

Report of the Director of City Development and Director of Environment & Housing

Report to Executive Board

Date: 22 March 2017

Subject: The Christmas Experience at Lotherton Hall

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Harewood Ward	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. The Council devised and delivered a successful new initiative 'The Christmas Experience at Lotherton Hall' over Christmas 2016. It was a cross-Council partnership between Breeze, Museums and Galleries, Parks and Countryside and Leeds Lights. This report highlights how the Council met the aims set at the beginning of the project.
2. This is a model of delivery that builds upon the on-going success of the joint working at Lotherton Hall between Parks & Countryside and Museums and Galleries and has the potential to be developed at other key points in the year and in other venues.
3. The event was successful both in terms of feedback from those attending and in terms of finance. A selection of the feedback is included at appendix 1. The surplus realised will support Council services delivered by Breeze, Museums and Galleries and Parks and Countryside.

Recommendations

4. Executive Board is requested to:
 - (i) Note the success of the project for both income generation and joint working across council services;
 - (ii) Note the potential of this and similar schemes to support the delivery of council services in the future and to encourage such initiatives;

(iii) Note that the surplus generated will be used to support the activities of the services involved and the continued provision of the Lotherton Christmas experience; and

(iv) Commend the work of the staff involved.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To inform and update Executive Board on the delivery of a new initiative - The Lotherton Christmas Experience.

2 Background information

- 2.1 The Breeze team is expanding its annual programme with a range of income generating events that broaden the Breeze offer for young people in Leeds, and support and complement its core programme of free events. Work was undertaken within the service to examine the 'Christmas Experiences' on offer both nationally and regionally, taking note of successes and where initiatives have failed, and felt confident that there was a gap in the market and a demand for a quality Christmas Experience in the City.
- 2.2 Lotherton Hall already ran a successful Edwardian Christmas weekend and had already identified this as an area to grow more in the future. It was felt that there was room to expand on this, running a Christmas Experience throughout the month of December in line with other venues.
- 2.3 The Lotherton Estate was gifted to the Leeds City Council by the Gascoigne family in 1968. Lotherton Hall and Estate is building an audience year on year, as is Breeze which has a current membership of 167,503 young people. Within this joint database there is a considerable block of young families, and the service felt that they could target that young family audience perfectly to make this a popular, annual event at Lotherton Hall and Estate.
- 2.4 The aim was to deliver a high quality Christmas experience at Lotherton Hall and Estate for Leeds families and surrounding areas and to add an exciting new event to the city's calendar. It would generate income to reinvest in more Breeze initiatives and in the estate. It would also raise awareness of the Lotherton Estate to new customers, generate additional footfall, increase membership and increase primary and secondary income.
- 2.5 The shared estate, building on success
- 2.6 In July 2011 Executive Board considered a report that set out a programme of investment into the estate. This report highlighted that the aim moving forward was for Lotherton to become a coherent estate that is a quality visitor attraction. Therefore from 2011, the estate has been managed through a collaboration between Parks & Countryside and Museums & Galleries which is guided by a joint project board.
- 2.7 Under this joint working initiative, income to the whole estate has steadily risen from £575k in 2010/11 to £800k in 2015/16 this represents a growth in net income of 225k and increase of circa 40%. These improvements in gross income generation have in turn had a positive impact on reducing the level of net subsidy associated with the management of the holistic estate.
- 2.8 This growth income has been in part driven by a commitment to the promotion and expansion of the onsite event programme, supported by a series of investments into

both the visitor focussed elements of the estate and it also its infrastructure. Some of the improvements undertaken include;

- The development of an adventure playground
- Establishment of a new vehicular access route
- Improved visitor parking
- Improved children's play
- Improved signage and interpretation..

2.9 These on site improvements and the expansion of the event programme have contributed to the growth in visitor numbers, but the impact of these investments and initiatives have been significantly bolstered by the implementation of an active marketing strategy which has seen visitor number rise year on year. In October 2016 Executive Board supported a proposal for continued investment within its visitor attractions in order to enhance visitor numbers further and in order to generate revenue to improve sustainability. This included plans to develop and enhance the bird garden at Lotherton Hall by investing £1.2m into an improved visitor attraction, with the objective of increasing visitor numbers by 72,000 per annum, which represents an increase of 40% from present figures.

2.10 This investment would be supported by an expansion in the onsite marketing programme for the Lotherton Estate along with a continuation and diversification of the programme of events and activities for visitors.

3 Main issues

3.1 The whole experience was steeped in the tradition of a classic Christmas, to tie in with its surroundings, the existing Edwardian Christmas offering, and taking inspiration from traditional Christmas story-telling and themes.

3.2 The Twelve Days of Christmas Walk was a festoon lit walk through the captain's wood, around the back of the bird garden to the dell and through the formal gardens. Installations along the walk represented the 12 days of Christmas, some of these were interactive. A small fairy village was situated in the dell to attract and fascinate young audiences.

3.3 The Elf Village was situated in the back courtyard at Lotherton and in the coach houses, was roofed, heated and decorated with trees and lights. This was essentially a 'Santa's Grotto' experience however with a little extra. When entering the 'Elf Village' families were greeted by an Elf who would give them a warm welcome into the village and guide them through arts and crafts and storytelling activities before their meet and greet with Santa who would provide the traditional gifts.

3.4 The house was themed for an Edwardian country house Christmas weekend,. The downstairs rooms all individually decorated. The Servants' Rooms were transformed into an Edwardian Selfie Studio where whole families could dress up and take

pictures against backdrops. Opening hours were extended so that the house could be fully integrated into the experience.

- 3.5 The event was designed to generate additional income but it was also essential to maintain a good relationship with existing regular customers and Lotherton members. The Twelve Days of Christmas Walk, the Hall and Fairy Dell were all included within the general admission price. A separate charge was made for the Elf Village and Santa Experience. Both generated additional income and along with the café and shop and exceeded targets.
- 3.6 Although the project was devised and managed by the Breeze team the planning, installation and delivery of this project has been a great piece of team work. Beginning in January 2016 teams from Breeze, Museums, Parks and Countryside, Christmas Lights and our Business Partners from Resources and Strategy worked to develop the logistics of hosting this complex event. The teams planned and delivered a marketing strategy, ticketing solutions, information management and all the other little things required to deliver a great Christmas Experience.
- 3.6 A key element in the success of the event was the selection of a cloud technology provider, TYG Tickets, who were able to design an online ticketing system quickly which allowed us to collect all of the money up front. The investment in the technology to enable this totalled £5k which set against the income generated represents a very modest investment indeed.
- 3.7 The effect of secondary spend enabled by the online ticketing is also quite dramatic with customers arriving at the event then feeling more inclined to spend money at the shop or café.
- 3.8 Online ticketing was also instrumental in relieving logistical highways issues by allowing for a speedy entry to the event; previous events have had traffic management issues.
- 3.9 The Breeze team oversaw the design and installation of the Elf Village, the 12 Days walk and the Fairy Dell assisted by site staff and the Christmas lights team. The whole team also continued to provide essential maintenance support throughout. The marketing for this project was managed and delivered by the Leeds Museums & Galleries audience development team who have been integral to the success of Lotherton to date. The teams really enjoyed working together and this flowed through to the customer experience.
- 3.10 For future planning it is worth noting that the event required the full site team working to capacity throughout the months of November and December and projected future growth will require consideration of appropriate staffing levels to deliver the customer experience.

3.11 The performance against the projects objectives is as follows:

Aim	25 November to 23 December 2015	25 November to 23 December 2016
Increase in footfall to the Lotherton Hall Estate	8,920 visitors	64,743 visitors
Increase in membership of the estate	236 new members	494 new members
Increase in total income generated	£23,504	£282,613
Increase in café income	£12,002	£96,994
Increase in shop income	£2,317	£9,425

3.12 The first year of the Lotherton Christmas Experience has outperformed expectations and there are several ideas for enhancing the experience and increasing footfall and income in 2017.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 The Christmas Experience Website and Lotherton Hall Facebook page were good vehicles for communication throughout the period of the event allowing us to pick up enquiries and concerns quickly. They were also a source of great feedback a sample of which forms Appendix 1 to this report.

4.1.2 Feedback forms were available and the returns reflect the feedback already received through social media with a rating of excellent and good throughout and the only areas for improvement quoted as being increased capacity in the café, a better or larger shop and the lighting in the car park.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 An Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration screening document is attached as an appendix.

4.3 Council policies and Best Council Plan

4.3.1 The initiative supports the Council's vision to be a more enterprising Council and a child friendly city. Supporting a resilient, inclusive, cultural sector and enabling greater access to green spaces, leisure and the arts.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 The project required Council to commit to inject £48,801 into the 2016/17 capital programme, funded by prudential borrowing. The repayment of the loan is to be over 5 years and the initial projection of income as follows.

4.4.2 Projected budget

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Income	£ 120,539.38	£ 128,510.63	£ 137,279.01	£ 146,924.22	£157,533.95
Cost	£ 84,628.00	£ 82,159.40	£ 85,447.37	£ 87,899.74	£ 89,524.73
Lothertons base take	£ 12,611.00	£ 13,872.10	£ 15,259.31	£ 16,785.24	£ 18,463.77
Prudential repayment	£ 10,900.00	£ 10,900.00	£ 10,900.00	£ 10,900.00	£ 10,900.00
Surplus	£ 12,400.38	£ 21,579.13	£ 40,931.64	£ 48,124.48	£ 57,109.22

4.4.3 Actual surplus

	Projected	Actual
Income	£120,539.38	£219,060.00
Cost	£84,628.00	£137,132.00
Lothertons base take	£12,611.00	£13,308.00
Prudential repayment	£10,900.00	£10,900.00
Surplus	£12,400.38	£57,720.00

The variance in projected and actual costs is in part due to additional capital set up costs and additional staffing costs necessary to manage the large numbers of public passing through the estate.

4.3 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 There are no legal implications in this report.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 This is an excellent example of an innovative approach accessing capital funding which subsequently over achieved in terms of revenue. With this kind of innovation a degree of risk is inevitable particularly around earned income (in this instance

ticket sales) but this was mitigated by sound research, a careful approach and good marketing.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 To recognise that the first year of the Lotherton Christmas Experience has been a successful event that can be built upon and the model extended to other events and venues.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Executive Board is requested to:

- (i) Note the success of the project for both income generation and joint working across council services;
- (ii) Note the potential of this and similar schemes to support the delivery of council services in the future and to encourage such initiatives;
- (iii) Note that the surplus generated will be used to support the activities of the services involved and the continued provision of the Lotherton Christmas experience; and
- (iv) Commend the work of the staff involved.

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1 None.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – The Lotherton Hall Christmas Experience Online Feedback.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.