

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 young people from the Oxclose Music Project 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 latest of these focus groups was arranged for 17th November 2008 with young people from the Oxclose Music Project. The committee were invited to Oxclose Community School to see the project and discuss with young people their experiences of Sunderland venues and music performance and attendance.
- 2.2 The project began in early 1990 when Sean Taylor went back to his old school (Oxclose Community School) on a work placement and discovered that there were a lot of young people wanting to participate in music but had nowhere to practice. The project runs Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings from 18:30 to 21:30 working with young people from Washington aged 13 to 19 enabling them to fulfil their musical aspirations. The project provides support, equipment and practicing facilities that allow young people to form their own bands, record their own music and perform “live” to their peers and others.
- 2.3 The project has now been up and running for 18 years with their last performance at Springwell Village Hall drawing nearly 200 people.

3. The Focus Group

- 3.1 The focus group was well attended by young people who attend the project on a regular basis 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:

- Transport links to Newcastle are better than to Sunderland which makes it easier to go to Newcastle to see bands.
- Not many music style venues in Sunderland mainly bars that put bands on rather than performance venues.
- Never see any advertising for gigs in Sunderland so never know what is going on or who is playing where.
- Rather than build a new music venue need to look at what we have and develop this into something that people recognise as a place to play with a good atmosphere.
- There is an audience in Sunderland for music and in Washington there are more young people than any other part of the city who have poor access to 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

17.11.08

Present: Cllr E Wake

Also in attendance: Nigel Cummings (Review Coordinator), Sean Taylor (Oxclose Music Project).

Has anyone played a gig in Sunderland?

Yes, but these are mostly bars/pubs that put live music on rather than being venues that specifically cater for music. There are no real venues in the city to play.

Have you been to see any bands play in Sunderland?

No. Normally go to Newcastle to see bands play but would go to Sunderland if bands played there.

How do you think Sunderland compares with other parts of the region as a place to play or see bands?

No venue to compare with the Carling Academy in Newcastle as a place to see live music. Sunderland low down compared to this.

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

Living in Washington identify with Newcastle and Gateshead rather than Sunderland. There are better transport links to Newcastle than to Sunderland. There are more young people living in Washington than any other part of Sunderland yet have poor access to the city centre.

The Arts Centre in Washington is a great facility that needs to be developed further. Also starting to use Springwell Village Hall which has good transport links and is a good building for music. The White Room in Sunderland is the only 'real' music venue others are just pubs, clubs and bars.

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

Don't really need a purpose built new venue need to look at what there is and what can be developed. Need to look to improve on what there is rather than build a new one. The White Room and Independent have potential and could be improved rather than spend money on a new venue that might work but might not work. It is important that whatever is done needs to have that atmosphere for live music.

Also lot of technicalities associated with a new venue in that many promoters will ensure that bands do not or cannot play within a certain radius of another venue. The Carling Academy is very successful because it has taken over from the Mayfair.

Important aspects to success of any venue are good transport links, reputation, housing development are nearby which can create a regular audience for a venue.

Is there a healthy audience in Sunderland for music?

There is a massive demand for music but most bands tend to play Newcastle rather than Sunderland and if bands played locally rather than Newcastle would go to see them in Sunderland, but this doesn't happen.

How easy is it for you as bands to get a gig, play or rehearse in Sunderland?

It's pretty easy but again these are just pubs rather than proper music venues. Many don't have stages or performance areas just play on the floor.

The music project is really good as get to use professional equipment such as drums, guitars and pa's and all for fifty pence a night. Could not get this anywhere else, places like The Bunker are too expensive.

What makes it difficult for you to see live music in Sunderland?

Poor transport to the city makes it difficult to get there. Also don't feel safe in the city centre at night.

Poor advertising of gigs in Sunderland often means not aware of what is going on in the city or around it.

How could Sunderland improve in relation to Music Venues?

Rehearsal space is poor and limited nowhere to go and practice. Need to look to develop what Sunderland has and build on from this.