

**OUR FUTURE CIRENCESTER**

**FESTIVALS  
AND EVENTS  
STRATEGY**

**PROJECT OUTLINE**

**OFC HERITAGE WORKING GROUP**

**SEPTEMBER 2008-MARCH 2009**

## BACKGROUND

In September 2008, Cirencester Town Council adopted its Community Plan, “Our Future Cirencester” (OFC). This contained 16 community development projects including one to produce introduce annual festivals and events to Cirencester. The original action plan is set out in Annex A.

From September 2008 to March 2009, the OFC Steering Group set up four working groups to consider how to take the community plan forward in detail. The task for the working groups was to consider specific topics and to make recommendations to the Steering Group in March 2009 on how the project should proceed in the 2009-2010 year. The four working groups were Heritage, Business, Infrastructure, and Children/Young People.

The Heritage Working Group dealt specifically with the Festivals project. The working group was composed of around 10 local people who met monthly to discuss how to take various heritage initiatives forward. Other experts were invited to join the working group from time to time, for instance from local schools, English Heritage and arts development projects.

The working group considered and refined the original OFC action plan. In doing this, it took account of existing events such as Heritage Open Day, the Churn Family Fun Day and the Advent Festival.

This report constitutes the Heritage Working Group’s recommendations to the OFC Steering Group.

## OBJECTIVES FOR THE PROJECT

The Heritage Working Group began by considering the main existing festival offer in Cirencester. This is set out in the table below.

Churn Family Fun Day	May, one day
Cirencester Early Music Festival	July, one week
Cotswold Show	July, 2 days
Ragged Hedge Fair	August, 2 days
Heritage Open Day	September, 2-4 days
Mop	2 Mondays in October
Advent Festival	Nov/Dec, one evening

They then went on to consider why it was important for the Community Plan to augment what was already available. Why hold a Cirencester festival that is different from the existing offer? The following objectives were identified.

## **Have fun!**

### **Attract more tourists to Cirencester**

- Generate revenue for local businesses
- Make Cirencester chosen tourist destination
- Attract regular “high quality” tourists who will bring benefits to local businesses

### **Foster greater community cohesion**

- Generate ambition for Cirencester amongst its community
- Build a sense that Cirencester has something special to offer
- Creating “heritage” for the future
- Create a sense of place and identity

### **Raise the profile of Cirencester**

- Amongst local residents
- Within our hinterland
- Nationally

### **Celebrate what we’ve got**

- History
- Culture
- Vibrant community

### **Increase engagement in culture and arts**

- Maximise the local “offer”
- Widen the offer with external artists

## **MATTERS TO CONSIDER**

At the onset of the process, the Working Group was lucky to have expert advice from the Chief Executive of New Brewery Arts who spoke about what the group should consider when establishing a festival. The group considered this advice and identified the following matters to be taken into account when developing festival ideas.

### **Size**

- How many visitors?
- How many sites?
- How many attractions?
- How much will it cost to host?

### **Resources**

- Financial budget
- Need to generate a profit or break even
- Deployment of volunteers
- Deployment of paid staff
- Specialist resources
- How do we raise funds

### **Legal issues**

- Insurance/liability
- Access
- Risk management
- Health and safety
- Licences and permissions

## **Demand**

- Who is target audience?
- What are their expectations?
- Can we meet their expectations better than someplace else?

## **Sustainability**

- Will interest and support be maintained in the long term?

## **Theme**

- How complex should the theme be?
- Should there be only one theme?

## **Brand/logo**

- Do we choose a unique logo for the event?
  - Sheep
  - Hares
  - Water voles
- Do we join the logo-generation exercise from the Cirencester Local project?

## **Supporting infrastructure**

- Enough accommodation for visitors
- Enough suitable parking
- Clear routes
- Publicity materials and advertising

## **OUTPUTS FROM THE PROJECT**

The working group considered a number of options for new festivals such as an arts festival, a Dickens festival, bringing back the combined charities' sale, enhanced music festivals, a school and country dance festival, and other. However, they drew the conclusion that it would be easiest to build on existing festivals rather than seek to establish a new one, but to also take advantage of opportunities as they arise for single events.

The working group therefore proposes that two festivals be given further support: Heritage Open Days and the Advent Festival. In addition, two separate events seem likely to be successful: an event at City Bank celebrating the River Churn in partnership with the Cotswold Water Park; and an event at the Amphitheatre which is mentioned in the Amphitheatre Strategy.

## **TIMETABLE**

The proposals in this report are for the 2009-2010 year only. This is a modest approach to what was envisaged as a larger and more complex festival in the Community Plan. However, it is better in this instance to build on our existing strengths and begin with festivals that can be really enjoyed by the local community. Once these have become established, it will be possible year on year to develop them into festivals that will attract people from farther afield. Once this happens, the festivals could form links with tourism projects that are being developed under other projects in the plan.

## **HERITAGE OPEN DAY**

### **AIMS**

To celebrate Cirencester's unique heritage encompassing its architecture, history, art, music, dance and cultural traditions.

To build on the existing framework and success of the Heritage Open Days : to develop and expand this event, both in size and duration.

### **EXISTING FRAMEWORK**

Heritage Open Days are fixed nationally as the second weekend in September and the preceding Thursday and Friday ( i.e. four days). This would be an ideal period for us to begin such a new venture. Exhibitions and displays could run for longer either side of the four core days if we wished, so that the Festival could easily be extended to a week's duration. Heritage Open Days are already in the Cirencester calendar and both locally and nationally people are expecting events to take place then.

### **ORGANISATION**

There are already 14 venues set in place, each with a named co-ordinator who decides the events for that venue: the Parish Church, the Quaker Meeting House, the Salvation Army Hall, the Royal Agricultural College, the Cecily Hill Barracks, the Air Raid Shelter, the Open Air Swimming Pool, the Corn Hall, the Norman Arch, the Corinium Museum, the Roman Amphitheatre, the Baptist Church, the Bingham Gallery and the New Brewery Arts. There is therefore a ready-made group of people working on the programme. This group is at present co-ordinated by the Civic Society Heritage Open Day Co-ordinator, with the active support of the Cirencester Archaeological and Historical Society, The Civic Society and the Bingham Library Trust. The present group is keen to expand and welcomes the idea of a Festival. New venues are planned for 2009 which will already increase the scope of this group.

In addition there are walks and exhibitions which are run, such as the Heritage War Walk and the Hidden Gardens of Cirencester Walk, thus widening the scope of the event. There is in place a Heritage Exhibition featuring panels linked to many of the venues used in 2008. This will form the basis of a larger exhibition in 2009 and is a feature that can be used again.

### **FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

Heritage Open Days in 2009 will be a larger event than 2008, with new venues involved. In particular it is intended that the Town's major landowners and business community will play an increasingly important role.

Local schools and youth groups will be invited to participate in displays of creative work, for example around a theme of a favourite local building.

Music and dance heritage will be represented by local musicians and dance groups.

Community groups, such as the Railway Society, the Allotments Society and the U3A will be asked to participate. The Cotswold Canal Trust will run events and displays.

With a little imagination it can be seen how a Heritage Festival can be developed quite simply from the core of the Heritage Open Days. The framework is in place; ideas for 2009 will already expand the event; everything is in place for further expansion and development, so that all sections of the Cirencester Community are involved.

### **ADVENT FESTIVAL 2009**

The Advent Festival has traditionally been organised by the Chamber of Commerce. However, this year, the Town Council has offered support in recognition that it is a large and complex event. The following proposal has been put forward:

1. Theme: A Victorian Christmas
2. 27 November 2009, 4.30 – 9.30
3. Main events:
  - a. Children's parade with costumes representing schools from in and around Cirencester
  - b. Tree lighting ceremony
  - c. Family fun fair after 6.00

- d. Individual events at key locations such as:
    - i. Churches
    - ii. New Brewery Arts
    - iii. Mews and alleyways
    - iv. Other venues
  - e. Food and gift sellers invited to take part
  - f. Retailers invited to remain open until 7.00 and to display children's art in windows for the night
4. Preparation
- a. Event planning group from Our Future Cirencester and anybody else who would like to help
    - i. Programme timetable
    - ii. Funding
    - iii. Securing and working with partners
    - iv. Programme management
    - v. Publicity
    - vi. Support for schools
    - vii. Fun fair
  - b. Agree participants by July 2009 and help them make arrangements and prepare
  - c. Use Extended Schools funding to hire local artists to work in three after school sessions with each participating school to make lanterns, banners and costumes
  - d. Library service (including school library service) to provide historical advice to schools
  - e. Satellite events to be managed by hosting organisation but provided with support from OFC
5. Tree and lighting, insurance etc to be organised by Chamber of Commerce and Town Council.

# RIVER CHURN ART, ECOLOGY AND COMMUNITY PROJECT

### PHASE 1:

Artist Jony Easterby was chosen from nationally advertised competition to work with CWPS (Cotswold Water Park Society) Ecologists on a Water Vole Audit of the River Churn. In summer 2008, the artist created an innovative 'Artist's Journey' down the River Churn from source to Thames, travelling 'as a water vole' swimming his way. In Cirencester, where the River ran under buildings and streets, the artist walked the River's route, talking to passersby on the way. The journey was filmed and the film had a public screening for two nights in December 2008 in the Cirencester Lido (adjacent to excellent urban water vole habitat). The audience included several 'free swimmers' and many local people who remembered and told stories of the how they swam the River Churn when they were young. The artist also held an 'Artist's Walk' one evening along the River.

The artist held a discussion day at the Water Park in which other artists (including the poet Alice Oswald – renowned for her work on the River Dart) and scientists (including flood expert Dr. Lindsey McEwen) came together to talk about river flows, flooding and climate change. See [www.riverchurn.co.uk](http://www.riverchurn.co.uk) ; also [www.waterpark.org](http://www.waterpark.org) click on In Our Element Art Project for a summary.

### PHASE 2:

The artist has proposed a second phase in which he has suggested two possibilities for enhancing the awareness of the River Churn and its ecology and involving communities in Cirencester:

#### **AN EVENING(S) EVENT IN WHICH AGREED PARTS OF THE RIVER ARE LIT UP BY ARTIST'S INSTALLATIONS**

Jony Easterby has worked on many public installations and events and these are a proven public success – for example the recent project 'Power Plant' in Liverpool. Another example of a successful light event in Gloucestershire was 'LightShift' at the Forest of Dean in 2002 that attracted 40,000 people. These installations are developed around particular theme and artists invited to develop light sculptures that are specific to the project and the community. Some installations will be developed with the community – for example local schools. The development time needs to be about 6 months to include community participation in the development and making of the projects; budgets clearly are difficult to assess for these depend on scale and ambition but £100,000 might be a realistic target for a spectacular event – smaller scale affairs clearly will have smaller financial implications.

### **AN ARTIST'S LANDFORM IN THE CITY BANK AREA**

This proposal would be a design that is created to enhance/reinforce public access and interpretation, include sculpture as part of a land form, built to enhance biodiversity and public understanding of biodiversity, and would be designed with public participation in the design development process. It is suggested that there is a design development/community engagement phase for this project of c6months at a cost of c£8,000 (inclusive of administrative and exhibition/materials costs) followed by a construction phase the funding for which would be sought from a mix of private and public sector investment and grants.

## **ANNEX A: OUR FUTURE CIRENCESTER COMMUNITY PLAN**

### **ACTION PLAN FOR THE CIRENCESTER FESTIVAL**

(SEPTEMBER 2008)

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>
<b>CIRENCESTER FESTIVAL</b>
<b>PROJECT DESCRIPTION</b>
1. Hold a regular themed festival in Cirencester, bringing together existing events and activities in a coordinated manner.
<b>PROJECT OBJECTIVES</b>
2. Put together a programme of one or more regular high quality themed festivals for the residents of Cirencester. 3. Attract visitors to Cirencester. 4. Work with existing event providers to coordinate activities in order to improve exposure and marketing opportunities. 5. Maximise use of existing venues in Cirencester, particularly the Parish Church and Amphitheatre. 6. Include the whole community in the provision and enjoyment of arts and entertainment. 7. Obtain regular sources of sponsorship and support to keep the programme running year on year. 8. Provide a showcase for local artists.
<b>SUCCESS INDICATORS</b>
9. Number of events held. 10. Number of participants/attendees. 11. Number of years of consecutive running. 12. Number of venues included.
<b>KEY TASKS</b>
13. Undertake consultation to determine whether a Cirencester Festival is supported. 14. Benchmark against other similar towns in the UK to learn how they achieved successful outcomes. 15. Put a management structure in place. 16. Analyse what is already on offer and seek to identify trends and themes. 17. Identify role/relationship for Town Centre Manager. 18. Identify suitable venues. 19. Prepare Business Plan. 20. Implement.
<b>KEY MILESTONES</b>
21. Consultation complete 22. Business Plan prepared 23. First festival held

## **BENEFITS**

- 24. Supports the local economy by attracting visitors to Cirencester.
- 25. Helps raise the profile of Cirencester regionally and nationally.
- 26. Provides activities for local people.
- 27. Promotes community cohesion.
- 28. Helps enforce the Parish Church's position as central to the town.

## **RISKS**

- 29. Lack of interest/support..
- 30. Poor weather.
- 31. Competition from other towns.
- 32. Not able to identify a strong brand niche.
- 33. Existing providers not willing to work in partnership.
- 34. Lack of suitable venues.

## **PARTNERS**

- 35. Town Council
- 36. New Brewery Arts
- 37. District Council
- 38. Royal Agricultural College
- 39. Wilts and Glocs Standard
- 40. Chamber of Commerce
- 41. Radio Gloucestershire
- 42. Funders
- 43. Bathurst Estate
- 44. Private Venues
- 45. Churches
- 46. Arts Council

## **POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES**

- 47. Local fundraising.
- 48. Arts Council.
- 49. Strategic Grant (Gloucestershire Community Foundation) for strategic projects that help the community up to £4,000.

## **EVIDENCE**

- 50. Other towns have successfully used festivals as regenerative and developmental catalysts.
- 51. Tourism is a growing economic sector in the South West (see strategic links below).

## **STRATEGIC LINKS**

- 52. Rural Economic Strategy for Gloucestershire 2007-2015 (Revised 2006), Objective 1: Leisure and Tourism.
- 53. Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006-2026, C1: increased participation in cultural activity.

## **LINKS TO OTHER PARTS OF THE PLAN**

- 54. Cirencester Local: Brand festival under Cirencester Local.
- 55. Schools at the heart of the community: possible links between extended services and the Cirencester Festival should be explored by the cluster group.
- 56. Cirencester Youth Town Council: The Youth Council could support and advise upon the festival.