

AT A MEETING- of the -  
**ILLUMINATIONS WORKING GROUP**  
held at the Council House, Walsall on  
**Friday 21 September 2006** at 6.00 p.m.

**PRESENT**

Councillor Towe (Chair)  
Councillor Burley (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Ault  
Councillor Griffiths  
Councillor Harris  
Councillor Bott  
Councillor Beeley  
Councillor Beilby  
Councillor Woodruff

**ALSO PRESENT**

Mr. W.J. Jones WJ Jones & Sons Amusements  
Mr. P. Gooch Amusement equipment  
Mr. C. Machin Arboretum users group  
Mr. B. Jenkins Arboretum users group  
Mr. J. Llewellyn Arboretum users group

**OFFICERS PRESENT**

Mike Parrott Group Co-ordinator Arts & Development  
Antonia Pompa Promotions & Events Manager  
Linda Downing WMBC Road Safety Team  
Stuart Bentley Scrutiny Officer

1/2006. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received on behalf of councillors Mrs. Martin and Mrs. K. Phillips. Apologies were also received on behalf Anne-Marie Pope, Sunita Lal-Kooner, Louise Oakley, Deb Slade and Amanda Best.

2/2006. **BACKGROUND**

Councillor Towe welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited Mike Parrott to give a brief overview of the final document from the consultants, SQW.

(annexed)

Mike Parrott highlighted the following issues arising from the report;

- Strategic direction
- Proposed vision and core objectives
- Development of the event content
- Funding the event

- Increasing the economic impact
- Phasing of product improvements and investment
- Management
- Branding/Name

and requested that the group make their initial recommendations for inclusion in the report to Cabinet.

3/2006. SITUATION ANALYSIS AND WAY FORWARD FOR WALSALL ILLUMINATIONS

Councillor Towe led a debate on the specifics of the recommendations outlined in the final report.

AGREED

That the illuminations working group;

Re: Strategic Direction;

- Recognise the need for investment, both in infrastructure and technology. The Illuminations 'core product' within the Arboretum should be the focus of any initial investment'.
- Believe that political backing and strategic guidance for the illuminations was important in order to reverse the event's decline.
- Believe that the Arboretum site be retained as the central site for the illuminations as the Illuminations are synonymous with the Arboretum and gives the Illuminations its 'unique feel'. However, the group also believed that the event could benefit from a link up with the Town Centre.
- Recognise that tying in the Illuminations more closely with Christmas could do much to boost the event by avoiding Ramadan and by encompassing Halloween, Diwali and November 5. The group also felt that the underfoot conditions would not be a major factor, although concerns over high winds were voiced. Further, they suggested that some form of public consultation should be undertaken, possibly through the local press, in order to gauge the views of the people.
- Felt that The Illuminations should retain 'the family' as its core target audience.
- Understood that The Illuminations needed a more commercial focus to ensure the event was sustainable. Further that any profits made by the illuminations should be ring-fenced in order to re-invest into the illuminations and that value for money be one of the core principals of the event.

Re: Proposed Vision;

- Amend the proposed vision statement to the following:
  - "By 2012, Walsall Illuminations will be a modern, interactive visitor attraction that appeals to adults and children alike and draws in large numbers of visitors from Walsall and across the Midlands. The event will continue to celebrate the culture and heritage of Walsall and its districts, but will also showcase the innovative and creative side of the borough."

Re: Proposed Core Objectives;

- Recognised that the investment required to develop the event into a modern visitor experience needed to be secured.
- Recommend the Development of the Illuminations into an event that reflects not only the history and culture of Walsall in its districts, but also presents a dynamic and progressive image of the borough.
- Recommend that the status of the Illuminations be enhanced, as one of the regions most popular visitor attractions, by growing local and regional visitor numbers year-on-year.
- Recommend that economic impact of the Walsall Illuminations be doubled by making much stronger links between the Arboretum and the town and its traders and attracting increasing numbers of visitors from outside the town. However, it was stated that any developed link with the town should not be detrimental to the core offer within the Arboretum.

Re: Development of the event content

- Recommend that light based themes be retained and developed and that the suggested light themes of; As a subject of discovery, Light as Art, Light as a way to showcase nature, Light as a way to communicate energy efficiency and Light as play, be endorsed and further investigated; with an emphasis on securing relevant sponsorship for each theme.

Re: Funding the event

- Recommend the appointment of a part-time commercial manager to develop business sponsorship revenues with the post subject to performance related pay and levels of investment. Further, there was a strong feeling that the post should not be filled by any form of consultant and that other options around obtaining commercial expertise, perhaps by giving further support to the existing staff, should be explored before committing to a job description.
- Recommend that the event apply for grant funding, although the exact geographic extent of the event should be ascertained in order not to be seen to be applying for the same grant monies twice under two separate bids, e.g. lottery funding for both the Arboretum and the Illuminations.

Re: Increasing the economic impact

- Further express the view that a better physical linkage between the Arboretum and the town centre was desirable insofar as any town centre attraction was not detrimental to the core offer of the illuminations and that the newly appointed town centre manager be involved in any development plans.
- Recommend that town centre-based attractions be developed for which Illuminations ticket holders would qualify for discounted or free entrance. It was felt that this could form part of a full Walsall visitor's package, which could include the Leather Museum, the Art Gallery and the Market amongst others.
- Recommend that idea of vouchers offering added-value or price discount offers on goods and services available in Walsall town centre be further investigated. Further, the group suggested that subsidised travel arrangements to and from

the districts should be investigated in order to make the illuminations more accessible to the residents of the more deprived areas of the borough.

#### Re: Phasing

- Endorsed Option I: Phased introduction of product improvements - a phased introduction of new elements as part of the 2007, 2008 and 2009 events.

#### Re: Management

- Recommend setting up a Walsall Illuminations Development Committee. Further, they suggested that the members of the illuminations working group form the core of the committee with further members being co-opted, as appropriate, from, example, representatives of the ethnic communities within the borough and the town centre manager.
- Agreed, in principal, that a full time member of staff be employed, tasked with developing the event. Further, that is post be separate to that of the commercial manager. However, they suggested that this post be held in obeisance until the impact of the commercial manager, on the available funding, could be assessed.

#### Branding/Name

- Felt that the current brand was well known and renowned and that renaming the event would loose not only the brand image, built up over 5 decades, but would loose the local connection to Walsall itself. The group re-iterated that the event should retain the name of Walsall illuminations with possible added by-line of “a festival of lights”.

Their being no other business the meeting terminated at 8.10 p.m.