

LEISURE AND YOUTH POLICY AND REVIEW PANEL

Meeting held on Monday, 9 November 2015 at the Princes Hall, Aldershot at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr Liz Corps (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs. D.B. Bedford (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr T.D. Bridgeman
Cllr P.I.C. Crerar
Cllr K. Dibble
Cllr J.H. Marsh
Cllr A.R. Newell
Cllr B.A. Thomas

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Mark Staplehurst.

11. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 7th September, 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

12. PRINCES HALL

The Chairman welcomed Mr. David Phillips, Town Centre and Cultural Manager, who had been invited to the meeting to give a presentation on the Princes Hall Annual Report 2014/15 and an overview of the future opportunities and potential developments at the site.

Mr. Phillips reported on events held at the Princes Hall during 2014/15, and advised that, for the first time ever, over 1,000 events had been held at the theatre. This figure comprised 407 promotions, such as 56 professional shows, 39 performances of the Pantomime and 232 Youth Theatre sessions, and 639 hirings, including 85 concerts and shows, 318 business meetings and 90 dance classes. It was explained that whilst "hirings" were risk free, a fixed fee was paid by the hirer for use of the room, profit on promoted events was dependent on ticket sales. It was noted that the Youth Theatre sessions had increased from four sessions a week in 2010/11 to seven per week in 2014/15, which were attended by over 100 young people.

It was advised that the number of professional shows and their attendance figures had remained consistent over the past few years; data showed there were 50-60 shows on average a year, attended by around 20,000 people. Increases to ticketing prices, in the past twelve months, had resulted in an increase in gross box office figures and profit on professional shows. The Panel was informed of the ten most profitable professional shows, these included shows by comedians Lee Mack

and Jason Manford, Sing A Long A Frozen, Psychic Sally, That'll be the Day and Milkshake Live! It was noted that if a show ran for more than one night/performance profits increased, as set up costs were reduced.

Mr. Phillips reported on the data collected from performances of the Pantomime. It was noted that attendance figures had remained between 17,000 and 19,000 per year over the last six years, with Snow White and Peter Pan being two of the most popular Pantomimes. Gross box office figures had risen steadily over the years, with takings in excess of £250,000 in 2014/15, resulting in a profit of £123,000 (a £3,329 profit per show). When benchmarked with ten other venues in England, it was noted that the Princes Hall ranked fourth on profit per pantomime performance, beaten only by three venues with significantly larger seating capacities.

It was noted that, compared with thirteen other civic theatres in England, the Princes Hall ranked top on average percentage of tickets sold per professional show, (including the Pantomime). 39% of all Princes Hall's tickets were now sold online, (fifth out of twelve venues), the installation of a new ticketing system, "Spektrix", enabled a target figure to be set of 50% by 2017.

It was advised that income from the Tichbourne and Princes suites had reduced since 2006/07 but income from the main auditorium had almost tripled. It was a priority to address the fall in hiring income of the ground floor suites or find alternative uses for them

The Panel was informed of the budget for the Princes Hall and noted that the venue had operated at a subsidy of £3.05 per person in 2014/15. It was also noted that some capital works had been carried out, in particular replacement flooring at £15,000, a replacement stage extension at £12,000 and installation of wi-fi throughout the building. It was explained that the subsidy of nearly £400,000 for the Princes Hall was very competitive compared to that of other local theatres.

In response to a query regarding the jump in the number of events by 18%, it was advised that one regular booking of 100 meetings, ie. Slimming World, would make a huge difference to the number of hirings, increasing the figures considerably.

It was noted that SNAP discos had once had attendance figures of 500-600 young people but had dipped about 18 months ago to 200 – 250. A relaunch had taken place making the disco cheaper to put on and attendance had increased to 300+. It was noted that the Police were no longer involved in SNAP.

The Panel discussed the parking facilities near the Princes Hall, and was assured that the demolition of the Warburg Car Park had not had a detrimental effect on attendance at the venue. However there were some issues with the Westgate/Morrisons car park, and staff aimed to divert theatre goers to the High Street Car Park at all times.

A discussion was then held on the future of the Princes Hall. A number of areas needed to be considered to ensure a sustainable future for the facility, these included, income from the suites, the staffing structure, booking fees, secondary spend, competition from other venues in the town centre and the long term use of

the building. The Westgate site had been identified as a key site in the Aldershot Prospectus; the site included the Princes Hall, Police Station and Magistrates Courts as well as the Westgate development. Possible developments for the Princes Hall included an enhanced ground floor area, which could include a café area and space for office co-location opportunities and flexible meeting rooms.

The Panel discussed the two venues in the town, which may have an impact on the Princes Hall, The Empire and The Palace. It was noted that The Empire had a capacity of 1,600 but required a lot of work and the view from the seating at the top was obscured; it was thought that the plan would be to have an auditorium on the ground floor and a restaurant with a place for worship on the upper level. It was advised that work was currently taking place on The Palace and the property still held a licence to operate as a nightclub. The future plans were still unclear.

In response to a query, it was advised that the Council would continue to monitor the site adjacent to The Empire, which currently housed Gala Bingo and a car wash facility.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Phillips for his presentation.

13. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel **NOTED** the current work programme and were advised that a presentation on the Playground Review and an update on the Lido Review would be given at the next meeting

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm.

CLLR LIZ CORPS (CHAIRMAN)
