

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD**

**12 January 2009**

**Report of the Chief Leisure Officer and the  
Cabinet Member for Leisure, Youth & Arts**

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken  
by the Cabinet Member)**

**1 TONBRIDGE CASTLE FESTIVAL OF MUSIC & FIREWORKS**

**Summary**

**This report updates Members on the proposed programme for this summer's event, including initiatives to reduce the cost of the Festival to the Council.**

**1.1 Background**

1.1.1 Members will be aware that Tonbridge Castle Festival of Music & Fireworks was one of a number of service areas considered by Cabinet for review at the beginning of last year. A saving of £4,000 on the Council's revenue budget was agreed, bringing the overall cost of the event to the Council down to £14,000. It was also agreed that the Council should test the market, in addition to seeking a proposal from the current promoters, Musical Associates, who have successfully delivered the event to a high standard since the Millennium.

**1.2 Review of Market**

1.2.1 Members will be aware that the promotion of outdoor concerts is a high risk business and there are, therefore, a limited number of companies in the market. The number of companies interested in an event at Tonbridge Castle is limited further, due to the relatively low capacity levels, and the type of event required by the Council. The current state of the economy has not helped this scenario, with the collapse of two companies within the industry in the last few months. Of the three companies approached, two were interested but not for an event in 2009, and the other was not taking on any new business.

1.2.2 Discussions have taken place with Musical Associates, and the company has responded positively to the challenge of exploring ways to reduce further the Council's subsidy of the Festival, whilst continuing to deliver a high quality event.

### 1.3 Proposals for 2009

1.3.1 It is proposed that the Council retains the services of Musical Associates for 2009 and the format of a three day open-air picnic style event with each performance ending with a firework display remains the same. Proposed new initiatives include:

- Earlier promotion of the event, starting in March 2009.
- Increasing capacity from 1,600 to 1,800 (in liaison with the Council's Health and Safety Officer) on Friday and Saturday night by not allowing tables.
- The addition of a matinee children's performance on Sunday.
- An earlier performance start time on Sunday evening.
- The option of an additional Thursday evening performance to be sold as a corporate function.
- Opportunities to increase secondary spend during the performances.

1.3.2 With regard to the programme for 2009, the following has been proposed by Musical Associates for consideration by Members:

Friday, 10 July 2009	The Bandit Beatles supported by Abba Magic
Saturday, 11 July 2009	Summer Nights
Sunday, 12 July 2009	The Magic of Motown *Includes music from The Four Tops, The Temptations, The Jacksons, Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder.
Sunday 12 July 2009	The Tales of Peter Rabbit

### 1.4 Community Involvement

1.4.1 To maintain involvement by the community in the Festival programme, it is proposed that in addition to West Kent College, other schools in the Borough be offered the chance to showcase some of their talented musicians. This would give their students the opportunity to use the professional equipment required to run the Festival and broaden their appeal with local community.

### 1.5 Sunday Matinee Performance

1.5.1 In order to help make the event more commercially viable, and to offer something new to children, it was suggested a children themed matinee performance be included as part of the Festival programme. Having researched this market, Musical Associates proposed debuting The Tales of Peter Rabbit. This show features brand new songs, with beautifully designed scenery and costumes, and brings the famous books to life in a new and exciting way. It is anticipated that the performance would commence at 1pm and be marketed as a picnic style event for

young families. The matinee would be finished by 3.30pm therefore allowing time for a Magic of Motown sound check before the evening's event.

- 1.5.2 This show is currently touring at theatres throughout the UK and Tonbridge Castle would be its first open-air performance. Tickets for this production are selling at £17 (adults) and £10 (children).

## 1.6 Corporate Function

- 1.6.1 Negotiations have taken place with the John Lewis Partnership to run a corporate event for its staff on the Thursday evening. Due to the economic climate the Company has been unable to commit to the event in 2009, but hope to reconsider the matter for the following year. The company employ a number of local people at its distribution depot in Aylesford and in local stores, and wish to purchase a block of tickets this year (in the region of 200) to gauge interest amongst its employees. Members will be pleased to note that a separate corporate membership arrangement has also been agreed with the company for membership of the Council's leisure centres and also Poult Wood Golf Centre.

## 1.7 Ticket Prices

- 1.7.1 The pricing structure for tickets at this event has remained the same since the initial Festival took place during the Millennium celebrations. Based on past trends, both the Friday and Saturday night performances have sold well in advance of the event taking place. Traditionally Sunday night has proved harder to reach capacity sales as many people have to go to work the next day. For 2009 it is proposed that the Sunday evening performance starts earlier (7pm), therefore finishing earlier and hopefully attracting larger numbers.

- 1.7.2 Following consultation with Musical Associates the proposed charges are as follows:

1 – 31 March Early Bird Special Offers	1 May – 9 July	10,11,12 July <i>*subject to availability</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £21.00 adults</li> <li>• £16.50 child</li> <li>• £13.50 Leisure Pass holders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £24.50 adults</li> <li>• £18.50 child</li> <li>• £15.50 Leisure Pass holders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *£27.50 adults</li> <li>• *£20.00.00 child</li> <li>• *£17.50 Leisure Pass holders</li> </ul>

- 1.7.3 The proposals represent a minimal increase on 2008 ticket prices, and retain the pricing policy of discounts to encourage early bookings. The three day Festival pass ticket will be available for the first month of ticket sales only. This will be priced at £59. The arrangement with the promoters regarding Leisure Pass holders will remain as in previous years. The proposed prices remain competitive in relation to similar events run by Musical Associates and other events in the local area.

## **1.8 Customer Feedback**

1.8.1 After last year's event, the Council consulted with people who had been to the Festival to obtain feedback. The overriding response was that the Festival was an excellent event, well organised and an extremely enjoyable experience with many questioned coming back year on year. Useful operational feedback included the following comments:

- More toilet facilities required.
- Additional lighting needed on site when leaving the Castle Grounds
- Earlier notice of when tickets go on sale
- Consider group discount rate or higher discount rate for children
- Improve box office online facility

These comments were raised in a recent meeting with Musical Associates and will be actioned in advance of this year's event.

## **1.9 Legal Implications**

1.9.1 The Council has powers to undertake this activity by virtue of Section 145 of the Local Government Act 1972. The contract with Musical Associates has been drawn up in agreement with the Council's Legal Services.

## **1.10 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.10.1 Following the review, the Council's subsidy for the event has been reduced to £12,000 and it is hoped that this can be reduced further, due to an income share arrangement for ticket sales over an agreed threshold included within the contract. This saving, together with the previous saving achieved on last year's event, represents a 33% reduction on the overall cost of the event to the Council since 2006 with no reduction in quality. The Leisure Pass holder ticket price ensures fair access for all. The promoters have public liability insurance cover of £5 million.

## **1.11 Risk Assessment**

1.11.1 A risk assessment and detailed Event Safety Plan for the Festival is undertaken on an annual basis in liaison with the Council's Health and Safety Officer. The contractor providing the firework display also has public liability insurance of £5 million. Musical Associates produce its own Health and Safety documents for the event, and employ external security staff to be on site over the weekend.

## **1.12 Policy Considerations**

1.12.1 Healthy Lifestyles, Community, Customer Contact, Communications.

### 1.13 Recommendations

1.13.1 It is **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that the proposed programme, charges and arrangements for the 2009 Festival of Music and Fireworks as outlined in the report be agreed.

The Chief Leisure Officer confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

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T.2/9/1

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