next to reach the standard to win an award, and investment in the Hull Road park will reap dividends in the years ahead.

Allotments

We have record numbers of tenants on allotments this year (991 in August 2008) with a new CYC site at Strensall and support to the community site in Wheldrake, of which I am a proud tenant with tonnes of fresh vegetables to my name! The city has been awarded the Ackland Trophy by the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners.

Looking forward this coming year will see the production of the first comprehensive pack of leaflets promoting the city's parks and gardens. All main sites will have full colour leaflets packed with useful information for visitors, produced in consultation with the friends/relevant community groups.

Social Inclusion

This is a new addition to my portfolio. Over the past year the following has been achieved:

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- The single corporate equality scheme for July 2008-July 2009 is now in place. This builds on and updates Pride in Our Communities- The Equality Strategy 2005-8
- A programme of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) of key Council strategies is progressing as planned. Resulting EIAs will be considered at an EIAs Fair to take place under the auspices of the Social Inclusion Working Group in November 2008. Findings will be fed in the service planning process.
- Upward 1,500 members of staff have received Equality and Inclusion training
- We are in the process of recruiting a corporate Equality Data Project Officer.
- Public engagement in the Social Inclusion Working Group has been extended to include "expert witnesses"

Since June we have made progress on organising with partners a Holocaust Memorial Day to commemorate the suffering of all those who have been victims of genocides around the world during the past century, as a way of remembering the tragedies in our pasts and focussing our minds on avoiding repeating the same mistakes in the future..

Credit Crunch Event.

I have been working with officers to put a multi-agency event on in the Guildhall later this year, to which residents will be able to come to receive help and advice on many of the issues that impact on them as a result of the credit crunch: from benefits advice to help with energy efficiency, from help on reducing household bills to conflict resolution and mediations, and so on.

Valuing People Partnership and Social inclusion Working Group

These organisations are currently involved in enabling a diverse group of residents across the city, including those with learning difficulties or physical disabilities, and a variety of minority groups to participate in and contribute to the Local Development Framework. It is important to broaden the number of residents who have the opportunity to contribute to these documents that will shape the development of this city in the years to come.

Conclusion

I want to thank all the many officers who have worked so hard, with energy and enthusiasm and vision, to improve cultural and leisure provision across the city, and to thank the officers who work hard to steer us towards being a more socially inclusive council and city. It is a privilege to work with you all.

Christian Vassie

Executive member for Leisure, Culture and Social Inclusion.

16th September 2008