

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

22 September 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 this year's Festival of Music & Fireworks organised by promoters Musical Associates (Concerts) Ltd in partnership with the Council, and outlines some initial considerations for the event in 2010.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Members will be aware that this year Tonbridge Castle Festival of Music & Fireworks celebrated its tenth anniversary. To mark this achievement, new acts were introduced into the line up which included the Bandit Beatles on Friday evening, and the Magic of Motown on the Sunday.

1.1.2 At the 19 May 2009 meeting of this Board, Members agreed a number of changes to the 2009 Festival in order to address customer feedback and reduce the overall cost of the Festival to the Council. In summary, these changes were as follows:

- introduction of online booking facility
- increase audience capacity from 1,600 to 1,800 each night
- not allowing tables into the concert arena (to enable greater dance floor space)
- an earlier finishing time for Sunday night.

1.2 Ticket Sales

1.2.1 Tickets for the event went on sale in April. Tickets were available to purchase through an online booking facility, and members of the public could also ring a dedicated hotline number. Both these facilities were arranged by Musical Associates to enable one box office for all its concerts nationwide.

1.2.2 Despite the current economic climate and a number of outdoor concerts nationally being cancelled, I am sure Members will be delighted to learn that there continues to be strong support from the community for the event with total ticket sales exceeding those in 2008 by 17%. Total number of tickets sold for each performance were as follows:

Friday 10 July	Party on the Lawn	1,591
Saturday 11 July	Summer Nights	1,446
Sunday 12 July	Magic of Motown	1,716

1.2.3 All three nights were well received, with Sunday night's Magic of Motown performance proving to be extremely popular. This was delivered to a very high standard by the artists and musicians involved. The performance was professionally choreographed and the costumes were outstanding. These elements helped create a fantastic evening's entertainment which was enjoyed by all. Public feedback has already indicated a high demand for this show to form part of the line up for the event in 2010.

1.3 Public Consultation

1.3.1 A questionnaire has been sent to a sample of those who attended each night of the Festival. A lot of positive feedback was received and a summary of results can be found in **[Annex 1]**. As well as highlighting what went well, this process will also help determine any areas which require improvement. Areas which have already been discussed with the Promoters include:

- Technical issues with website (including booking fees and terms and conditions)
- Availability of box office facility at Tonbridge Castle
- Quality of performance from the Bandit Beatles compared to other acts
- Sound quality on Saturday compared to other evenings
- Early finish to Sunday's performance meant lack of impact re firework display

1.4 Proposals for 2010

1.4.1 A debrief meeting with the Promoters has already taken place which was attended by the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Youth and Arts. The Promoters were made fully aware of the financial pressures facing the Council, and that this will be a key issue in considering an event for next year. The Promoters are keen to deliver a Festival at Tonbridge Castle in July 2010 and discussions took place regarding potential content for next year's programme. It was felt that if the event proceeded Friday night should remain as Party Night but content could be

changed to incorporate a “Back to the 80s” show featuring songs from The Human League, Belinda Carlisle, Heaven 17, ABC and T-Pau.

- 1.4.2 It was suggested that the Summer Nights concert be removed from the Festival programme, and that the Motown performance be changed to the Saturday night. This would allow a new show to be introduced into the line up. The Promoters currently own the rights to “The Music of Queen, A Rock and Symphonic Spectacular” based on the successful West End Show We Will Rock You. The Promoters are investigating whether the Queen show and the Back to the 80s show could be adapted for Tonbridge Castle given the size of the budget and the stage. The Queen show currently uses a 60-piece symphony orchestra.
- 1.4.3 A key element of the debrief meeting with the promoters was to continue to reduce the cost of the Festival to the Council, with the future aim of achieving at least break even. A number of options are already being considered, which will be reported to a future meeting of this Board, including:
- Afternoon matinee performance.
 - Review of ticket prices including introduction of a family ticket.
 - Placement of a titled sponsor.
 - Sales/sampling including specialist local companies.

1.5 Way Forward

- 1.5.1 The Festival received a two page feature, full of positive comment, in the Courier newspaper the week after the event. This, and the community support shown in ticket sales, highlights the importance of the event to local residents. The event has now become an established part of this Council’s arts programme.
- 1.5.2 A good working relationship has now been established with the Promoters, who have been tasked with submitting proposals on how to make the event more commercially viable for the Council in the future.

1.6 Legal Implications

- 1.6.1 The Council has powers to undertake this activity by virtue of Section 145 of the Local Government Act 1972. The contract with Musical Associates (Concerts) Ltd has been drawn up in agreement with the Acting Chief Solicitor.

1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.7.1 Following the changes introduced in advance of this year’s Festival, the overall cost of the Festival to the Council in 2009 was within the 2009/10 revenue budget (£12,000).

1.8 Risk Assessment

- 1.8.1 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.

1.9 Policy Considerations

- 1.9.1 Healthy Lifestyles, Community, Customer Contact, Communications

1.10 Recommendation

- 1.10.1 It is, therefore, **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that the success of the 2009 Festival of Music and Fireworks be noted, and a detailed report be submitted to a future meeting of the Board on proposals for 2010, incorporating measures to reduce the cost of the Festival to the Council.

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

Background papers:

contact: Lyndsey Bennett

Nil

Robert Styles
Chief Leisure Officer

Martin Coffin
Cabinet Member for Leisure, Youth & Arts