



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Belfast Festival at Queen's – use of venues
Date:	15 April 2010
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Caroline Wilson, Policy and Business Development Manager

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to seek Committee approval for two events to be held on Council property as part of the Belfast Festival at Queen's in October 2010.

Key Issues

Belfast Festival at Queen's has requested that the Committee consider supporting two events for the 2010 festival programme. The Festival Director, Graeme Farrow is seeking to host two large-scale productions in Belfast in 2010 and has approached the Director regarding the possibility of staging these in partnership with the Council.

Black Watch theatre production – Shankill Leisure Centre

Black Watch is an internationally acclaimed play based on interviews from former soldiers who have served in Iraq in 2004 as part of the Black Watch regiment. The National Theatre of Scotland's production has won numerous theatrical awards and has had a sell-out tour across the world.

It is described as a thought-provoking play which examines what it means to be a soldier, serving in Iraq and the emotional journey home. Belfast Festival at Queen's will work with the National Theatre of Scotland to ensure that there is positive and stimulating debate around the production's first visit to Belfast as well as a diverse audience attending over the course of the seven performances.

It is a large-scale production (30m x 25m playing space) which requires a suitably sized venue for the specially built stage. It plays to an audience of 700 per night and takes them on a journey from Scotland to the Iraqi desert. The highly physical performance incorporates pipe music, songs and physical action sequences.

After extensive research, the Festival is seeking to stage the show in the Shankill Leisure Centre. They have met with the Shankill Leisure Centre manager to discuss the practicalities of staging the production there. They are requesting support in-kind from the Council by seeking a discount on the market value of hiring the space. They require the space from 24 October – 1 November 2010; this includes set-up and removal times.

Two porta-cabins would be installed for dressing room and office facilities in addition to the use of the main hall. A full risk assessment would be undertaken by Belfast Festival at Queen's with the co-operation of the National Theatre of Scotland. The production would be covered by the Festival's public and employee liability insurance.

Belfast Festival at Queen's is requesting a discounted hire fee for the duration of the production. The standard full hire charge for the main hall would be £11,200 (£1400 x 8 days). This does not include additional staffing costs and the use of changing facilities. However, it assumes 100% capacity during the period and at a comparable time last year the main hall income was approximately £3,000.

It would therefore be possible cover all actual costs, if the Council were to offer the facility at £7,500. This would cover loss of income for the main hall and associated rooms, the additional staff required for out-of-hours cover and the stand-by electrician. The production company will sign a standard hire contract which will include clauses regarding making good any damage. It will be marketed by the Festival at Queen's, who will also handle ticket sales and provide front-of-house staff.

Over the seven performances, they anticipate a sell-out audience of 4,900. This potentially could benefit the Council in bringing non-users into the Shankill Leisure Centre, promoting it as a shared space, as well promoting access to the wider neighbourhood. In line with our corporate objectives, it will be a high-quality contribution to the cultural and tourism experience in the city, attracting visitors from across and outside of Belfast. It is anticipated that there will be significant media interest in bringing this production to Belfast for the first time. The Council's involvement in staging the production will be suitably reflected in the publicity for the event. The Council may also use it as an opportunity to promote simultaneously its leisure services, including the Boost scheme.

Leon and the Place Between circus production – Botanic Gardens

Belfast Festival at Queen's is keen to work in partnership with the Council to develop a regular Botanic-based festival event. To this end, they are proposing that Cahoots NI perform a new version of the children's tale *Leon and the Place Between* in a circus-style big top, located on the main lawn opposite the Palm House in Botanic Gardens. They require the location from 11 – 26 October 2010; this includes set-up and removal times.

The 'big top' has a footprint of 25m x 18m. A complete risk assessment will be undertaken by Cahoots NI and Belfast Festival at Queen's. It will be staffed by appropriately trained Festival staff, as well as a 24-hour security officer. It would be a condition of hire that the final location of the tent and any additional accommodation would be agreed with the relevant Parks Officer.

Belfast Festival at Queen's has requested that the Committee considers waiving any hire charge for the site. This would include covering the re-instatement costs of the lawn, following the removal of the tent. This is likely to be in the region of £2,000 (18m x 25m x £4.50 per sq m).

Over the course of 24 performances in 11 days, Cahoots anticipate a total audience of 2,400. It will be marketed by Belfast Festival at Queen's as the key children's event in their programme, targeting families and schools.

The Council's involvement in staging the Cahoots NI production will be suitably reflected in the publicity for the event. This would consolidate the Council's work in promoting the park as a vibrant, shared, open space, connecting with the re-opened Ulster Museum and the nearby Lyric Theatre.

Enchanted Evening lighting installation

Belfast Festival at Queen's has also suggested that the Council might consider re-staging the lighting displays which were installed as part of the popular 'Enchanted Evenings' production.

They propose that the Council would benefit from the marketing support they would offer, as well as the guaranteed footfall for the Cahoots production. In total, would create a very attractive cultural product in the park, targeted at children and young people, drawing visitors from across and beyond Belfast.

The cost for the lighting installation would be borne by the Council. The cost of the lighting displays would be in the region of £14,500. This would include installation (£11,000); stand-by electrician costs (£2,500) and out-of-hours staffing costs for the park (£2,000).

Conclusion

Both of these events have the potential to demonstrate the reach of the Parks and Leisure Committee across all the corporate objectives of the Council. They will be high-profile features of the Festival programme, generating positive publicity for the Council as well as introducing Council facilities to many non-users.

Resource Implications

Financial

Shankill Leisure Centre - loss of revenue from external hire and/or hire of hall fees
Botanic Gardens – reinstatement costs in the region of £2,000
Lighting installation – in the region of £14,500. This will be covered by existing revenue budgets.

Human Resources

Shankill Leisure Centre - Additional staff cover for out-of-hours use and stand-by electrician. This is covered in the proposed fee to be charged.
Botanic Gardens - Additional staff cover for out-of-hours use and stand-by electrician.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. Grant authority for 2 events to be held on Council property as part of the Belfast Festival at Queen's in October 2010, subject to satisfactory terms being agreed with the Director of Parks and Leisure and on the condition that:
 - The event organisers resolve all operational issues to the Council's satisfaction;
 - An appropriate legal agreement, to be prepared by the Director of Legal Services, is completed; and
 - The event organisers meet all statutory requirements including entertainments licensing.
2. Approve a discounted hire fee of £7, 500 as outlined above for the use of the Shankill Leisure Centre for the Belfast Festival at Queen's staging of *Black Watch* (24 October – 1 November 2010);
3. Agree to waive the hire fee at Botanic Gardens for the purposes of the Cahoots NI production of *Leon and the Place Between* (11 – 26 October 2010); and
4. Approve the staging of a version of the Enchanted Evenings at Botanic Gardens, to coincide with the Belfast Festival at Queen's period, as outlined above.

Decision Tracking

A closure report on the 2 events will be presented to Committee by February 2011 by the Policy and Business Development Manager.

Key to Abbreviations

None.

Documents Attached

None.