

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

15 March 2010

Report of the Chief Leisure Officer

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 ARTS AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Summary

This report updates Members on key areas of the arts and tourism development work programme, including the Heart of Kent, the new Tonbridge Arts Festival and Heritage Open Days.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Members will be aware that the majority of arts and tourism work is delivered in partnership with others. The Heart of Kent, which in 2009 celebrated its 21st anniversary, is a tourism partnership between the five West Kent authorities of Ashford Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Tonbridge and Malling.
- 1.1.2 Tonbridge Arts Festival, a new and exciting venture for the town, is being co-ordinated by West Kent College, Hillview School for Girls (Performing Arts College), Tonbridge Library and Tonbridge School. The Borough Council supports the event through Officer time and provides in kind support via use of various Council owned venues such as Tonbridge Castle and the Angel Centre.
- 1.1.3 Heritage Open Days is a national scheme organised by English Heritage. Locally it is delivered by the Borough Council with assistance from The Malling Society and Tonbridge Civic Society.

1.2 Heart of Kent

- 1.2.1 The 2010 Heart of Kent holiday guide was successfully launched at the business networking event held at Finchcocks Musical Museum last December. This year's guide comprises of 240 places to stay ranging from hotels, inns, bed and breakfast establishments as well as self catering apartments and caravan and camping accommodation. The guide also includes 100 attractions to visit across the West Kent region as well as listing numerous events due to take place throughout the year. 80,000 (including 10,000 multi lingual version) copies of the guide are produced annually which are distributed nationally and internationally to

relevant Heart of Kent target markets. An online booking service is also available for visitors wishing to book accommodation in the Heart of Kent region.

1.2.2 Other activities undertaken by the Heart of Kent to promote the area as an attractive holiday destination include advertising, PR and exhibition campaigns.

1.2.3 Earlier this year, all Heart of Kent businesses were sent a questionnaire to complete based on how they rated the value of service provided by the partnership. The results were extremely positive. When asked “how would you rate the following types of tourism services or support provided by the Heart of Kent”, the following elements were rated by Heart of Kent businesses as excellent, good or satisfactory:

- Holiday Guide 95%
- Website 82%
- Marketing and promotion of the destination by Heart of Kent 77%
- Support of the Tourist Information Centres 75%
- e-newsletter 63%
- Updating of information on the Visit Britain website 50%
- Business networking events 50%

1.2.4 63% of Heart of Kent businesses stated that the tourism services provided by the Heart of Kent had greatly or moderately assisted their business.

1.2.5 When asked “which elements of the current Heart of Kent tourism services bring you additional business” Heart of Kent businesses replied as follows:

- Holiday Guide 89%
- Website 78%
- Participation in Visit Kent/TSE campaigns 21%

1.3 Tonbridge Arts Festival

1.3.1 Plans for the new Festival are progressing well. A Committee has been established with representatives from West Kent College, Tonbridge School, Tonbridge Library and Hillview Performing Arts College. The Borough Council is also represented on the Committee, fulfilling the role of secretary. The event will take place between 15-24 October using the venues of the organisations involved. Three sub groups have been created to help formulate the programme and to ensure the relevant personnel and expertise are in regular contact. The sub groups are:

- Literary (story telling, script-writing, poetry)
- Performing Arts (music, dance, drama, comedy)
- Visual Arts (film, photography, sculpture, drawing, painting and printmaking)

- 1.3.2 Comedian, compere and playwright Arthur Smith has agreed to be patron of the Festival. Festival organisers aim to include performances by both high profile artists and local community groups. Some events will be ticketed and others free of charge. Applications for funding have been submitted to Kent Arts Investment Fund, Arts Council and Grassroots. West Kent College students are in the process of creating a website for the event.
- 1.3.3 Ambitious plans for the Festival include a Tonbridge “plinth”, music competition inviting people to create an anthem for Tonbridge (performed by massed bands/choir), creation of a giant painting (20 ft x 15 ft) in town centre, panels to be completed by schools and members of the public, Tonbridge Has Talent competition and various literary events such as open mic poetry nights and author visits from Victoria Hislop and Anthony Horowitz. Other proposals include a costumed Jane Austen walk, Ghost Story tours and a talk from the scriptwriter/author of the Tonbridge Heist Film.

1.4 Heritage Open Days

- 1.4.1 Organised by English Heritage, Heritage Open Days celebrates England’s fantastic architecture and culture by offering free access to properties that are usually closed to the public or normally charge for admission. It is a once-a-year chance to discover hidden architectural treasures and enjoy a wide range of tours, events and activities which bring to life local history and culture. In order to be included in national marketing for the event, properties must be registered with English Heritage by 1 May 2010.
- 1.4.2 This year’s event will take place during the weekend of Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 September and will once again be linked with Tonbridge Castle Medieval Fair. A leaflet listing all local properties participating in the scheme will be produced in July.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 Chief Officers represented on the Heart of Kent partnership sign up to a Memorandum of Understanding on an annual basis.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 The Heart of Kent holiday guide is self financing through income from advertisers, entries in places to visit section as well as membership fees for accommodation providers.

1.6.2 A contribution of £2,000 has been made from the arts programme budget towards the development of the Tonbridge Art Festival and to help attract match funding from external sources.

1.7 Risk Assessment

1.7.1 The Heart of Kent partnership has a formalised risk assessment which can be viewed on request.

1.7.2 Policy Considerations

1.7.3 Community, Healthy Lifestyles.

Background papers:

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Nil

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