



CABINET

Tuesday, 07 September 2021

Subject	First Light Festival 2022
Report by	Councillor Craig Rivett Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economic Development Councillor Letitia Smith Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities, Leisure & Tourism
Supporting Officer	Paul Wood Head of Economic Development and Regeneration paul.wood@eastsoffolk.gov.uk 07798 797275

Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN
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Category of Exempt Information and reason why it is NOT in the public interest to disclose the exempt information.	Not applicable
Wards Affected:	Kirkley & Pakefield

Purpose and high-level overview

Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to update the Cabinet on the work and progress of the First Light Festival and request funding to support a full festival programme in 2022.

Options:

Option one: Use the underspend from the Business Rates Retention Scheme (2019/20) already earmarked for the First Light Festival (£114,277) and a further £85,723 to fund a full festival programme in 2022. This will enable the organisers to deliver a full festival programme in 2022 with community projects and new youth music and theatre zones.

Option two: Agree to award a total of £114,277 that remains available from the 2019/20 Business Rates Retention Scheme; therefore, we are not asking members to commit any new money to this festival. The scale of the programme would need to be reviewed and reduced to meet this budget.

Option three: Agree not to financially support the festival in 2022, which will cut the budget by 50% and will significantly impact on the delivery, scale and ambition.

Recommendation/s:

1. That Cabinet notes the significant positive impact of the First Light Festival to the local economy and communities and the positive response to the Longest Days of Summer 2021.

2. That Cabinet agrees to support the 2022 First Light Festival with a grant of £200,000 comprising the already allocated £114,277 from the Business Rate Pilot Reserve and a further £85,723 growth to the General Fund in 2022/23.

Corporate Impact Assessment

Governance:

No Impacts.

ESC policies and strategies that directly apply to the proposal:

ES Strategic Plan

ES Economic Growth Plan

Lowestoft Cultural Strategy 2025 'Celebrating Culture on the Edge'

Lowestoft Town Investment Plan 2020-2030

Environmental:

The First Light Festival CIC has an Environmental Policy which sets out policy and procedures to meet environmental legislation and approved codes of practice, including:

- To reduce impacts from pollution, emissions, and waste

- To encourage more sustainable forms of transport
- To sustainably manage the use of all resources, energy, water, and procurement
- To raise awareness and encourage participation in environmental matters
- To assist performers and festival goers to participate in the festivals in an environmentally sensitive way

Equalities and Diversity:

An equalities impact assessment has been completed which demonstrates that the FLF will have a positive impact on the ten characteristic groups. The festival is free entry, which removes any financial barriers to access, especially for residents from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The festival programme provides opportunities for everyone to engage and enjoy music, dance, film, talks, walks, sports, and workshops. There will be a range of food and drink on offer during the 24-hour festival that cater for all dietary requirements and the festival organisers work with protected characteristic groups to develop their festival programme. The upper and lower promenade are accessible and festival programme takes place on both promenades and in Spring 2022 a new board walk will be installed on the South Beach, which will aid access for wheelchair users. The First Light Festival CIC have an Equality and Diversity Policy.

Financial:

It was agreed by Cabinet on 3 September 2020, to financially support the First Light Festival CIC up to a maximum of £140,000 for 2021 festival, using the 2019/20 Business Rates Retention Scheme. Due to COVID-19 restrictions a smaller scale event was held in June 2021 on a reduced budget, which leaves £114,277 unspent.

The overall budget for the festival in 2022 is £414,585 and earned income and grant support is expected, but it leaves a funding shortfall of £200,000, it is requested to carry forward the underspend of £114,277 from 2021 to the 2022 festival and award an uplift of £85,723.

Human Resources:

No Impact

ICT:

No Impacts.

Legal:

A funding agreement setting out the terms and conditions of the grant will be signed, setting out the roles and responsibilities of the First Light Festival CIC and the Council and KPIs. This will be reviewed and signed off by the Legal Team.

Risk:

A grant agreement with First Light Festival CIC will mitigate against any liabilities raised against the Council, as the First Light Festival CIC will have overall accountability and responsibilities for the festival and related activity. The First Light Festival CIC will put in place a risk register as part of the 2022 festival preparations.

External Consultees:	First Light Festival CIC have been consulted and have provided a budget breakdown and KPIs achieved as part of a smaller scale event (Longest Days of Summer) held in June 2021
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	In 2019 the CIC evaluated the impact of First Light on festival goers and received 352 surveys responses during the festival and 1033 online responses. One of the top three words used to describe audience experience was 'Inclusive' along with 'Fun' and 'Amazing'. The feedback was overwhelming positive, with 92% of people agreeing that the First Light Festival should happen again in Lowestoft and 9.2 out of 10 agreeing that the festival has left them feeling more positive about Lowestoft.
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Strategic Plan Priorities

Select the priorities of the Strategic Plan which are supported by this proposal: <i>(Select only one primary and as many secondary as appropriate)</i>		Primary priority	Secondary priorities
T01	Growing our Economy		
P01	Build the right environment for East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P02	Attract and stimulate inward investment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P03	Maximise and grow the unique selling points of East Suffolk	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P04	Business partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P05	Support and deliver infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T02	Enabling our Communities		
P06	Community Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P07	Taking positive action on what matters most	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P08	Maximising health, well-being and safety in our District	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P09	Community Pride	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
T03	Maintaining Financial Sustainability		
P10	Organisational design and streamlining services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P11	Making best use of and investing in our assets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P12	Being commercially astute	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P13	Optimising our financial investments and grant opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P14	Review service delivery with partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T04	Delivering Digital Transformation		
P15	Digital by default	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P16	Lean and efficient streamlined services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P17	Effective use of data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P18	Skills and training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P19	District-wide digital infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T05	Caring for our Environment		
P20	Lead by example	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P21	Minimise waste, reuse materials, increase recycling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P22	Renewable energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P23	Protection, education and influence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
XXX	Governance		
XXX	How ESC governs itself as an authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How does this proposal support the priorities selected?			

T01 Growing Our Economy theme of the Strategic Plan,

P02: Attract and stimulate inward investment

The FLF has demonstrated how it showcases Lowestoft in a high profile and positive light. One of the objectives of FLF was to positively change perceptions of the town and in so doing will attract additional inward investment, especially within the cultural and creative sectors through public and private investment. This will be further enhanced by ESC's joint City of Culture bid with Great Yarmouth Borough Council.

P03: Maximise and grow the unique selling points of East Suffolk

Culture and the creative industries are a strategic priority and are increasingly seen as a driver for the local economy. The First Light Festival uses Lowestoft's USP as the most easterly town and its landscape and celebrates the changing tides, light and darkness, sun, and stars for a unique shared experience with music, dance, film, talks, walks, sports, and workshops as well as local and regional food, drinks and produce. In 2019, £90,000 invested by East Suffolk Council through retained business rates delivered approximately £900,000 of direct local financial benefit. This is a 10:1 Return on Investment. In total the festival attracted 30,000 visitors from the local area, district, and wider region.

T02 Enabling our communities

P09 - Community Pride

The socio-economic profile of Lowestoft highlights significant challenges for much of the population. Many residents suffer from income and employment deprivation, which has resulted in low levels of cultural participation and engagement, as well as a lack of optimism surrounding the town. The festival helps break down barriers and reach less engaged groups, mitigating against the disconnect between the existing creativity in the town and potential participants. The First Light Festival forms part of a wider cultural regeneration, which can tackle some of the socio-economic challenges, including promoting more cohesive communities and maintaining healthier lives. The First Light Festival 2019 attracted 30,000 visitors with 90% agreeing that 'the festival has left them feeling more positive about Lowestoft'.

T03 Maintaining Financial Sustainability

P13: Optimising our financial investments and grant opportunities

The First Light Festival CIC has been awarded a total of £69,999 from Arts Council England and Suffolk County Council, with a further unsecured £91,586 from grants and trusts and a further £53,000 from earned income. This external funding is being matched by ESC to deliver a highly ambitious programme. By maximising the leverage of this external funding ESC are supporting the delivery of a much more impactful festival which supports several of the Council's Strategic Plan priorities.

T05 Caring for our Environment

P21: Minimise waste, reuse materials, increase recycling

The FLF CIC has an environmental policy which seeks to reduce the impacts from waste and encourages the 'reduce, reuse and recycle' approach. This is targeted at both festival performers and attendees.

P23: Protection, education and influence

The FLF environmental policy includes an objective to raise awareness and encourage participation in environmental matters as part of the FLF programme.

Background and Justification for Recommendation

1 Background facts	
1.1	In January 2019 Cabinet gave approval to develop plans for a festival in Lowestoft in support of its strategic objectives. The festival was organised and delivered by First Light Festival Community Interest Company (CIC) with membership drawn from several arts organisations from Suffolk and Norfolk, with Wayne Hemingway as the creative lead.
1.2	<p>The Evaluation Report for the inaugural 2019 First Light Festival, showcased that there is a clear need for further investment in creative culture in the area, and a large audience has already been established through the success of the festival. The festival was recognised as a key element of cultural regeneration, tourism, and place – making for the area.</p> <p>First year achievements and outcomes included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attended by 30,000 people, prior to the festival it was estimated that attendance would reach 10,000 people. • 4 jobs created • 248 Arts professionals involved • £172,400 of external investment obtained • Worked with 16 arts organisations • 10 voluntary organisations involved • Worked with 9 schools and colleges • 100% B&Bs and hotels booked on the night of the festival • 183% increase in car parking revenue
1.3	<p>The First Light Festival has been the flagship cultural event in Lowestoft since the inaugural festival in 2019. It has changed internal and external perceptions of the town being a tired, run-down seaside resort and put Lowestoft on the national and international map as an energetic and creative place. It has re-imagined the South Beach and celebrated Lowestoft’s unique position on the east coast and is central to Lowestoft place making ambitions and sits within the Lowestoft Town Investment Plan 2021-2031 in driving the cultural ambitions of the town.</p> <p>Below are examples of the impact in 2019:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35% of those attending had not visited Lowestoft before and 96% from those outside Lowestoft would visit again • 92% said “This event has left me feeling more positive about Lowestoft” • 97% said “This event is good for the profile of Lowestoft” • 96% said “I would recommend First Light Festival to a friend” • 98% said “I think First Light Festival should happen again in Lowestoft”

- Approximately 60 pieces of regional and national print and online coverage, with an approximate reach of 1.4 million for print and 4.9 million for online.
- 20 pieces of regional broadcast
- 4 pieces of national broadcast

1.4 In 2020, as a result of COVID-19 the festival became an on-line event including live streaming, with videos viewed 16,747 times and had a digital reach of 49,456 people. A smaller scale event (Longest Days of Summer) was held in June 2021 which was attended by approx. 6,000 people, with a further 3,000 people engaged, including 2,500 pupils from 13 Lowestoft schools, home schooled pupils, East Coast College’s Art Foundation course and community groups. The festival worked in partnership with the North Lowestoft and London Road High Street Heritage Action Zones to engage with businesses through the bird boxes art trail installations. A further 500 people took part in the Beach of Dreams project which included a 500-mile walk from Lowestoft to Tilbury Fort in Essex and the creation of 500 silks (photo below).



1.5 In addition, the First Light Festival Dippy the Dinosaur schools workshop programme, part of the organisation’s partnership with the Natural History Museum, linked up with the Dippy on Tour at Norwich Cathedral and worked with 11 schools and 600 pupils.

1.6 The Longest Days of Summer had a digital reach of more than 30,000 people watching the Winter Solstice, Sunrise and Longest Days of Summer films. The Longest Days of Summer drew a great deal of media coverage with syndicated articles across EDP, EADT and Lowestoft Journal, items on BBC Look East and ITV Anglia and the Beach of Dreams launch event was covered in the Guardian Newspaper blog of journalist Kevin Rushby.

2 Current position

2.1	COVID-19 has exposed a significant level of inequality and social isolation in Lowestoft, and if the town is going to be transformed as per the ambitions of the Town Investment Plan, it will need substantial investment, and the cultural and creative sector can play a significant role in this– a new way of Lowestoft seeing itself. COVID 19 has had an impact on the sector, the full extent of which will not be known for some time.
2.2	Whilst the First Light Festival CIC has delivered digital content and a smaller scale event as part of their resilience to the COVID-19 pandemic, the projected business plan growth of the festival has been significantly stunted by the last two years. This has included the return of small grants; sponsorship income being suspended and freelancers and volunteering opportunities significantly reducing.
2.3	First Light Festival 2022 will be the joyful nexus of cultural recovery for Lowestoft, which as the town recovers from COVID-19, will develop the 24 hour festival model of world class multi-arts, in a stimulating programme of free music, dance, theatre, art and science activities and performances, inspired by the place, people and spaces of Lowestoft - particularly the coastal location, bringing people together as a community and growing national reach and recognition for the festival, town and region.
2.4	First Light 2022 will be a large, expansive festival across the beach, promenades, and Kensington Gardens, with camping and a wide range of local and regionally sourced food and drink offers. A large-scale community performance of 'The Light Returns' by local folk musician John Ward will open the festival bringing together professional musicians and singers with schools, community groups, local choirs and Shanty singers in a rousing celebration of open-air singing. Across the 24-hour festival, an uplifting cross-genre mix of music from classical to contemporary, blues, jazz, folk, and international DJs will feature on the main stage, in the enlarged Beach Club Bar and in pop-up locations on the beach and in the Gardens; a new 'New Dawn' stage will showcase new young musical talent; a new Theatre tent will offer new writing talent, comedy, open mic and poetry curated by East of England Laureate Luke Wright. Dance East's exceptional programme in the Moon Dance tent will keep everyone dancing around the clock with 'a dance along' Singing in the Rain event leading into late night silent beach cinema with live music accompaniment.
2.5	Large scale artworks will animate the beach and light up the night-time, with dawn celebrated with a new music composition performed live on the beach, a Pier to Pier run and community swimming. Foraged feasts and well-being activities will highlight the fantastic South Beach environment and a large-scale kite project that will work with schools, community groups, individuals and kite flying professionals will celebrate the Sunday morning in a lively interactive event. First Light Festival 2022 will promote a 'leave no trace', sustainable policy that will grow First Light as an environmentally responsible, flagship festival.
2.6	Over the last two years, the Arts Council England have maintained a full level of support, Suffolk County Council increased their support and made the festival one of their revenue funded organisation and grant support was received from New

	Anglia LEP. This support enabled the festival to retain their core team, maintain and grow partnerships and deliver adapted/blended cultural work that maintained community and stakeholder relationships, drew significant PR and grow its digital reach.
2.7	The First Light Festival CIC has also been working closely with the Council and consultant Quarterbridge on the redevelopment of East Point Pavilion, with the ambition to form a new strand to its business model, growing a year-round programme of activity for the Pavilion and supporting the sustainability of the CIC.
2.8	The CIC intends to apply for National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status when the programme opens later this year. Achieving this status will mean that the CIC will receive investment from Arts Council England for a four-year period, this will give the CIC more stability and allow them more time to put their business plan into action, increasing earned income and commercial sponsorship over time, which will make them more sustainable and resilient going forward.
2.9	Through securing NPO status from the Arts Council, it is expected that the CIC will become less dependent on the Council for significant grant support, with grant support decreasing over time, as earned income and commercial sponsorship increases. Furthermore, if successful, the First Light Festival CIC will become Lowestoft's first NPO. The previous round for 2018-22 National Portfolio is made up of 829 organisations that hold 842 funding agreements and covers a range of art forms and geographical areas.
2.10	The cost of delivering the festival programme in 2022, with additional community projects and new youth music and theatre zones is £414,585. For every pound the Council spends on the 2022 festival it attracts another £1.06 through external grant funding and earned income to the 2022 festival. Which has a positive spill over effects with direct and indirect benefits to the local economy. Confirmed public funding to date totals £69,999, consisting of the Arts Council (£49,999), Suffolk County Council (£20,000) and an application pending to Lowestoft Town Council for £5,000. In addition, a total of £86,586 will come from other grants, trusts and funds (including Kirkley People's Forum) and fundraising and £53,000 of earned income for the event.

3 How to address current situation

3.1	To deliver a full festival programme in 2022 with community projects and new youth music and theatre zones a budget of £414,585 is needed and the organisers have identified a £200,000 shortfall. The use of previously allocated and additional funding from the Council is requested to meet this shortfall.
3.2	The festival directors accept that the level of financial support from the Council and other partners will need to reduce over time and are therefore working on plans to become more financially sustainable. This includes applying for National Portfolio Organisation status, developing new strands to their business model and

	kick starting their sponsorship income.
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4 Reason/s for recommendation	
4.1	The FLF has proven that when a full festival programme is delivered it achieves substantial economic, social and community outputs and outcomes, including raising pride and aspiration, job creation, volunteering opportunities and increased direct and indirect spend. In addition, it has demonstrated the ability to attract visitors from beyond the usual tourist catchment areas. The hugely positive profile of this event also mitigates some of the more negative perceptions of the town and combined with the massive business and infrastructure investment taking place highlights Lowestoft as a growing, dynamic and exciting place to be.
4.2	ESC has recently submitted a joint expression of interest with Great Yarmouth BC to become the UK City of Culture 2025. If successful, this will create a step change in investment in the local cultural and creative sector and put Lowestoft (and ES) on the map at a national and international level. The First Light Festival is a significant cultural event which has strengthened the bid and a decision to not fund a full programme could damage the outcome of the bid. If the bid is successful however, this has the potential to substantially increase the scale and ambition of future festivals.

Appendices

Appendices:
None.

Background reference papers:		
Date	Type	Available From
November 2017	South Beach Vision and Festival (REP1723) (exempt)	
November 2018	First Light Festival (REP1927) (exempt)	
September 2019	First Light Festival ES/0124	
September 2020	First Light Festival ES/0471	