

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW 2008/09: FOCUS GROUP**

**LINK TO WORK PROGRAMME: POLICY DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW**

**Report of the City Solicitor**

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: SP1: Creating a prosperous city, SP2: Extending cultural opportunities, SP7: Developing an attractive and accessible city**

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CIO4: Improving partnership working to deliver 'One City.'**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with detailed information from the recent focus group held with venue promoters and owners in the city as part of the Policy Review 'A Place to Play – A Review of Music Venues in Sunderland.'

**2. Background**

- 2.1 A series of focus groups are to be arranged with various music performance stakeholders in Sunderland to gain evidence and information about venues in and around the city. The first of these focus groups was arranged for 30<sup>th</sup> October 2008 with venue promoters and owners. A number of promoters and owners were invited to attend the focus group and discuss with members of the review committee their own experiences of music performance and venues in Sunderland.

**3. The Focus Group**

- 3.1 The focus group was well attended and provided an interesting discussion around music venues in Sunderland. The attached appendix provides a full breakdown of the discussions for member's information and below are listed some of the main points and common themes that came from the discussions:

- All venues run in a similar way with a good location, decent facilities, recognition and good transport links and in Sunderland a good venue would be ideally located in the city centre.
- In any city there is a need for a range of venues in varying sizes to cater for all types of band and music performance.
- One of the major barriers for music promoters is getting information about gigs out to potential audiences. Cost of any promotion is a major factor.
- A poster-point in city centre to promote live music and gigs to allow bands to post adverts about future gigs in the city.

#### **4. Conclusions**

- 4.1 The focus group was informative and provided some useful information for the review committee and will feed into the policy review along with the views and opinions of other stakeholders.

#### **5. Recommendations**

- 5.1 That members note the content of the report and that the evidence gathered is used within the final policy review report of the Culture and Leisure Review Committee.

**SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL  
CULTURE AND LEISURE REVIEW COMMITTEE**

**A PLACE TO PLAY – A REVIEW OF MUSIC VENUES IN SUNDERLAND**

FOCUS GROUP

30.10.08

Present: Cllrs Jim Scott, T Martin and P Gibson.

Also in attendance: Nigel Cummings (Review Coordinator), Jessica Bell (Arts Development Officer), Paul Smiles (Owner – Independent), Ben Wall (Independent), Alan Wall (Contract Manager Northern), Kenny Sanger (Promoter), Alan Humes (Sunderland Student Union), Ben Lowes (Promoter), Richard Hodson (Promoter – The Campus), Lisa Armstrong (Accountant) and Steven Langley (Promoter).

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**What makes a good music venue?**

All music venues are run in a similar way and they all need a good location, decent facilities, recognition and good transport links to ensure that people will go and in Sunderland a good venue would be ideally located in the city centre.

One off events like the Radio 1 event will always attract huge crowds due to the calibre of performer. People will travel for this type of event, but on a regular week in week out basis city centre would be best.

Easy to promote well known bands – sell themselves, it is the less well known bands that need more promoting and venues like Independent and The Campus are good venues for live music.

**Do you think Sunderland has the right mix of venues to cater for the city in relation to music styles, audiences and locations?**

In any city there is a need for a range of venues in varying sizes to cater for all types of band and music performance.

There are good venues in Sunderland already including The Empire, Independent and The Campus.

Stadium of Light is a fantastic venue but will only cater for the really big bands – but what it does is put Sunderland on the music tour map with other groups and promoters.

Many venues are pubs and these are commercial concerns and only interested in profits and these are ultimately through bar takings.

The City needs something different. There are a lot of bands in Sunderland who want to play venues of a certain calibre.

### **Could Sunderland benefit from a new venue in the city, is there a demand?**

Need to look at how long it would take to have something in the city, need to be taking a long term view at the next 20 years. Also important to have satellite venues to any main venue and good established transport links.

Important that a new venue is multi-purpose and can cater for pop/rock, choral, acoustic and various other music performance styles.

Any new venue needs to be used and for this to happen it needs to be accessible and affordable to all potential audiences within the city.

Sunderland audiences travel to Newcastle to see bands play and Sunderland has a potentially larger catchment area. The Stadium of Light gigs featuring Oasis and Take That will ensure good publicity for the city. Sunderland venues need to build a reputation as a place to play.

Any new venue cannot open and immediately be a success it takes time to build the reputation as a venue and develop contacts before gaining recognition and success. The Cluny in Newcastle is a good example took 15 years to develop recognition but now reaping the rewards.

### **How easy is it for music performers to get a gig and play in Sunderland? Is it easier to promote certain genres of music?**

It all depends on the type/size of venue required. It is very easy to play a small venue as there are a number of smaller venues, such as pubs and bars, so much so that performers can pick and choose where they play, ultimately it is the quality that suffers.

There is not a network of support for promoters.

It can be difficult to promote certain genres. The White Room put jazz performers on for a number of years and these events were totally reliant on the city's overseas students to keep it going. For certain types of music full venues can not be guaranteed.

Difficulty for younger groups pre-18 to perform and see music as much of this is in bars, clubs and pubs which limits the choice for younger people.

### **Is there a healthy audience in Sunderland for music?**

There is a demand for music and gigs, but again this needs to be accessible with good transport links. Also the city can be perceived as a no-go area for older people on an

evening. Need to develop a wider audience base, provide choices for older and younger music goer.

### **How easy is it to advertise music gigs in Sunderland?**

The Sunderland Echo does not do enough to promote gigs and music events in Sunderland. It is very difficult to get listing in the Sunderland Echo or Magazines.

Could have a poster-point in city centre to promote live music and gigs to allow bands to post adverts about future gigs in the city. These have been successfully used in Liverpool, Leeds and London. This could be administered by the Sunderland Music Forum to ensure that it is not misused but would provide a focal point for music gigs in the city.

Potential to advertise gigs in local libraries, tourist information centre and Sunderland Museums is something that could be explored by the review committee along with other mediums including council publications and website.

### **What are the barriers for music promoting and performing in Sunderland?**

Difficulty for younger groups pre-18 to perform and see music as much of this is in bars, clubs and pubs which limits the choice for younger people.

Schools can offer the opportunity for young people to practice and perform music. School halls are purpose built to play however no 'cred' for playing in own school want to play somewhere different and more trendy.

One of the major barriers for music promoters is getting information about gigs out to potential audiences. Cost of any promotion is a major factor.

The only dedicated city centre practice space is The Bunker and the effects of the credit crunch and facilities in schools are having an adverse reaction. Particularly with young bands cost and access to rehearsal facilities is important and will simply move out of the city as more and more schools open to the community.