

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>EVENTS AND CULTURE – CHRISTMAS IN LINCOLN 2023 AND BEYOND</b>
<b>DIRECTORATE:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT</b>
<b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b>	<b>SIMON WALTERS, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT</b>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This report provides Members with details of the objectives for a yet to be finalised new city council led annual city centre/uphill events programme, which will replace the Lincoln Christmas Market. It also covers the proposed approach and timeline for a public consultation and engagement exercise prior to finalisation of that programme.

## **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1 On 20<sup>th</sup> February Executive Committee approved the transition to a new approach for 'Christmas in Lincoln', supplemented by an annual events programme throughout the rest of the year, to mitigate the economic impacts caused by the closure of the Christmas Market. This decision was 'called in' and considered by Select Scrutiny Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023, the outcome of which will be verbally updated in committee.
- 2.2 The proposed programme is designed to spread visitor numbers to the city centre/uphill area throughout the year, rather than within the condensed four-day period of the Christmas market. There are a number of benefits arising from such an approach, which are covered in the report below.
- 2.3 The report details the overall aim for the new programme and sets a number of objectives to be achieved. It then goes on to detail the approach to public and wider stakeholder engagement on the shape of this new programme. Due to constrained timescales, and the imminent start of the pre-election period, which precludes that wider public engagement during the period through to 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023, some commissioning of programme content will take place (focussed on the summer holidays, Halloween and Christmas period 2023) prior to finalisation of the overall programme.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 Lincoln Christmas Market enjoyed its 40<sup>th</sup> year in 2022, having been established in 1982. The 2022 Christmas market was exceptionally well planned and executed but saw a significant uplift in visitor numbers from 2021 and whilst the plans for crowd control coped with this increase, they operated at capacity. The visitor experience suffered and hence the reputation of the market 'took a hit'. The Executive report concluded that a new approach was required to events organised by the City Council in the core retail areas covering the city centre and uphill.
- 3.2 This new approach will have a particular focus on 'Christmas in Lincoln' but offer a range of activities throughout the year to encourage footfall and spend. Executive Committee were clear that the development of such a programme must be supported by a public and

stakeholder engagement exercise to ensure all interested parties have an opportunity to comment and hence help shape the content.

- 3.3 Work has already commenced on a draft of that programme, but at this stage committee are asked to offer a view on the process proposed, noting the tight timescales involved, rather than the content of the programme. A further report will be submitted to this committee in June 2023 with more details on the finalised programme.

#### **4. EVOLVING WAY FORWARD - A VISION FOR THE FUTURE APPROVED BY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

- 4.1 At Executive on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023, Members approved a new approach that transitions away from an intense four-day Christmas market, to a programme that celebrates the full six weeks of Christmas, together with a yearlong programme to maintain animation in the city centre/uphill area at other key times in the year.

Whilst further work is ongoing to develop this new programme, the shape and structure will be moulded around a number of core aspects. These are:

- **Move to a model of “Christmas in Lincoln”.** This will take place over the full 6-week period leading up to and including Christmas itself. This will see an offer across both the uphill area and city centre. Whilst this will not be a Christmas market, the final model will potentially have a retail element to it, utilising key event spaces in the city, namely City Square, Cornhill and Castle Square. This will address two of the key criteria - delivering activity over a wider footprint to spread the crowds and delivery over a longer duration.
- **Utilise partners to also organise activity** - The city benefits from some very active partners in the city who produce events and activities themselves throughout the year. These organisations have already been in discussion with the city council with a desire to develop more of their own offer during the Christmas period in the uphill area. Indeed, the market would have had to significantly change in 2023 anyway to accommodate their requirements. The new format will give them the space they have been looking for to develop their own full programme of activity.
- **Invest in wider Christmas infrastructure** – Officers are also exploring the extent to which the Christmas lights in the city centre can be refreshed and replaced on a rolling programme over the next few years to ultimately create a complete new display and extend to areas more recently re-developed within the city centre.
- **Develop and curate a range of cultural events throughout the year** - The Culture and Events team have been re-deployed to develop the new events programme for the city centre and uphill areas. Their remit is to develop and curate such activity to ensure a spread of attractions for visitors and residents alike throughout the year, supplementing (not replacing) the activity already undertaken by organisations such as Lincoln BIG, Cathedral, Lincoln Castle etc.
- **Support a re-emergence of the Lincoln Cultural Arts Partnership (LCAP)** - officer support will now be provided to encourage and develop creative talent in the city. Such artists will in turn support the vitality of the city centre through contributing to that programme of attractive events all year around.

#### **5. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE NEW PROGRAMME**

- 5.1 The aim for the programme therefore is:

***“To support the vibrancy of the city centre and uphill area by providing an all-year-round cultural experience for visitors and residents that cements Lincoln as a key destination locally, regionally and nationally”***

5.2 A series of objectives have also been developed to help direct and inform the programme. These provide a focus for the Events and Culture team and set some parameters within which to work.

These are:

- The city council will seek to replace the £2m spend and 320k visitors for the local economy, but more evenly spread over the whole year.
- Whilst it will be a year-round programme, there will be a particular focus and emphasis on the Christmas period.
- Events and activities will remain predominantly free to enter /public space based - but can include paid for events to build future programme sustainability.
- Geographic focus will be the city centre/uphill area, but large-scale events may be located elsewhere if they also have a significant positive impact for the city centre/uphill economy
- The city council will maximise the use of the events spaces in the city centre and uphill areas together with the wealth of other cultural assets across the city centre/uphill area
- A variety of events will encourage footfall and spend in the city centre/uphill area, which will consist of a mix of complimentary events (that enhance the existing visitor experience) through to larger scale impact events that draw new visitors from a wider area and encourage overnight stays.
- The programme will build on, and seek to enhance, the existing events programme delivered by partners (hence not replace it) and ideally give partners the confidence to also commit to additional content
- The programme will build in opportunities for charities to fund raise at the various events and determine criteria for how such opportunities are allocated.
- The city council will provide a consistent corporate policy for financially (or otherwise) supporting and encouraging a wider events programme delivered by partners in the city.
- The programme will meet other policy objectives such as encouraging environmental sustainability in the delivery of events locally.

5.3 However, this programme will not replicate a full Christmas market attracting visitors from across the region. The city council have stepped away from organising/coordinating such large-scale activity. Therefore, the collection of smaller attractions will be re-oriented to attract a local audience of residents in, and around, the city. Communications issued by the City Council will continue to make clear that the Lincoln Christmas market is effectively ‘bowing out’ after a run of 40 years. Therefore, initially, it will be a more intimate offer for

residents in the city and the surrounding area, as 'Christmas in Lincoln' evolves into its new format.

## **6. OUTLINE APPROACH TO PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

6.1 The approach to the engagement highlighted below is significant and involves interaction with partners, businesses, residents and visitors over the period through to June 2023. During the pre-election period this will consist of information gathering, pulling together all the ideas stakeholders have on possible content for a new programme.

6.2 These will then be evaluated and assessed for deliverability, content, and fit with the overall emerging programme. In summary the consultation will consist of:

- On- line survey launched 21<sup>st</sup> March 2023 and run until end of April 2023. Purpose is to gather information from partners, businesses, residents and visitors on what they would like to see in a yearlong programme of activity.
- During March to April, officers will complete a full procurement exercise for the provision of Christmas lights and will also start to book some event activity for summer, Halloween and Christmas 2023.
- Full public engagement on the emerging draft programme during May 2023. This will again be a wide on-line survey, supplemented by more specific workshops for key partners (who will be able to enhance the draft programme through their linking own event activity).
- A full All-Member workshop to consider outputs from all the public engagement in late May 2023.
- Finalisation of the programme and making final bookings for 2023 will take place from June 2023.
- Work on booking the more comprehensive 2024 programme will also start from June 2023 onwards.

6.3 It should be noted that the timescales are challenging in terms of undertaking a full and comprehensive consultation exercise alongside ensuring officers are able to book activity for 2023. There is an element of compromise required, with some event activity having to be booked soon to secure them, ahead of finalising the full programme. The main emphasis in 2023 will be from Halloween onwards, with a particular focus on Christmas 2023. It is envisaged there will be some activity booked to animate the city centre over the summer school holidays, but this will be built on for the 2024 full programme of activity as the lead-in period for next year's calendar of events in much longer.

## **7. BENEFITS OF THIS REVISED APPROACH**

7.1 Members will recall that the Executive report dated 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023, listed a range of benefits from this revised approach. These are reproduced again here for completeness:

'Christmas in Lincoln'.....

- Activity will be programmed in the city centre and uphill areas over the full 6 weeks of Christmas, not just focussed and concentrated into 4 intense days of the Christmas market
- All retail areas within the core city centre/uphill will be covered so footfall will be spread over a wider area
- It is anticipated that wider partners will become more involved. This is an opportunity to harness their expertise and assets to make Christmas appeal to a much wider local audience - creating a more diverse offer
- It will maximise the use of those city council assets in the city centre that have been regenerated in recent years - places such as Cornhill and City Square
- It doesn't draw heavily on partner capacity such as Police, EMAS, ULHT, Fire and Rescue at what is a very pressured and busy time of year anyway for these organisations

#### The annual events and activities programme.....

- The city will attract visitors to a range of events across the whole year. These visitors will be encouraged to make it a weekend stay in the city to enjoy all the city has to offer. This will benefit the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors.
- Social media exposure for the city will be across the whole year and hence will attract visitors at other times of the year, not just one weekend in December.
- The quality of the offer will be enhanced through a carefully integrated programme of activity in the city centre and uphill area so no one area is adversely affected by road closures etc, benefitting residents and businesses alike.
- Visitors will have longer to dwell and enjoy Lincoln at their own pace which will encourage repeat visits.
- It will support business and city centre vibrancy in a much more effective way and increase the associated economic spend.
- The city will experience fewer capacity issues be that available hotel spaces, parking, restaurant tables etc – the environment will be much more inviting & showcase our beautiful city with visitors spread through the year rather than concentrated over one weekend with the resulting elevated prices as demand outstrips supply.
- The city council will look to build charity opportunities across the full year of events so charities do not miss out on the opportunity to fund raise
- A diverse range of activity over the calendar year will provide greater value for money from the budget available, rather than it be spent on one 4-day event
- It will release significant staff capacity at all levels across the organisation.

## **8. Strategic Priorities**

### **8.1 Organisational Impacts**

The Events and Culture team, who had worked exclusively on the market have now been redeployed to deliver that wider events and cultural offer across the calendar year.

### **8.2 Human Resources**

The whole team has re-focussed on a wider culture and events programme of activity. This provides the staff resources to develop and curate a wider annual cultural programme for the city.

### **8.3 Significant Community Impact**

The replacement events programme will need time to build over the next few years as events start to gain traction and become a staple of the calendar.

### **8.4 Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

### **8.5 Procurement Implications**

There are no direct procurement implications arising from this report, although various event providers will be commissioned once the final programme is developed.

### **8.6 Financial implications**

The council's Medium Term Financial Strategy has a deficit built in of approximately £260k pa across the next five years for the Christmas market. This has been re-allocated to support both the new approach to 'Christmas in Lincoln' and a wider culture and events offer at other key times during the year.

## **9. Risk Implications**

### **9.1 (i) Options Explored.**

The emphasis of this report is to detail the process for consultation that in turn will provide the council with the widest range of options for a new programme.

### **9.2 (ii) Key risks associated with the preferred approach**

The main risk is covered in the body of the report, this being the condensed timeframes available and the need to balance undertaking public consultation over the next few weeks alongside the need to start booking activity as soon as possible. The report suggests a compromise whereby some activity will be booked quickly for the 2023 season.

## **10. Recommendation**

### **10.1 Policy Scrutiny committee are invited to:**

- i) Comment on the aim and objectives for the proposed events programme

- ii) Comment on the approach and timeline for wider consultation on the events programme
- iii) Note that due to constrained timescales, some event activity will be commissioned prior to the programme being finalised.
- iv) Instruct officers to bring the final programme back to committee prior to final sign off by Executive committee.

**How many appendices does the report contain?**

None.

**List of Background Papers:**

None

**Lead Officer:**

Simon Walters, Strategic Director  
Telephone (01522) 873440