

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL SERVICES**

**DEVELOPING MUSIC IN SUNDERLAND**

**1.0 WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO THE COMMITTEE?**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information relating to the development of Music in Sunderland through a proposed 5 year strategy.
- 1.2 The work of the Culture & Leisure Review Committee in considering this report will support the Council in achieving its Strategic Priorities of a Prosperous, Attractive and Accessible City. The Committee's work contributes to the Council's Corporate Improvement Priorities C101 (Delivering customer focussed services) and C104 (improving partnerships working to deliver 'One City').

**2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In March 2008 Brian Debnam Ltd was commissioned by Sunderland City Council to undertake a process of consultation with the local and regional music community, local authorities and regional agencies in order to develop a strategy for Music.
- 2.2 The brief asked the consultants to examine whether Sunderland could claim the title of a 'Music City'; either now or at some point in the future.
- 2.3 During March, April and May 2008 the consultancy team of Brian Debnam and Craig Wilson supported by Practice Administrator, Jenny Dewar, undertook extensive one to one consultancy interviews with representatives of Sunderland's music community and, officers and councillors from Sunderland City Council and other North East local authorities, officers from regional economic development and music agencies.
- 2.4 The work of the consultants has been supported by fortnightly meetings with a steering group that has comprised Zoë Channing, Jessica Bell, Peter Brewis, Steven Auster, Sean Taylor and Kari Vickers.
- 2.5 Desk research was undertaken to determine the nature of cities that were publicly acknowledged to have a 'Music City' status. Further research was undertaken into music provision in Portsmouth, Southampton, Nottingham and Hull; cities with similar geographic or demographic characteristics.
- 2.6 Further public consultation was held at the Stadium of Light on 19 May 2008 where preliminary findings of the research were shared with over

50 attendees, and discussions held on the opportunities for key initiatives.

- 2.7 The consultants have produced a report presenting their research and the conclusions they have drawn including a five year strategy for the development of music in Sunderland.

### **3.0 CURRENT POSITION - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

“Older than the written word, for millennia live music has provided a means to convey the hopes, desires and aspirations of one generation to the next. For many it underlines our very sense of self and sits at the heart of our national identity. It is the foundation of our music industry and has an audience unrivalled in its passion and enthusiasm”.<sup>1</sup>

#### **3.2 A growing market for live music**

A recent study by Mintel indicates that, in 2007, the UK live music market was worth over £700 million in ticket sales alone, which is up by eight per cent on 2006. According to Mintel’s surveys, the proportion of adults attending live music concerts grew by almost one-fifth between 2001 and 2006, from 32 per cent to 38 per cent.

#### **3.3 Music’s role in Regeneration**

There is an increasing belief in the power of music to contribute to whole school development and community regeneration. Buildings and public spaces provided for music and its audiences create iconic symbols of a community’s aspirations and physical regeneration.

A recent survey conducted on behalf of Youth Music revealed that

- 92% of projects assisted the behavioural needs of young people by building respect, confidence and self esteem
- 74% assisted with learning or training needs, increasing young people’s ability to learn and the value they place on learning or training.
- 60% specifically reported assisting literacy and language skills.
- 83% reported they had created aspirations among young people.

As a proven contributor to physical and social regeneration, educational attainment and economic and community development it is no surprise that many cities have used positive policies in music development to raise their profile and establish their image, attract inward investment and build community cohesion.

#### **3.4 Music Cities**

Several cities in the USA and UK have gained recognition as Music Cities through a combination of venues, festivals, education,

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<sup>1</sup>DCMS: Survey of Live Music in England and Wales in 2007 BMRB Social Research Pg 5

community and music development strategies, commercial music activity building on the reputations of local musicians who have become household names and a local music scene which provides a critical mass of music activity which makes the city attractive to music students, tourists and cultural industry investment.

The Visit Britain website lists London, Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Cardiff Edinburgh, Newcastle/Gateshead, Leeds and Brighton in this category. Some smaller towns and cities have built on local musical specialisms with tourism based strategies to enter other top ten lists; Clarksdale Mississippi “The Home of The Blues” despite a local population of 20,000 and Austin Texas, through a major music industry convention, are two such examples.

The more obvious large scale cities of New York, Los Angeles and Detroit enter such lists through sheer scale and New Orleans, Memphis and Nashville through tradition and specialisation. Vienna, Salzburg, Paris, Barcelona, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Sydney and Johannesburg are equally acknowledged for music traditions, famous residents and critical mass on lists, which are less UK-or US-centric.

A benchmark study of UK Cities with similar populations and geographical characteristic has drawn comparisons with Nottingham, Hull, Southampton and Portsmouth.

### 3.5 **Sunderland as a Music City?**

Alongside these acknowledged music cities, it is understandable that Sunderland demonstrates a number of weaknesses, which would make claiming such a title - in the short term - premature. A limited stock of appropriate specialist venues for music, limited music festival development, a music service lacking the resources for out of school ensemble opportunities, a limited number of local promoters for music and an historic lack of a strategy for music development whilst being amongst those weaknesses provide the key opportunities for development in the future. The benchmark comparators also show that Sunderland is currently behind potential competitors.

### 3.6 **Collaboration and the Music Forum**

Many people in Sunderland are passionate about music; the city has committed groups of both amateur and professional musicians and enthusiasts that drive its provision of music on all nights of the week and in venues both large and small. There is a sense of community in Sunderland; musicians work with each other willingly and there is a healthy cross-pollination of ideas. The recent formation of a Music Forum, which was initiated by people active in the Youth and Popular Music sector, provides the platform for a body that can represent all styles of music and has the potential to build a Music Development Agency that can attract partnership funding and expertise to lead Sunderland towards its goal of music city recognition.

### 3.7 **Partnership**

Amongst people engaged in the regeneration and commercial redevelopment of Sunderland, there is much enthusiasm for, and acknowledgement of the positive role that music can play. There appear to be many organisations locally, regionally and nationally, prepared to work in partnership with Sunderland City Council to support a strategic approach to the development of music. The City Council will need to improve its partnership working capacity and decision making timeframes to take advantage of such opportunities.

### 3.8 **Festivals**

Sunderland has started to invest in infrastructure, which could provide an important boost to music in the city. The development of infrastructure for large scale festivals at Herrington Park provides the opportunity for national and regional promoters to work in partnership with the City Council to provide the city with a new major festival. However commercial promoters will seek substantial underwriting of risk from the City Council, given the uncertain track record of such events in the North East region, national competition and the uncertainty of the weather. Alternatively the City Council could work with existing regional partners to enhance and develop existing festivals such as Evolution into a genuine large scale regional festival.

There are considerable opportunities to work with local partners for the development of smaller local festivals that feature local and visiting musicians building on the success of existing events such as the International Friendship Festival, the Big Band Festival, Houghton Feast and Music in the Minster as well as building specialist Popular Music, Folk, Jazz, World and BME festivals to animate the centre of the city.

The development of appropriate spaces within forthcoming upgrades of city centre urban streetscape to allow busking, small music concerts and events could contribute significantly to changing existing negative perceptions of the city centre.

### 3.9 **Venue Infrastructure**

Further infrastructure opportunities may be offered by the redevelopment of the Manor Quays building at the University, the possibility of the development of a Carling Academy style of venue in partnership with the commercial sector and the redevelopment of heritage buildings (such as Trinity Church and the Athenaeum) to provide specialist space for music within the City. The building of a major sports hall development next to the new 50 metre pool on the Stadium of Light site may provide the opportunity for smaller scale arena style music events seating up to 4000 people at a single performance.

New venues such as the Place in Sunnyside are about to open and the city's plans for the development of a cultural quarter around its existing investment in the City Library, Contemporary Art Gallery and Museum

provide new opportunities for Music in the City. There is concern in many quarters that the city does not have an alcohol free venue for young audiences of popular music.

The City Council should consider undertaking a comprehensive audit of its existing and potential capital stock (including spaces in educational facilities) alongside an assessment of the regional and local market for the performing arts and music before committing to its next stage of capital investment.

### **3.10 Recording Facilities**

There is also plenty of state-of-the-art equipment in the city - recording studios, digital music software and new instruments - partly as a result of Government spending priorities in the past few years. Sunderland's three performing arts schools, the City Learning Centre, the Bunker, University of Sunderland and Sunderland City College can all provide modern recording and rehearsal facilities. Unfortunately the expertise and equipment do not always match up, as funding for staff can be minimal and therefore the facilities are often under used.

Rehearsal facilities for young musicians are also under provided. The possible demise of the Bunker, for redevelopment, would seriously impact on the capacity for the popular music sector to find adequate rehearsal space.

### **3.11 Regional Competition**

Clearly there are a number of established regional competitors for audience, funding and profile.

The music scene in Newcastle/Gateshead benefits from a wide range of specialist venues at all scales from the Sage Gateshead to the Cluny and from a Carling Academy, Metro Arena, City Hall and Tyne Theatre to many small specialist venues in theatres, pubs and community venues where live music is regularly promoted. Newcastle and Northumbria Universities run specialist music courses as does Newcastle College. The University Unions are active music promoters. There is a vibrant network of specialist festivals including classical, early music, jazz, world music, blues and folk. Larger festivals such as Evolution (May Bank Holiday weekend) are firmly established and supported by local authority and regional funding. There is a strong network of local and regional promoting organisations and individuals prepared to take risks, attract partnership funding and develop audiences. Newcastle/Gateshead benefits from the presence of several regional music agencies with office space and networks with the city centre.

Music promoters take advantage of the large student audience for smaller lower priced performances in small venues – over 20 individual promoters are active in Newcastle/Gateshead.

Teesside has developed a Music Development Agency for rock, popular and a classical music promotion; Middlesbrough Music Live is a 10 stage, free event that attracts around 20,000 people to the city centre at the beginning of June. The event is supported by the local authority, regional agencies and sponsors.

Durham provides limited music programme through the Gala Theatre but also provides a range of specialist music events through the Cathedral, University and other historic buildings. Brass Music is strong in County Durham and the new Durham County authority is developing a strategic lead on Brass Band music for the region.

### 3.12 **Sunderland Audiences**

The geographical spread of Sunderland's communities into the three zones of Sunderland City, Washington and Houghton/Hetton and the transport infrastructure that links them provides a number of barriers for the development of audiences for music in Sunderland. For instance bus fares from Washington Centre to Sunderland City Centre are twice the price of a fare into Newcastle discouraging a strong identification of young audiences with their local authority area for enjoying a night time economy.

Sunderland University provides a large number of local people with opportunities for Higher Education, many of them mature students. Its student profile is further characterised by a strong contingent from Asia to whom the heavy drinking culture associated with a large number of music events is alien.

As a result of these transport and demographic factors, young audiences in Sunderland's city centre are smaller in quantity than those normally associated with a major University and a city of Sunderland's scale.

As a result audiences for popular music in Sunderland appear to be less progressive than their counterparts in Newcastle/Gateshead preferring a diet of cover bands and familiar music to new original music. New young bands struggle to attract audiences

However the success of the Empire's programme of West End Musicals in attracting regional audiences (60% from outside SR and DH Sunderland Postcodes) has shown that audiences will travel to Sunderland for in-demand entertainment product (although the more family and older audience demographic for this product suggests an audience more likely to travel by car than that for rock and popular music).

Dedicated Sunderland audiences for a wider range of music, such as classical, jazz, blues and folk, travel comfortably to the Sage Gateshead and Newcastle venues. However the limited supply of these types of programmes in Sunderland venues militates against

broadening access to such a wide range of music and limits opportunities for local people.

### **3.13 A Strategy for Music Development**

The Consultants report goes on to outline a five year development strategy for Music in Sunderland which will be integrated into Sunderland's Arts and Creative Development Strategy.

The key points of the strategy are:

- The Council providing support for the emerging Music Forum to provide a network and support for the development of rock and popular music in Sunderland.
- Expansion of the membership of the Music Forum to embrace all the Sunderland music constituency representing all forms and styles of music.
- Employment by the City Council on a two-year contract of a Music Development Officer to provide support to the developing Music Forum, and to provide specialist work on the development of new music festivals.
- Run a series of pilot festivals to determine future models.
- Engage with the promoters and financial supporters of existing regional festivals to determine the opportunities for collaboration in the use of Herrington Park.
- Work in partnership with regional agencies such as Generator to provide support, advice and mentoring to local music promoters and encourage more people to take on the challenge of music promotion.
- Providing financial support in partnership with local and regional funders for existing local festivals.
- Seeking funding and logistical support from partners to ensure the more effective use of existing music facilities across the city.
- Through the Music Development Officer establish a strategic plan for young people's music in Sunderland engaging with the Youth Service, Education and Arts providers to ensure that there is an expansion of opportunities for young people to develop their involvement in music outside of the school curriculum and that there are progression routes to enable young people to move from introductory activity through to programmes that encourage excellence.
- Focusing of leadership for music in the City Council through the political portfolio holder with the support of a single officer who is able to provide a strategic overview of the way in which music is deployed through the City Council's events, public realm, festivals and regeneration programmes.
- Forge partnerships with City Centre Management, the Bridges Shopping Centre, city centre pubs and other commercial bodies for the development of festivals, which animate the city centre.
- Engage with regeneration, education, youth service, health and social services agencies within the city to encourage partnership support for music, musicians, music audiences and music venues.

- Engage with Arts Council England, North East, Youth Music, the Sage Gateshead and other regional music agencies for the development and support of this strategy.
- Undertaking a research project, which provides an audit of current music venues and an analysis of audience potential for new venues in Sunderland.
- Develop a five year strategy from this research which determines opportunities for investment in specialist facilities for music including appropriate venues and rehearsal facilities.
- Developing the Music Forum's capacity by 2010, in the form of an independent charitable trust, to be the core of a Music Development Agency for Sunderland which would attract funding and support from regional and national agencies for music and arts development.
- Seek support from Children's Services for additional resources to provide a series of out-of-school musical ensemble programmes to complement the current increased demand for instrumental learning in primary schools and to encourage excellence from the many children that engage in learning an instrument.
- Providing seed funding and seeking partnership funding for community music projects across the city, in particular those that encourage singing.

#### **4.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 4.1 The Members are requested to consider the information provided and comment on the findings in the Consultants report and the proposed 5 year strategy for music development in Sunderland.

#### **5.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 5.1 Sunderland Music Strategy Final Report

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