



Report of: Director Development and Regeneration

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SUBJECT: Chapel Gallery Update

Ward affected: Ormskirk Wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update in relation to activities at the Chapel Gallery following a request from Members at the meeting of this Committee on 11 October 2018, and the programme of events and initiatives that are being planned for the coming year.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That Members note the current position in relation to the Chapel Gallery and the initiatives that are underway, including the new footfall monitoring system.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At a meeting on 11 October 2018, this Committee were considering a report in relation to performance indicators and following a discussion about the lack of any data in relation to the Chapel Gallery, Members requested a report to inform them of the work being undertaken by the Gallery and how this may be measured.
- 3.2 The Chapel Gallery was opened in 2001 and originally just consisted of the area to the rear of the Community Centre.
- 3.3 Following Arts Council funding being obtained in 2014 (£127,933) and in 2017 (£65,000) significant works have been carried out to the building. This has resulted in:

- A lift being fitted to the front of the building to enable access for those with mobility issues to the first floor of the building
 - The former small café being relocated and extended, from the rear to the front of the building, in space formerly occupied by the community centre meeting rooms on the ground floor
 - Extensive renovations with a new audio visual system being installed throughout the building including projection equipment to the first floor room and improved decoration and lighting.
- 3.4 This renovation work over a number of years has caused significant operational issues for staff and resulted in reduced bookings and activities whilst it was being undertaken.
- 3.5 The Gallery has hosted many major exhibitions over the years, such as the internationally renowned illustrator Nick Sharratt, including one recently by Paul Kidby, the illustrator of the Terry Pratchett books. Each year the Gallery runs a 'Lancashire Open' competition, as well as regular Art Clubs for children and various other classes and activities.
- 3.6 There is also a craft and design shop run by the Gallery that sells a wide variety of quality gifts, which adds to the offer.
- 3.7 Previously attendance figures were estimated based upon attendance at classes and events in the Gallery. The recorded estimates are 35,964 in 2015, 37,621 in 2016 and 35,069 in 2017. In 2018 figures were not collected due to the impact of development works, and officers have been seeking a new more accurate way of measuring footfall data.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The Gallery currently have quite a wide variety of activities that are growing since the renovation works were completed. The key aspects of the Gallery's activities include:

Exhibitions

- 4.2 There are two main exhibitions on in the Gallery at the moment. The 'Opening the Gates' exhibition is a collaboration with Edge Hill University and the Ormskirk & District Family History Society. Funded through a Heritage Lottery Grant. Set against the backdrop of the First World War, it tells the story of ordinary women in West Lancashire who were thrust into occupations originally occupied by men, and how ultimately this, combined with suffrage, led to women gaining the vote. This also included a programme of talks and workshops for schools and community organisations.
- 4.3 The 'Loop Effect' exhibition introduces recent digital art projects by four artists positioned at the forefront of experimental digital animation/art. This is part of the artistic programme funded by Arts Council England integral to an audience development programme and the capital development programme. The

exhibition has been curated by Alex Jukes a lecturer at Edge Hill University. This also includes workshops and talks for schools.

Arts Workshops, Events and Talks

- 4.4 Based around the Loop Effect, workshops will be held in March, April and May to complement the theme of the exhibition. Three are being held to explore digital image making, loop art (repetition devices such as Spirograph) and games play to look at the practical approach to methods, system loops and designing cycles for use within computer game design.
- 4.5 A variety of events and talks are held in the Gallery, including an Artists' Network meeting in February and 'Still: the Poetry of Photography' in February.
- 4.6 There are also art clubs held for different age groups of children every Saturday in term time and a variety of holiday activities for families.

Learning

- 4.7 A broad range of courses and workshops have recently taken place at the Gallery during the day and evening. Yoga and Qi Gong and Sing for Health sessions. For those involved in creative pursuits there are also courses in activities such as Creative Writing, Painting for Pleasure and Silver Clay Jewellery making.
- 4.8 There are also educational opportunities for schools, colleges and community groups in terms of tours and practical workshops.

Room Hire/Group Bookings

- 4.9 The Gallery is used by a wide variety of different groups. Examples include 'Learning Stars' which are workshops for people with learning difficulties in confidence building, creative art, and dance. These are run by the Workers' Education Association. Positive Together are also working with the Gallery to provide a creative course that will result in increased employability for those individuals who participate.
- 4.10 The NHS have booked space for 'hypnobirthing' classes and Active West Lancs are currently holding yoga classes.

Cafe

- 4.11 The café is now leased to 'The Modern Caterer' who also operates a similar facility in the Whitworth University gallery in Manchester. The focus is on healthy, wholesome home cooked food, from breakfasts, to light lunches, daily specials and traditional baking. They specialise in the very best local seasonal food and drink.

Shop

- 4.12 The craft and design shop within the Gallery stocks over forty independent jewellers and supports artisan makers from across the UK. Makers' work includes

prints, textiles, and homeware. It has developed and stocks a number of Ormskirk branded products.

Specialist Markets

- 4.13 These are held in the Gallery as well as occasionally in Ormskirk Town Centre, usually during events such as Motorfest, the Gingerbread Festival or the Christmas lights switch on. These usually involve local makers who sell their products and are charged for stalls.

Outreach Work

- 4.14 In terms of wider arts development work, the team has secured grant funding to work with a number of local businesses in Ormskirk Town Centre, installing artwork in shop windows. "Out from the Shadows" took place in 2019, a commemorative event focusing on WW1. In 2018, for a three months period, The Festival of Tales animated the town with an art trail, performance and a programme of events. Officers have also been involved in the recent scheme to improve the Sandy Lane Centre, with local people being involved in creating the artist inspired improvements, and the 'Wishing Wings' at the Digmoor Centre. A great deal of work is done with schools.

Footfall Monitoring

- 4.15 A local company has supplied a footfall monitor above the front entrance and it is being tested at present. They are due to place a further monitor above the side entrance soon and that will then enable proper footfall monitoring to take place. This system will be ready for figures to be collected at the start of the 2019-20 financial year and these figures will be reported to Members from then. This system has been provided at no cost to the Council as it is being used as a test facility by the company concerned.

5.0 ISSUES

- 5.1 The running of the Gallery, and the wider Arts Development Service involves several staff. These are
- Arts Development Manger
 - Gallery Officer
 - Retail and Events Officer (0.86 FTE but currently working reduced hours)
 - Outreach and Education Officer
 - Gallery Admin Officer (0.56 FTE)
 - Cleaner (0.56 FTE)
- 5.2 The Gallery and wider arts development service provides an important contribution to the economic regeneration and health agendas as outlined above, but there is clearly a cost to providing this service. The appeal of cultural facilities is widely recognised as being an important factor in sustaining town centres given the current difficulties that retail is facing. People need a reason to visit town centres as opposed to out of centre retail parks and shopping online,

and the experiential offer that cultural facilities provide can be an important part of that attraction.

- 5.3 The Council has recently commissioned a report from Growth Lancashire to examine ways in which the Gallery could generate more income streams to make it more self-sustaining. A final report has not yet been received but officers have discussed initial findings with the consultant and are already putting several initiatives in place to improve income generation and reduce costs. Work is ongoing to ensure all operating procedures are in place to enable more and profitable events to be held. This includes booking systems, health and safety procedures and licensing. The key initiatives being pursued at the moment are set out below.

Cinema

- 5.4 The new audio visual equipment will allow the Council to bring cinema back to Ormskirk Town Centre for the first time since the 1980's. Currently being planned is a monthly film night (possibly involving an optional meal), silver screenings of classic films on Wednesday afternoons (probably every 2 weeks), Saturday Matinees for families with children, and a parent and toddler screening on Wednesday mornings where parents can watch a film whilst their young ones sleep or play. Once a month there could be a special autism showing where there will be reduced sound.
- 5.5 There is also the chance to promote 'cinema parties' for children or even adults where favourite films can be shown for friends and family for birthdays or to celebrate an anniversary.
- 5.6 A programme is currently being drawn up and pricing and licensing arrangements being examined. Chairs also need to be purchased so that there is adequate comfortable seating in keeping with the venue.

Weddings

- 5.7 Weddings are potentially the biggest income earner for the Gallery, and how this can be taken forward and marketed is currently being investigated. There will naturally be a longer lead in time for starting weddings in the Gallery, but it is hoped to be holding the first weddings in late 2019.

Birthday Parties

- 5.8 In addition to 'cinema parties', the building is a great venue for a wide variety of themed children's parties – for example art & creative parties, pottery parties etc. It can also cater for adult parties in the evenings. This needs further marketing.

Music and Comedy Clubs

- 5.9 Given the improved facilities within the building there is considerable scope for folk nights, acoustic music nights and to host a comedy club. These are currently being explored with promoters.

Specialist and Makers Markets

- 5.10 There is scope to increase the number of makers and specialist markets held in the venue, and this will further increase income. Proposals for this are currently under consideration.

Payments, Bookings, Fees and Charges

- 5.11 There needs to be an overhaul of room booking rates to simplify the current charging regime. It is critical that people have the ability to book and pay online for events and room hire, to ensure that custom is not lost. Currently people have to ring during the working day and cannot pay online. A new booking and payment system, along with an overhaul of the website is currently being explored so that this can be in place as soon as possible.

Marketing and Promotion

- 5.12 The Gallery is often described as a hidden gem, and there is much more promotion of the venue that is needed. The website is being overhauled at the present time and there needs to be much more of a social media presence. The events, weddings and room hire possibilities need to be extensively marketed. A promotional film is currently being developed which can be shared on the website and social media as well as prior to cinema performances.
- 5.13 Through better promotion and increased visitor footfall through the various events being held, the shop should see increased sales and it will also make the café more viable in the long term.

Volunteers

- 5.14 Many similar facilities have many volunteers who can assist with such matters as running the shop and helping set up for events. This then frees up staff time to concentrate on developing the offer in the Gallery further. Moves are already being made to encourage volunteers to come forward and two new volunteers have recently been recruited.

Monitoring

- 5.15 The success of all the various initiatives will be closely monitored both in terms of income generated and also footfall into the Gallery. Footfall will be reported to Members through the normal reporting mechanisms.

6.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no sustainability implications associated with this report and, in particular, no significant impact of crime and disorder. However future developments detailed above would encourage 'new' people to get involved in cultural and recreational activities.

7.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Gallery does not currently cover its operating costs. The initiatives that are being planned will significantly increase income but it is not possible at this stage to say if this will be enough to completely cover the costs associated with running the Gallery. As the initiatives are rolled forward officers will closely monitor their impact on the financial position of the Gallery.
- 7.2 There is a great deal of staff time and effort being spent in moving forward with all these income generating initiatives simultaneously. However, all the initiatives being planned are being covered within the existing staff resource and budgets.

8.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 There is a risk that the initiatives being planned are not successful or fail to deliver appropriate revenue streams. The costs of the Gallery will not then be covered and Members will ultimately need to decide on the future direction of the service.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) have been relied on to a material extent in preparing this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

The decision does not have any direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Appendices

None