



CABINET

3 September 2019

FIRST LIGHT FESTIVAL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This paper sets out a review of the impact of the First Light Festival, which was held at the midsummer solstice in 2019 on Lowestoft's South Beach.
2. The festival, called First Light, originated as part of a strategy set out in the Seafront Vision. That strategy aims to double the number of tourists visiting Lowestoft by developing an exciting and contemporary offer around arts, events, entertainment and places to eat, drink, shop and stay.
3. In January 2019, cabinet approved the festival and ringfenced £120k to support the festival over three years. This money came via the Business Rates Retention Pilot. Approval was granted subject to a business case, which is attached to this paper. The business case set out several projected outcomes for the festival, and this paper reviews the extent to which those aspirations were achieved.
4. Amongst other outcomes, the data shows that the festival was successful in terms of generating income for local businesses. Specifically, an investment of £90,000 of business rates retained by East Suffolk Council was converted into between £700-£900k of direct spend at the festival. This is in addition to wider benefits to the local economy.
5. This paper seeks approval for East Suffolk Council to support the delivery of a second festival, in June 2020, funded by the 2019/20 Business Rates Retention programme.

Is the report Open or Exempt?	Open
Wards Affected:	Kirkley
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Craig Rivett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development
Supporting Officer:	Kerry Blair Head of Operations 01502 523307 kerry.blair@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In January 2019 Cabinet gave approval to develop plans for a Festival in support of its strategic objectives. The attached Business Case (Appendix A) sets out the proposed programme, operational and safety arrangements, and the benefits of the festival.
- 1.2 The council's investment unlocked funding from other organisations, set out below:

Funder	Commitment
The Arts Council	£100,000
CEFAS	£13,000
The Wellcome Trust	£25,000
Suffolk County Council	£16,000
Lowestoft Town Council (main stage)	£10,000
Waveney District Council	£80,000 (year 1 - £20,000 in subsequent years)
Commercial income (camping, food market, film tickets, silent disco tickets, advertising and merchandise)	£25,000
East Suffolk Partnership	£1,500
Suffolk DMO	£1,000

- 1.3 Cabinet approved funding to support the festival for a three-year period.
- 1.4 Cabinet reviewed similar events and looked at the economic benefit that festivals and events brought to those communities:

- The National Festival of Making in Blackburn attracted an additional 30,000 visitors to the town over the period of the festival and an economic benefit of £840,000
- (This is as measured by event IMPACT methodology which includes direct spend, average visitor spend, organiser spend in the local community and overnight stays)
- The Festival of Thrift – using the same methodology – generated an economic benefit of around £500,000 in 2016 and attracted an additional 40,000 visitors to the town
- The Vintage by The Sea Festival in Morecambe generated £900,000 in additional benefit in 2015, and £700,000 in 2016.

- 1.5 Projected benefits at the time that the business case was written were:

Benefits/ Hard Outcomes	Number
Jobs created	4
Jobs – temporary/ seasonal	40
Attendees	20000 in Year 1 30,000 in Years 2,3
External investment	£172,000 in Year 1 £300,000 in Y2, 3
Sponsorship and other income	£32,000
Volunteering opportunities	200
Hours of school outreach delivered	120
Art Organisations Engaged	5
Artists Engaged	130

- 1.6 The festival was organised and delivered by a Community Interest Company (CIC) with membership drawn from a number of arts organisations from Suffolk and Norfolk, with Wayne Hemingway as the creative lead. The festival was held on WDC land and where possible to keep costs low, using WDC buildings and supported by council partners.
- 1.7 The Seafront Vision Strategy – approved in 2017 - seeks to increase visitor numbers by attracting a new visitor base to the town. This would be achieved by extending the reach of Lowestoft’s appeal to the growing, urban audiences of Norwich and Ipswich. Seaside towns such as Weston Super Mare, Hastings and Margate have grown their tourism economies in this way.
- 1.8 The economic development team’s analysis suggests that doubling the distance from which people travel to visit Lowestoft could treble the income the town receives through tourism. Prior to the first festival it was hoped that the festival would increase the number of visitors from further afield.

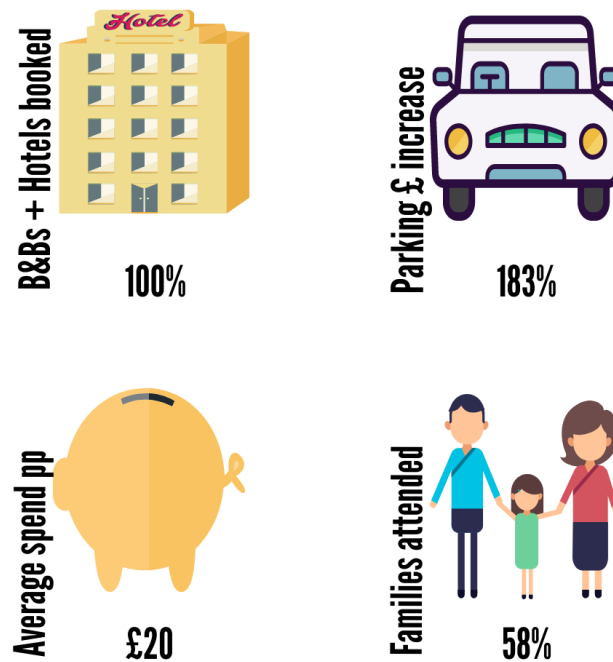
2 IMPACT

- 2.1 To start with a review of the measures set out in the business case in 2019, the festival delivered the following results. It should be noted that in most cases, actual results overperformed the expected outcome

Benefits / Hard Outcomes	Number (Planned)	Number (Actual)
Jobs Created	4	4
Jobs - contract	40	115
Attendees	20,000	30,000 +
External Investment	£171,659	£172,400
Sponsorship and other income	£32,000	£26,301
Volunteering opportunities	200	200
Volunteering organisations involved	9	10
Links with schools and colleges	7	9
Hours of outreach delivered	120	150
Other Arts organisations involved	5	16
Number of Arts Professionals involved	130	248

- 2.2 The festival enjoyed considerable media coverage, both regionally and nationally, and the event also received positively on social media, with near universal praise for the event.
- 2.3 Pleasingly, our efforts to correctly position East Suffolk as enablers and facilitators of the festival were understood, with clear references to our own role in its delivery and numerous media interviews with leading figures from the Council.
- 2.4 A number of positive stories were published in local newspapers during and following the festival - including the Lowestoft Journal, EDP and EADT. Regional broadcasters BBC Suffolk, BBC East and ITV Anglia covered the event on television and radio and also used their websites to praise the events.
- 2.5 The festival also enjoyed national coverage with a feature on the BBC One evening programme, the One Show.
- 2.6 From an East Suffolk perspective, our social media activity was among our most popular ever on any topic, with (for example) over 7,000 views and 3,000 engagements for our post-event Facebook post and universal praise in the comments section for the event, the organisation and also the Council's role.
- 2.7 Across the weekend, there were more than 1,000 separate, individual posts on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram using the hashtags #firstlightfestival and #firstlightlowestoft and over 2,300 using #lowestoft. According to a third-party analytic website, 46% of the #lowestoft tweets said positive things about the town with only 6% expressing negative views.

2.8 Other positive impacts of the festival are shown in the infographic below:



3 HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO THE EAST SUFFOLK BUSINESS PLAN?

3.1 This activity supports several strands of the East Suffolk Business Plan, including:

- Delivering greater financial sustainability: By increasing the number of visitors to the town, the festival will support local businesses, and increase the contribution that tourism makes to the local economy (currently £74m per year)
- Enabling communities: Making people feel proud of where they live. The festival is a celebration of Lowestoft's position as first place to see the sun each day. The programme will include innovative and engaging work about the town's relationship to the sea, both past and future.
- Delivering cultural activity as a way of increasing the number of visits to East Suffolk

4 THE ROLE OF THE ARTS IN LOWESTOFT – ARTS COUNCIL ASPIRATION

- 4.1 East Suffolk Council through the Lowestoft Cultural Leadership Group is working with cultural partners, Arts Council England, Historic England and NALEP to create a Cultural Strategy for Lowestoft and an ambitious 2025 vision for the town. The role of the Group is to maximise the opportunities for developing a varied and excellent range of arts, heritage and culture in the town and being a collective voice to influence decision makers.
- 4.2 The First Light Festival supports the strategic aims of celebrating the town's position as the most eastern community, contributing to a strong and diverse cultural programme to promote investment and inward growth and develop a compelling and innovative offer for residents and visitors using our South Beach assets.
- 4.3 The First Light Festival reinforces other cultural and place-led initiatives happening in the town including Great Places, Making Waves Together, Lowestoft Rising, Local Cultural Education Partnership, Community Action Suffolk Community Enablers and London Road Heritage Action Zone (decision pending) which if successful will include a cultural programme. The Strategy will be launched in October 2018 followed by an Action Plan that will outline how the sector will respond to the high level aims and meet the 2025

vision that Lowestoft will be transformed into a vibrant and energised town with every resident enjoying and taking part in arts, culture and heritage.

- 4.4 Despite all the good things that are happening in the town, the socio-economic profile of Lowestoft is likely to point towards less cultural participation than the national average. There are pockets of persistent disadvantage in and around Lowestoft with 8 LSOA's ranked 10% most deprived neighbourhoods and a further 7 LSOA's ranked 20% most deprived neighbourhoods.
- 4.5 Active Lives survey data indicates that 44.5% of the population in Waveney (former district) have engaged in 3 or more cultural activities in a year, which is below the national average of 52.2% (arts activity). In Waveney the number of people taking part in arts activities is lower than heritage activities.
- 4.6 In terms of the Community Wellbeing Index, Kirkley is below the national average for participation, which could be corrected through holding participatory projects in the First Light Festival with Beaconsfield Road, Cleveland Road Residents' Association and Kirkley Peoples Forums. Waveney also has a low Heritage Index Score (RSA) and a relatively low heritage potential suggesting that a greater level of ambition and infrastructure for culture is needed.
- 4.7 Arts Council England are currently consulting on their new strategic framework which is designed to enable more people to access the widest possible range of high-quality culture, reaching the hardest to reach through programming and engagement activities, which First Light Festival can strongly contribute towards.

5 FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 In 2019, £80,000 invested by East Suffolk Council through retained business rates delivered approx £800,000 of direct local financial benefit (this was the amount people spent at the festival according to the 1500 people who answered the survey after the event. It does not include the additional financial benefit to local hotels, restaurants and bars – which is thought to be considerable, but is not possible to measure)
- 5.2 This is a 10:1 Return on Investment.
- 5.3 The cost of delivering an expanded festival programme for 2020, which will include activity both before and after the main festival event, is £375,000.
- 5.4 In addition, in order to provide capacity to deliver the event for 2020, £31,000 is required between September and December 2019 as production costs. This will provide the capacity and the funding to develop the artistic programme and book artists, and prepare bids for external funding and fundraising.
- 5.5 The total budget is therefore £405,000 across 2019/20
- 5.6 First Light CIC, the organisers of the festival have prepared a budget schedule which anticipates £250,000 of income for the event – which includes commercial, sponsorship and fundraised income.
- 5.7 The above figures are reasonably conservative – there is the potential that more could be generated, particularly in terms of ticket sales, fundraising and concessions and traders.
- 5.8 The proposal, however, is that East Suffolk supports the 'gap' between these two sums – to a maximum of £200k. This will enable organisers to start planning the event.
- 5.9 It should be noted that the actual commitment could be less than this and organisers will be pushing to maximise income – whilst ensuring that the event remains almost entirely free to visitors.

5.10 If the same level of return on investment (in terms of local economic benefit) was seen in 2020 as in 2019, then the Return on Investment to local traders would be in the region of £2m

6 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

6.1 It is proposed that Cabinet agrees to support the festival for 2020 on the basis that it will:

- Attract 40-50,000 visitors, with a focus on people from outside of Lowestoft's traditional visitor base.
- Brand Lowestoft as a desirable and attractive tourist destination
- Extend the area from which people travel to Lowestoft to include the growing populations of Norwich and Ipswich
- Contribute directly to the local economy during the course of the festival including increased hotel stays
- Position Lowestoft as a venue for contemporary arts and events – with the potential for significant financial support from the Arts Council
- Identify Lowestoft as – uniquely in the UK – the first place to see the sunrise, allowing the town to trade on it's geographical position

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Cabinet notes the impact of the First Light Festival to the local economy.
2. That Cabinet agrees to support the festival to a maximum of £200k in 2020.
3. That Cabinet reviews the impact of the Festival.
4. That this funding comes from 2019/20 Business Rates Retention scheme – and the relevant allowances have been made.

APPENDICES

Appendix A	First Light Festival Presentation
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