Report to:	Cultural Leaders Group
Date of meeting:	25 November 2015
Report of:	Section Head – Culture (Watford Borough Council)
Title:	Big Events Programme

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report illustrates the background and context of the BIG Events programme, the biggest cultural events programme ever staged in Watford.
- 1.2 It supports and reflects on the significant value Arts and Culture can play in the regeneration of social capital and the local economy, helping to transform, inspire and provide a sense of pride and well being in our town

It illustrates The BIG Events key objectives, summarising key factors of success, key learning points and notable changes made to improve ways of working.

- 1.3 The evaluation of the programme covers user satisfaction, user profiles and data from surveys undertaken, business feedback, cost of events, marketing spend and reach, successful channels used and footfall per event. Looking to the future it highlights areas of streamlining, opportunity's, revenue implications, and required changes and delivery options.
- 1.4 Finally, the report covers the financial commitment the council has made over the last two years and what is proposed for 2016/17 including the key dates for next years events.

In addition and for consideration and discussion the long term sustainability of events will require a trio of factors including external funding, sponsorship and advertising, business and cultural partner contributions.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 To endorse and support the continued development of the Big Events programme series 3, the dates and use of the new events spaces as opportunities for cultural activities
- 2.2 To resort back to keeping the Imagine Watford and Watford Live as individual brands and avoiding any clash of programming for those two. Events.
- 2.3 To schedule Imagine Watford over two key weekends including the two Fridays to ensure the programme is intensified and acts are chosen for maximum impact value, entertaining and aim to retain the public over a longer period of time.
- 2.4 To explore a variety of funding channels including sponsorship and grants to support the ongoing development of the Diwali outdoor festival. In addition collectively

provide any application support and experience where appropriate.

- 2.5 To continue to support and develop local business partnerships and work with the BID team to co-ordinate events activity, share resources, knowledge and help to promote the BID and other pop up events.
- 2.6 To work collectively on the long term sustainability of the programme and to bring back some options for consideration at a future meeting to be agreed

3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

Background – The BIG picture and why this is important

- 3.1 The magnitude of Watford's economic regeneration programme is likely to be the envy of many towns across the UK. In recent times our two leisure centres; theatre and entertainment venues have been subject to significant capital investment resulting in brand new facilities or major refurbishment. The parks investment programme has seen a steady programme of extensive improvements and the recent award of a Heritage Lottery Fund will transform the facilities in Cassiobury Park.
- 3.2 The agreement to proceed with the Watford Metropolitan Line will vastly improve the transport infrastructure enabling greater access in and out of London.
- 3.3 The significant redevelopment of Charter Place and the public realm improvements to the top of the town have and will continue to transform the look and feel of the High Street and primarily Watford as a destination of choice.
- 3.4 In general, high streets are very important as identified in the Portas Review 2011 which was an independent study into the future of the high streets across Britain. In summary, the review sets out what has led to the decline of high streets. It sets out a vision as to what may need to happen to create new sustainable high streets of the future buzzing with innovation and creativity. It further adds that high streets can be dynamic, lively exciting social places to be and this links into the objectives of the BIG Events programme.
- 3.5 The Portas Review further states that once we invest in and create social capital in the heart of our communities, the economic capital will follow. One of its recommendations is to put in place a "Town Team": a visionary, strategic and strong operational management team for high streets.
- 3.6 So key to the resurgence of the town centre and unlocking the economic capital, are the Town Centre Partnership (TCP) and Cultural Leaders Forum.(CLF) The aim was to help drive forward the town centre strategy to create a balanced, vibrant town centre, encouraging more visitors to stay longer in a safe well maintained environment where businesses are thriving
- 3.7 Looking ahead, the recent announcement that we have been successful in support of a Business Improvement District (BID) is very encouraging and provides greater

opportunities for a co-ordinated programme of events. In the business plan the BID has outlined marketing and events as one of its priorities so collectively we can build on our strengths and collaborative approach.

3.8 The value of Culture – why we do what we do

Whilst the figure below is the national context we are working with Herts County Council and Herts Tourism related partners to collaborate on a destination management plan for the county. Part of the attraction to come and visit Watford is the strength of our cultural offer and events. We will all collectively benefit from this work and research i.e.; the following the Cambridge Economic Impact Model and the Business Barometer will be tools that we can use and obtain vital information.

The Cambridge Economic Impact Model

Is an industry respected tool for measuring the economic impact of tourism in a given area. Knowing the volume and value of tourism is an essential part of developing policies for managing tourism.

The Cambridge Model is a spreadsheet model that produces estimates from existing national and local information (e.g. accommodation stock, inbound trips) of the level of tourism activity within a given local area. The volume of visits is translated into economic terms by estimating the amount of spending by visitors based on their average spend per trip. In turn, the impact of that spending can be translated to estimate the effects in terms of business turnover and jobs.

The standard measures generated in this Model are: the total amount spent by visitors, the amount of income for local residents and businesses created by this spending, and the number of jobs supported or created by visitor spending.

The Business Barometer

Visit Hert's Business Barometer will contain monthly feedback from tourism businesses on their performance and give a simple 'snapshot' of how tourism is doing in Hertfordshire each month. Attractions, accommodation providers, conference venues, transport companies and Visitor Information Centres will be invited to submit their figures to Visit Herts.

To ensure that we share accurate district wide figures, we will encourage more businesses to contribute to the Business Barometer. Those who sign up for the Business Barometer will be added to the Visit Herts database and will be contacted monthly by Visit Herts to complete their figures on a confidential basis

A DCMS report January 2014 revealed that creative industries are worth £71.4 billion pounds to the UK economy that's £8 million every hour.

Culture and Arts plays a hugely significant role in transformation of people's lives, communities and the look and feel of our town.

Culture and art are lifeblood for people both as individuals and as part of communities.

Whether enjoying a visit to a museum, art gallery, singing, listening to musicians, reading poetry, or relishing the excitement of a street performance, this is part of what makes life worthwhile' Sandy Nairn, Director of the National Portrait Gallery.

And

'Arts and Culture can connect with, and create connection between, individuals, groups and communities in uniquely personal and highly engaging ways. It can provide inspiration, understanding, solace and entrertainment.It enriches our lives in deeply personal ways' Di Lees, Director –General of Imperial War Museum

3.9 Watford Cultural Leaders

The work and support of the Watford Cultural Leaders has been instrumental, highly valued and essential in creating and promoting the vibrancy in our town centre as identified in the town centre strategy. This has involved the commissioning of exciting cultural performances and events with the aspiration of attracting increased footfall into the town centre, enabling and presenting further business trading opportunities and a platform for businesses to thrive in the future.

These events support the four cultural development themes in Watford as identified in the Watford Cultural Plan 2011- 2016.

- Balanced Watford
- Accessible Watford
- Talented Watford
- Participating Watford
- 3.10 So as a reminder, In November 2013, the Watford Cultural Leaders Group was tasked with developing an events programme for the newly created events space in the town centre. We are fortunate to have such a strong cultural platform in Watford and as a testimony to this, the Cultural Leaders Forum developed the BIG Events programme which was endorsed and launched to stakeholders in March 2014
- 3.11 .A review of the programme at CLF followed and it was streamlined to 7 BIG events for 2015. We are now on series 3 and have learnt about what the public really like and what works well for us in the town centre.

BIG Events

- 3.12 The BIG Events programme is in essence a series of spectacular outdoor events showcasing a range of cultural genres, arts, dance, music, sport. Visually stunning programmes which are designed to bring the town centre and infrastructure to life.
- 3.13 Venues and spaces come to life and artists weave their magic along the High Street thrilling crowds along the Parade and providing a talking point in the heartbeat of our town.

The programme is designed around a kaleidoscope of all art forms, a mix of sound, light, movement, colour, comedy and drama which is designed to create those

memories that families will talk about in years to come; such is the power of culture.

3.14 Through continuing to support BIG Events and improving our Cultural Offer we collectively position Watford as a destination of choice which benefits us all.

Using our combined creative enterprise the BIG events is designed to enrich lives and drive social and economic growth.

3.15 Values of the BIG events programme are;

Events and spaces easily accessible to all High quality, high impact commissioned events Support the repositioning of Watford Free or value for money Strong cultural partnership working Develop and showcase community talent Maximise use of outdoor events spaces Developing partnerships with local businesses

3.16 **Objectives** of the BIG events programme are ;

Supporting the growth of the local economy Establishing Watford's growing reputation as a strong cultural destination Increasing a sense of well being, making people happy and proud of our town

3.17 For 2015, the BIG events programme consisted of;

- Big Summer Sounds
- Big Festival (combined Imagine and Watford Live)
- Big Beach
- Big Screen
- Big Sports
- Diwali
- Big Skate

3.18 **Proposed BIG events and dates for 2016 are**:

BIG Imagine Watford Festival – 24/25/26 June & 1,2,3 July

BIG Beach - 25 July – 13 August (3 weeks)

BIG Screen - 24- 27 August

BIG Sports - 10 - September

BIG Fireworks - November 5

BIG Skate - 26 November – January 8 2017

Others to note:

Watford Live (Community Arts Festival) – 4th June – 19th June.

In addition, we are currently developing ideas around other emerging events such as a Literary Festival for 2016 in collaboration with Watford Central Library, Watford Palace Theatre, LP café, Reasons Café and Watford Museum.

Our WBC Arts development officer has had some very encouraging interest from a wide range of local dance groups seeking to hold a BIG Dance event on the Parade.

3.19 Funding sources and levels of funding for the above are approximately;

Imagine Watford – 45 k Big Beach- 40k BIG Screen -25 k BIG Sports – 17k BIG Fireworks – 50k BIG Skate – 60k BIG Skate security & set up 25k

There is a commitment to work towards these as a key focus. The impending announcement of the government spending review is likely to be challenging and will place pressure on funding levels across the board for next year. We will not be in a position to know the full outcome of this until mid December

- 3.20 As a result decisions on funding levels may have to be taken which may be limiting so key to the discussion is how can a programme of this nature can be sustained longer term with our collective support and channels of funding available.
- 3.21 Following a review we recently re shaped our Events Planning group in order to provide a more detailed focus on the design, commissioning and marketing of events. This smaller group and model works well and we intend to use this group's knowledge and skill to go out to procurement to find the best operator and outcomes for each event.
- 3.22 This will involve testing the market to identify if there is any advantage in packaging events and sourcing operators who can deliver multiple events such as BIG Beach and Big Screen.
- 323 Whilst the Events Officer post is currently vacant there are sufficient resources, experience and knowledge in the WBC virtual events team to absorb any operational responsibilities. In addition with fewer events and an opportunity to tender many of the operational aspects can be built into the contract with an operator.

4.0 **Evaluation of the 2015 programme**

This section is a summary of headlines in the evaluation of this years programme,

some of this is supported by appendices attached to the report.

4.1 **User surveys** – during each event staff encourage people to complete a feedback forms. The data below helps us to evaluate each event, gives satisfaction ratings, provide data to focus our marketing activity, an understanding of our audience, average spend per head and where people also visited as a result. The analysis of this is contained at Appendix 1. We are currently exploring ways of how we could improve the collection of data from people at events and how this could be better utilised. For example, next year the council is using You Gov a dynamic way of collecting data from users and using this to help targeted campaigns.

4.2 Footfall

Strategically placed around the High street are footfall cameras which can provide us with data and reports necessary to hep us evaluate, monitor the success of our events.

The data for this year provides the benchmark for future analysis.

Appendix 4 attached is a summary of pedestrian flow for 2015 BIG Events; This overall demonstrates the additional pedestrian flows created by events, some significantly more.

4.3 Business engagement

A business survey was not undertaken this year mainly due to the focus and timing of the work required on the Business Improvement District (BID).

However the events team did engage with several businesses and a local business offer started to materialise at each event. This is summarised below;

This year has been more successful in engaging local businesses although this is still an area which is underdeveloped and has huge potential. Going forward the newly formed BID can play a significant part in engaging with local businesses, in activities, promotions, whilst on the ground the events team can continue to be a contact to assist and deal with any issues during event days.

This year the Events Team managed to get a number of business offering discounts into their restaurants for the BIG Sports, BIG Screen and BIG beach i.e.

Fit For sport offering 10% off holiday activities Everyone Active – join for a £1 discounted from £40 Banana Tree £10 off when you spend £30 Mulloys 20% off food Barracuda 10% off everything LP Café 10% off everything L'Artista 10% off everything Zinco's 10% off everything Feel Hot Yoga a draw for a free prize, value £135 Twisted Monkey a wide variety of discounts off food and drink

We also managed to encourage local traders from the Watford New Market to trade on

events such as the Big Screen and Diwali

Whilst we need to develop a more quantifiable way of getting feedback from businesses about the impact of this, we can demonstrate through the survey that people coming to events are spending money in the local bars and restaurants – (see survey report attached for details).

The feedback from local businesses was good overall with many thanking us for the trading opportunity, and it has developed some good positive relationships that we can continue to build on

4.4 **Cost of events** for 2015

Note; The ice rink is a separate contract, valued at 60k maximum risk. The Big Skate is an example of how a competitive procurement process has yielded improved quality and look and feel of the product. It has lessened the risk to WBC by capping the contract price at 60k with the additional advantage of a profit share.

The length of the contract is 2 years with an option to extend a year at a time up to 5 proving a longer term incentive for the operator. The contract also has some built in protection for WBC at the same time.

Event	Month	Budgeted Expenditure
Big Summer Sounds	May	£35,391.15
Big Beach	July	£29,696.16
Big Screen on the Parade	August	£21,898.31
Big Family Sports Day	September	£15,225.65
Diwali on the Parade	October	£17,566.55
Big Skate (Security)	Nov/ Dec	£15,222.18
Marketing costs		£45,000
Total		£180,000.00

The table below captures the cost per event for 2015.

4.5 **Learning Points from the events**

The Big Events programme has been a catalyst for change in how we help enable and facilitate other events within the town centre. Clearly in its first year there was rapid learning and agility required in all areas to deliver the programme, such as planning, communications, i.e. and environmental health and the events team.

This learning resulted in several changes which help now to facilitate events and make process slicker. An events Policy launched in March 2015 with accompanying guidance notes was produced with input from all the areas above.

Some changes have been made to improve the planning for events;

- Producing a Master Plan for events, showing key milestones for event support
- Changing the format of the Events Planning Group to enable a greater focus on design, delivery and marketing
- A focused and targeted marketing plan, excellent use of social media.

Others have allowed changes to legislation;

- amending the town centre premises license to allow alcohol to be sold on the Parade for the BIG events(with associated conditions

Some have improved understanding;

- Greater understanding and involvement of the Safety Advisory Group,
- Involvement and engagement of local businesses at events, promoting trade opportunities
- Officers in Environmental Health and Licensing supporting the business needs

Or the product

- tendering exercise for the BIG skate resulted in an improved product, look and feel and a positive shift in risk for 2015
- The BIG Screen had improved sound, picture, seating, catering and barriers resulting in a much improved all round experience
- The BIG Sports day built on last year success but shifted to participation and a teenager/family audience based on feedback

4.6 **Communications and Marketing Plan**,

Appendix 2 illustrates the channels used, costs and audience reach of all the BIG events 2015.

The communications and marketing of this year's Big Events series has moved on considerably since last year. By being much more targeted we have drawn bigger crowds and allocated resources more effectively. Social media has played an enormous role in building up excitement about events, measuring the sentiment about and success of events, and targeting specific audiences.

Partnership working has also improved, with Watford For You taking on business engagement - this is an area that can be further developed.

The Big Summer Sounds was our least successful event and we received some useful feedback from the public about it on social media. Key points highlighted by people included:

- it wasn't suitable for a Sunday (they would have stayed for Rebecca Ferguson but had to get the kids to bed)
- It clashed with the Rickmansworth Festival, which has been running for more than 20 years and has a wider offer. They were targeting a similar audience to us and pulled in more than 30,000 people

• the space at the top of town doesn't suit a music event

An interesting point to note is that we slimmed down the channels for Big Sports but spent more on JC Decaux and to date it's had the biggest reach. This also meant a slightly higher spend.

Furthermore the reach doesn't include the reach of all our partners who also promoted the events via their social channels and to staff.

The jump in spend is mostly down to lamppost banners, which we implemented after the feedback that we needed much more visibility around the town after Big Summer Sounds.

Quotes from social media and the Watford Observer include:

Watford Observer headline (not from council press release): 'The Big Sports Day in Watford town centre dubbed a success by parents'

Mike Gouboze, Tudor Estate: 'It is fantastic for the children. You could not have asked for a better day to do something like this. It gets the children out in the fresh air and interested in things they might not have been aware of before.'

Catherine Agnihotri, Orchard Drive: 'It is a fabulous event. It is great because it makes sure this area is for families and not just the nightlife which has always been here. I have said this is what the council needs to do more of. Family events. If the council does more of these events, families will take over here again.'

Zoreema Fatima, central Watford: 'It has been an excellent event. Watford Council has done a really good job. It is a lovely day out with the family and I hope they do it again next year. It is right on our doorstep. We don't have to go to London to have a family day out and we are looking forward to the next event, which will hopefully be the ice skating.'

Juangandini – nothing quite like watching a film alfresco #Outdoorcinema #watford @watford_for_you #bigscreen #outdoorfilm #watfordbigscreen #watfordforyou #film #gravity #watfordparade

Jess_laa – 80s music, Ghostbusters, and frozen cocktails all make for a pretty fabulous evening. #ghostbusters #watfordbigscreen #cocktails #happy

Tara McBride - Sophie Westnedge I'm jealous of you watford dwellers right now! Xx

Rusul Kamal Khazal - I love Watford

ANLifeCoaching - @WatfordCouncil sitting on one of your lovely deck chairs thanks. Loving the atmosphere, great screen. Summer anywhere :)

cakesbylorayne - @WatfordCouncil Great evening, thank you #WatfordBigScreen & #smirnoff @Lynneoc

cathbal66 - Lots of whooping & cheers from the #WatfordBigScreen crowd :)

@WatfordForYou @WatfordCouncil @WatfordEvents

ihertwatford - Excellent afternoon watching Shaun the Sheep on the Watford Big Screen @WatfordEvents @WatfordForYou @WatfordCouncil

cathbal66 - Looking forward to Dirty Dancing in #Watford in the sun! @WatfordForYou #WatfordBigScreen @WatfordCouncil

AhhGeeProd - @cathbal66 @WatfordForYou @WatfordCouncil @WatfordEvents No one puts Watford in the corner..

5.0 Summary of Learning from 2015 BIG events and suggested changes

- 5.1 This year has been no exception. There are changes happening all around which present opportunities and or threats to a programme, some of these key learning, opportunities and questions are summarised below.
- 5.2 Last year we decided to bring together the Watford Live and Imagine Watford festivals under one umbrella brand the 'BIG festival', In conclusion whilst there was a positive intent to make this work, in reality it only served to confuse and we are recommending that the two brands stand alone.

However, if funding is required for the Imagine Festival we would want to ensure that there is a strong association and alignment to the BIG events brand and or the council.

- 5.3 The Imagine Festival is a real showcase of international artistes. Looking at the audience and footfall during the mid week daytimes it was significantly less than the Friday night and weekends. For 2016 we would expect to see a concentrated programme over two weekends including the Friday nights so that performances flow and lead into each other with very little gaps in between retaining audiences and increasing the impact. We would also recommend a review of some of the performances and would wish to see ones which are impact and appeal to larger audiences.
- 5.4 Now that the development Business Improvement District has been confirmed there are some real opportunities to share resources and collectively market and plan events. It is suggested that the Commissioning Group is supported via a nominated representative from the BID who has the overall remit for events. This will help to ensure effective co-ordination of programmes, using the resources of the virtual events team to help facilitate events to happen safely and smoothly. Collectively we can shape a programme that incorporates BIG events, pop up events, community artistes.
- 5.5 This year we entered into a competitive procurement exercise for the Ice rink, this has allowed us to improve on the quality offered and fix the risk with potential for a % return on income over a specific threshold

In addition with fewer events planned for next year we will need to review the delivery models for those events. The design and commissioning group have reflected on this and will collectively take forward the commissioning and procurement of the Beach Screen, Sports.

The BIG Skate and BIG fireworks are already procured and contracted for 2016 whilst Watford Palace Theatre takes the lead role on the Imagine Festival with funds from arts grants, sponsorship and partnership funding.

The group will explore other funding sources and continue to support and encourage the Diwali Steering Group to apply and develop their outdoor event.

It is felt that the larger scale Music events such as Big Summer Sounds are better suited to Cassiobury Park and there is emerging interest to hold a music festival in the Park in 2017.

Whilst our events are free, we acknowledge that some events present commercial opportunities too i.e. such as making a nominal charge for a chair/seat at the BIG Screen. We would encourage and support the these possibilities for operators and that may help to drive down the costs of commissioning the event if these can offset against hire costs of equipment.

In summary some suggested changes for this year

Imagine Watford

- ✓ Detailed project plans and funding package being implemented for Imagine Watford 2016
- ✓ Shorter intense programme over two weekends, retention plan for audiences
- ✓ High impact, mass audience acts
- ✓ Improved marketing and awareness of the festival

BIG Beach

- ✓ Larger Beach
- ✓ Over longer period
- ✓ Bigger seating area
- ✓ Better bar and food areas
- ✓ More games and toys available
- ✓ Beach volleyball
- ✓ Acoustic performance
- ✓ Street theatre on the beach

BIG Screen

- ✓ Run over longer period (two weekends if possible?)
- ✓ More screenings
- ✓ Film Festival showcasing local talent
- ✓ Enhance infrastructure scale
- ✓ Utilise infrastructure more effectively
- ✓ More themed programming
- ✓ More added value (live performances)
- Opportunities for residents to help select films (not at expense of Palace Film Club steering group involvement)
- ✓ More seating options
- ✓ Tie ins with Warner Bros and other local Film Companies

BIG Sports

- Successful year and so more opportunities for 13 18 age group (e.g. this year penalty shoot out competitions, athletics training by professionals, parkour, army fitness training)
- ✓ ALL Family (inter generational) participation activities to be added
- ✓ More promotion of local groups
- ✓ Promote health and well being further
- More opportunities for older people (e.g. green bowling, walking football for over 50's, croquet, crazy golf)

BIG Skate

- ✓ Reflect on success of this year
- ✓ Consider success of procurement option
- ✓ Consider success of adding Christmas market
- ✓ Sponsorship
- ✓ More 'winter wonderland' experiences
- ✓ Sell advertising space
- 5.6 As pointed out earlier this year has been more successful in engaging local businesses although this is still an area which is underdeveloped and has huge potential. In addition, we are going to be looking at more effective ways of measuring the impact complimenting footfall reports.

6.0 Wider Events

- 6.1 The development of events and showcasing events in the town centre has resulted in an increase in other organisations wanting to book events and filming in the town. Appendix 3 illustrates the kind of interest we have been getting so far which is very encouraging.
- 6.2 We aim to continue to develop this by marketing and creating a website that helps to promote this. Our new booking procedures and process are constantly refined to help support the easy facilitation of events

7.0 Longer term

- 7.1 The current level of funding given to the programme has decreased each year. The ambition and desire is to maintain the existing level of the programme but to look at ways of leveraging in other income streams to help support this. This could be in the form of external funding if applicable, sponsorship or financial support from the local traders and businesses along the Parade and partners.
- 7.2 The Town Centre Partnership may have a vital role going forward as the concept of a Business Improvement District takes shape. The possibility of them working alongside

the cultural leaders to help develop and shape and jointly finance a programme to suit their needs is a strong one.

- 7.3 Watford has a solid base from which to go forward. There are significant opportunities here. The range of cultural assets across Watford would be the envy of a much bigger town or Borough. We have a wide ranging and strong 'arts community' with up to 100 local organisations and small groups who collectively make a difference in the town and going forward provide us with a strong opportunity to showcase local 'home grown' talent. All the elements exist to make it a great place for culture such as location, transport links, cultural attractions, excellent educational offer, strong communities, good and developing shopping offer, vibrant sports clubs and buzzing night time economy.
- 7.4 Events and activities in the town centre continue to provide a framework for transforming the appeal, attraction, movement, place of our Parade. Opening up this cultural infrastructure offering the opportunity for pop up activities such as diverse live street theatre/music/dance in places which are accessible provides different communities a sense of ownership and pride.
- 7.5 This balance of social and economic capital interweave in creating a town that thrives and builds a reputation and identity of Watford of increasing cultural significance and a destination of choice.