

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting24th April 2008

1. Title of Item/Report

Christmas Festival and Market Proposal

2. Record of the Decision

Members considered a proposal to develop a themed Christmas Festival and Market of regional significance over the next 3 years in Stockton.

Cabinet was reminded of the contribution the Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF) and Billingham International Folklore Festival made to the Borough's profile and economy.

However, both of these exceptional events took place within a short period of time over the summer months. Recognising this, and the need to provide shoppers and visitors with a reason to choose Stockton town centre as their destination during the Christmas season, in 2006 the Stockton Sparkles Christmas Festival was launched, the primary purpose of which was to enhance and support the retail offer in Stockton town centre at Christmas, thereby positively influencing the decision of Christmas shoppers to come to Stockton. Having completed two successful years, Stockton Sparkles was ready to move forward to become a high profile festival of regional significance, to complement the quality of the summer festivals.

Stockton Town Centre had a well known and well used market, which provided a range of convenience and comparison goods 52 weeks a year. Stockton's market continued to remain at capacity with a waiting list of potential stallholders, and offers a good range of products for customers to choose from. Markets were key to Stockton's ability to attract and keep new customers who would not otherwise have come to the town centre.

Taking the above into account it was proposed that a high quality, well managed and publicised Christmas market, as a four-day focus of Stockton's Christmas Festival celebrations be developed, supplemented by a programme of entertainments, musical performances and attractions on a much larger scale than achieved by the Stockton Sparkles festival to

date forming a solid basis for an annual event. This would grow to become regionally, even nationally, significant over the years and would play a key role in ensuring the vitality, viability and attractiveness of Stockton town centre at this crucial time of year for retailers whilst sending a strong signal to potential investors that there was sufficient footfall to justify their investment in regenerating the town centre.

Members noted that the proposal had the full support of the Regional Development Agency, One North East.

Cabinet noted the positive impact a successful Christmas Market had on the economies of other towns and cities in the UK, such as Bath and Lincoln.

The involvement of local businesses was considered important to the ongoing viability of such festivals and Members noted that there were a number of ways for the event to sit alongside the existing market and other retailers. Plans would be discussed through the Markets Forum and the Retail Forum and a nominated representative of the market traders encouraged to sit on the steering group developing the event.

In 2008 the event would set out to deliver

- An exciting, pleasurable and safe family day out
- A range of new customers for Stockton town centre
- An environment which would stimulate the senses and encourage people to buy
- A day out for local people and visitors from further afield
- An atmosphere of vibrancy, activity and celebration
- An event which would raise awareness of Stockton and change perceptions locally, regionally and nationally.

Members considered the key elements of the festival and noted possible attractions/activities under the following broad headings:

- Visual Appearance
- Interactive Experience
- Creating a Buzz
- Celebrating multiple cultures

It was felt that the entire festival would be extremely beneficial in helping to change perceptions of Stockton and reinforce its forte as the home of great markets, where there was always something going on, making it 'a place to visit, not just a place to shop'. Retailers, hospitality providers and other associated town centre businesses would benefit from the additional footfall and spend generated. In particular, the aim was to

improve the dwell time of visitors (how long they stay in town) to ensure that businesses benefited.

Cabinet noted the additional infrastructure that would be required. For example:

- Car parking (local provision combined with remote park and ride; alternatives for local workforce)
- Coach drop off and waiting facilities, with booking system
- Road closures, bus diversions
- power distribution (market stalls, area / local lighting, specialist for events)
- marquees
- Bespoke stalls, e.g. wooden huts, 'pop ups'
- temporary toilets
- Additional rubbish collection / disposal

It was proposed that the 4-day event would occupy a number of sites across the town centre area, in much the same way as Riverside Festival occupies different areas for different types of performance. In October 2007 preliminary site visits were carried out on potential areas where activities could be located. Since that time, further planning had taken place which has identified the type of activities best suited to these prime locations. These areas were identified, see below, and Members were provided with details of their inherent advantages and disadvantages.

- a. Stockton High Street
- b. Parish Church & Parish Gardens
- c. Church Road/Splash plazas
- d. Green Dragon Yard and the Cultural Quarter
- e. Riverside
- f. Trinity Gardens
- g. Castlegate
- h. Wellington Square
- i. West of High St (Partnership Scheme (ShiP) area)

Members were informed that there was considerable experience, within Stockton Council, of managing large scale events such as SIRF, events at Preston Park and throughout the Borough, and in the town centre. There was a well established group of officers, and representatives of external bodies (police, fire brigade, ambulance etc), which came together to manage every aspect of such large scale events and this group would oversee the operational aspects of the proposed event.

Marketing and promotion would be essential and would focus on recruiting traders attracting visitors.

A significant advantage was the existence of the Town Centre Joint Promotions Group, part of the Town Centre partnership and the body that already delivered the Stockton Sparkles magazine, the Stockton Sparkles festival and other events and campaigns throughout the year. This group would be in a position to maximise the marketing of the event and through joint funding and sponsorship would achieve greater coverage, and better buy-in from town centre businesses, than would otherwise be achievable. It was proposed that this group oversees the programme of marketing for the event.

The project would be managed by a small but experienced group, which would co-opt additional expertise as required.

It was explained that updates would be provided to the wider Town Centre Event Operations Group (which incorporated town centre ward councillors and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Transport), and also to the Markets Forum, Retail Forum and the Central Area Partnership Board.

Members noted that the event would be funded for the first three years through capital and revenue investment. Over the period, however, there would be opportunities to generate income through stall rents, sponsorship and fees. Whilst this amount was expected to be small in years 1 & 2, it would be banked and by year 3 the event was expected to have generated sufficient surplus to offset the expenditure required to implement it in year 4. Thereafter, the event should become financially sustainable.

RESOLVED that:-

1. the outline proposals be approved as a basis for further development work.
2. an all member seminar be arranged in the summer.
3. a further report be submitted to Cabinet in the Autumn to include detailed financial appraisal when costs have been firmed up.
4. an update report be brought back to Cabinet in February/March 2009 following the first year experience to evaluate progress towards the various objectives including financial.

3. Reasons for the Decision

Building on success in redeveloping and relaunching Stockton market, it

was proposed to deliver a range of specialist markets and events for Christmas 2008 under the brand of the now established Stockton Sparkles Christmas Festival. The wider festival runs from the end of November to Christmas Eve and provides a range of entertainment, events and performances to entice customers to shop in Stockton. Building on this now established brand, it was proposed to hold a town centre-wide, themed 4-day event which would draw visitors from across the region for a complete Christmas Market Festival experience. The first such event would run from Thursday 27 November 2008, through to Sunday 30 November 2008. This would be repeated and built upon in 2009 with a major celebration in 2010, the 700th Anniversary of Stockton's Market Charter.

The 4-day event would:

- Develop our winter based Festival offer to complement the existing summer programmes presented by Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF) and Billingham International Folklore Festival (BIFF)
- Provide a vehicle to develop and expand the existing markets in line with Stockton's unique selling point as 'the home of great markets' - identified as one of Stockton's strengths for regeneration of the town centre;
- Provide opportunities to develop a range of new, specialist markets drawn from the local area;
- Provide an exceptional and unique business opportunity for local businesses, crafts people, food producers and entrepreneurs in a high profile, low risk environment;
- Provide a viable business opportunity to attract a major specialist market provider to bring a large Continental-style market to Stockton;
- Provide the foundations for a series of bigger and better Christmas Festivals and markets leading up to the celebration of the 700th Anniversary of Stockton's Market Charter, in 2010, and beyond.
- Improving the offer, attracting new customers, increased footfall, additional benefits to existing retailers and increasing the attractiveness of the whole town centre offer.

Funding of £550,000 had been earmarked in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) over the next three years to set up and develop an event which would form a 4-day celebration of Christmas, with entertainments, attractions, a wide range of different goods on sale from craft fairs to

continental foods, across Stockton town centre. In addition, high quality street entertainment, staged performances and a major attraction e.g. an ice rink would provide a festive atmosphere.

The event would truly highlight Stockton as an exciting place to shop and visit at Christmastime and would establish a new, high quality event in the Tees Valley to draw visitors from the area and much further afield.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not Applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Not later than Midnight on Friday 2nd May 2008

Proper Officer
28 April 2008