

**THE HUNTINGDONSHIRE BIG GIG
(Report by Arts Services Manager)**

1. SUMMARY

This report summarises the outcomes of the Big Gig 2004 and outlines briefly options for the future of the event.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 This year's event was based on the successful model of both educational workshops and public performances which were part of a programme of local events to mark the Millennium in the summer of 2000. As well as a series of skills workshops with local young people and adults, the original Huntingdonshire Big Gig included three free evening concerts in Hinchbrooke Country Park in June 2000.

2.2 A Medium Term Plan (MTP) bid was then submitted to produce a similar annual event budgeted at £67k pa and beginning in 2003. The outcome of the bid was a reduced budget of £60k over two financial years, a three year cycle of events, the first being held in June 2004 at Hill Rise Park, St Ives, and subsequent events to circulate around the District's major open spaces with St Neots the proposed venue for 2007.

2.3 In subsequent considerations of the Council's MTP, the funding available has been reduced to zero and Officers have to report to Cabinet if and how that might be achieved.

3. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The justifications for the events were made against the Council's Medium Term Objectives (MTOs) current at the time of the bid, which were:

- ◆ Reducing ill health caused by environment and lifestyle by improving the range of accessible leisure and social opportunities within market towns
- ◆ Meeting the social and cultural needs of local people and visitors by promoting social and cultural activities; supporting voluntary sector involvement in the development of social and cultural activities; establishing and maintaining a programme of cultural activities accessible to all local people and visitors; and supporting local schools in creating an appreciation of all art forms in local children.
- ◆ Effectively, efficiently and economically meeting local needs through generating satisfaction amongst users.
- ◆ Increasing public awareness of their local and built environment.

4. BUDGET

	2004 BUDGET	ACTUALS
Technical equipment hire	23,000	21,982
Acoustic safety engineers	3,000	2,500
General infrastructure	4,000	5,323
Safety and security	6,000	3,017
Additional admin staff	4,000	1,600
Artists & performers	18,000	20,100
Insurance	1,000	1,340
Licence (Performing Rights)	100	847
Promotion	4,000	5,522
Photography	400	307
Fireworks	3,000	4,500
Workshops for amateurs	1,500	2,295
TOTAL BIG GIG EXPENDITURE	68,000	69,333
Earned income	2,500	790
Eastern Orchestral Board Contributions	5,500	8,543
TOTALS	£60,000	£60,000

- 4.1 Savings were made to the budget in 2004 as the Service benefited from having a very competent Modern Apprentice on hand to cover some day-to-day work, while a substantial amount of the event administration was contained within the service's administration support. This allowed essential spend in other areas of the budget to be met and would not necessarily be able to be repeated.
- 4.2 The budget figure for safety marshals proved to be an over-estimate, as the particular venue was very easy to patrol and required fewer marshals than anticipated. Again, this may not be applicable to other venues.
- 4.3 Earned income was considerably down on expectations, as income from concessionaires was very disappointing. It proved extremely difficult to get any caterers to attend, and those who eventually did would only offer 5% of gross takings. It proved impossible to get an outside bar to offer any commission due to the high costs of setting up a bar in the open-air. We eventually did a deal with a bar that gave £100 to our nominated local charity (Natural High). This meant that more had to be drawn from the Eastern Orchestral Board reserves to balance the budget than had been planned.
- 4.4 Local sponsorship of the event was considered. However it was decided that this would have had a detrimental effect on other local initiatives, particularly those run by the voluntary sector. Other sources of sponsorship require the development of longer-term relationships and this is difficult to build for one-off events, particularly with limited staff resources.

5. TARGET AUDIENCES

There were several distinct target audiences for the various elements of the event:

- ◆ Local children & families
- ◆ Local young people
- ◆ Local members of the public, particularly those who do not normally engage in cultural activities
- ◆ Members of the public who do not use or are unaware of local park facilities

6. OUTCOMES

6.1 There is no doubt that, from the point of view of people attending the event, it was extremely successful. In spite of very poor weather (cold, wet and windy all weekend), substantial numbers of people turned up each evening and enjoyed themselves.

6.2 There is evidence of people's positive reactions in the large number of comments received both at the concerts and in the following days by phone, email and letter. These are published on the Big Gig pages of the Huntsleisure website. Press and media coverage was good and, again, extremely positive. Only one written complaint was received regarding the fact that the event was free of charge. There were no complaints of noise or nuisance and no poor behaviour by audience members was recorded by either the CCTV staff who were in attendance, or by the Police.

6.3 The MTOs given above were met by:

- ◆ increasing the range of accessible leisure and social opportunities in a market town by holding the event in St Ives;
- ◆ meeting the social and cultural needs of local people; involving the voluntary sector in the event, particularly Natural High, local uniformed groups and the charities which took stands; ensuring the event was accessible to all local people by making it free of charge to attend and by publicising it well locally; and involving a local primary school;
- ◆ achieving an extremely high level of satisfaction from both audience members and participants; and keeping the event within budget; and
- ◆ holding the event in a local park to encourage its awareness amongst the public.

6.4 The target audiences were met.

- ◆ **Local children & families:** a series of music workshops was held in Thorndown School with members of Britten Sinfonia. The children then performed the piece of music they had written and rehearsed with the orchestra on the Sunday evening, and brought along other family members to watch and listen.

- ◆ **Local young people:** six local young bands, two DJs and a rap artist performed on Friday evening, to a total audience of approximately 1,400, mostly comprising young people, but also including a significant number of adults of all ages. In addition, graffiti sessions were held during the event. These develop the relevant artistic skills whilst emphasising the need to contain graffiti art within socially acceptable boundaries.
- ◆ **Local members of the public, particularly those who do not normally engage in cultural activities:** the event was free of charge, held in a local, easily accessible venue, and publicised locally, and there were few barriers to attendance. In talking to audience members during the concerts, people expressed different reasons for attending: it was on their doorstep, it was free, they liked a particular performer, their friends were coming, their children were performing, they had enjoyed the original Big Gig, or they were simply curious.
- ◆ **Members of the public who do not use or are unaware of local park facilities:** the event brought a total of around 9,500 into Hill Rise Park, the huge majority of whom had never been there before. The Parks Manager has reported an increased level of use of the Park since the Big Gig.

7. FUTURE OPTIONS

7.1 The Huntingdonshire Big Gig has been very successful in meeting its objectives in both Huntingdon (2000) and St Ives (2004). It was originally planned that the event would move to St Neots in 2007. However, as there is no funding from the MTP, at this stage there would appear to be two options for the event's future:

- ◆ organise no future events; or
- ◆ organise a ticketed event in St Neots in 2007, aiming at a cost-neutral budget, but underwritten by the authority in case of lower than anticipated sales due to inclement weather, conflicting events, and potential resistance to paying for what has been a free event in the past.

7.2 Work is currently proceeding to identify the financial risks associated with the second option and how such an event would meet its objectives. This will then be the subject of the report to Cabinet.

8. RECOMMENDATION

That the Overview & Scrutiny Panel note the contents of this report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Photographs of Big Gig 2004 at St Ives are available to view at www.huntsleisure.org/arts, together with comments received from members of the public and performers.

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