



Development/Theatre Director's Report

December 2023

Artisan Market

- The Artisan Market was on Saturday 2nd December. We are experiencing a little negative feedback from our original Artisan Traders, who are not supporting the market as frequently anymore. They feel that there is a lack of communication from Bescot and although the stalls are good and the staff on the day are great, they are not feeling as supported as they were by us. We are having a meeting with Bescot to discuss these issues and see if we can make some adjustments to the administrative function, which may involve us taking back some of that organisational role. We prided ourselves on the service which we have historically given to our traders, and although we knew that outsourcing the management would dilute that a little, we obviously want the traders to feel taken care of.
- There are, however, many stalls from the Thursday market now taking stalls at the Artisan, which is indicating that there will be support for a regular Saturday market if Bescot feel that can facilitate this for us moving forwards.

Thursday Market

- The Thursday Market is continuing to thrive, with Bescot feeding back that the traders are extremely happy with Rugeley and the support which they are receiving from the community. Some of the stalls are already becoming established businesses in the town, with regular weekly customers choosing to shop there in preference to using our local supermarkets. Obviously more footfall at the market brings more footfall to the Town Centre, with businesses feeding back that they are busier on market days.

Theatre

- **Update on Pizza Oven** – the Pizza Oven which we secured through Government grant is not up and running yet, for several reasons. On arrival, the oven itself was considerably larger and heavier than expected, resulting in us having to relook at where it is going to be situated. We cannot house it in the back kitchen as we want it to be visible to the bar area to encourage sales, and if it is at the back of the theatre,

we would require additional staff to manage it, which defeats the income objective. We asked Environmental Health to come and visit us to look at our options. You may be aware that there is a large storage 'cupboard' next to the kitchen bar area, which Environmental Health agree would make a perfect home for the pizza oven with some adaptations:

We will need to 'knock' through the hatch in the wall to make a walk through and put lino down on the floor and paint and tile the area. We would also like to add 'barn doors' to the front so that the pizza 'experience' is visible to customers and I can paint a 'mural' above the preparation area, effectively making a bespoke pizzeria space.

Given that the Theatre is fully booked until after Christmas, we have a window of a couple of weeks at the start of January prior to the Rugeley Musical Theatre Pantomime starting, which would enable us to have a 'working party' one weekend to complete the work. **If you have any skills that would be useful for us to complete this work over one weekend and would like to be part of this working party – please let me know.**

We will also be looking for donations of lino, tiles, grout, paint etc. if anyone is able to help or has contacts who would be willing to donate them.

- **We can source a Stainless Steel work bench for the space for £199 inc.VAT which would save us having to build work space in the area. Councillors to discuss the purchase of this item.**

Christmas Lights Event

We were extremely happy with the Christmas Lights Event this year – but as always there are some snagging issues which we would tweak for the next event, such as:

- Situation of stalls in Lower Brook Street. This was heavily congested. Bescot placed stalls on opposite sides of the street which was not practical on the evening as we had more visitors than ever. Next year we will only have a minimal number of stalls on one side in that area of town.
- Transportation of Santa. The mobility scooter worked well for this – over the congestion in town made it impossible to get his through to Upper Brook Street. This needs to be completely re-thought. The use of the shop as the Grotto worked brilliantly – huge thank you to Cllr Cooney for facilitating that, but for next year, dependant on where the Grotto is situated, we need to have Santa arriving from very close by. We have obviously had him arriving from the Library as it is so close to the stage and we can announce him, but in hindsight, having him arriving from The Globe would have made far more practical sense. This is something that we will factor in for next year.
- Market Stalls. There were several issues with the market stalls on the day, but this was obviously Bescot's first year with us, so we did expect some teething problems. Bescot set up the positioning of stalls on Thursday night, along with the stage, which made Friday morning a little less stressful, however, they weren't on the ball putting

the sides on the stalls first thing, which resulted in stall holders having exposed stock and being very cold for several hours, and this seemed to take a very long time. There was also a lack of a cohesive map and plan of the stalls which had stall holders coming in from various access points which were not appropriate – had they known positioning in advance this would have helped with congestion. They also started to de-rig the lighting immediately at 7pm causing the stall holders some issues with packing away. These issues are being addressed in our meeting with Bescot.

- I have received several messages and emails around fireworks and the distress that it causes to dogs. I have said that this year the display was considerably shorter than in previous year but have assured those members of other community that we would **discuss the options again at CEC.**
- We have also made the decision to manage the food stalls ourselves on the day of the Christmas Market, as Bescot did ‘double up’ on several of the stalls we had booked in, which did make our placement of these trucks difficult.
- We did have stalls in Albion Street, but as always that area was the quietest on the day. We would love to include Albion Street more in the plan of the event and make it as inclusive as possible but this does seem to be a difficult fix. **Any suggestions would be welcomed.**
- We have had several complaints about the fairground rides since the event, mainly around pricing. We agreed at our meeting that rides would be capped at £2.50 across all rides, however the feedback is that people were being charged £3 per ride. There was also an issue with the Helter Skelter pricing, in that at one stage it was £3 for 2 slides, and when a lady returned, it had increased to £3 for 1 slide. The Hook a Duck on Upper Brook Street which was a last-minute addition from the Fairground people, was apparently charging £5 per go. Obviously, this is unacceptable. We are meeting with William on Friday and it will be discussed then.
- Brewery Street Fairground rides. William fed back to me during the evening that he felt that the rides on Brewery Street were very quiet and suggested that ‘next year’ the Helter Skelter should be placed at the top on Upper Brook Street. This is very frustrating as we have been asking them to place a ride at the top of Upper Brook Street each year and they have been unhappy to – again this will be discussed in the meeting with them. **Could Cllr Hart give us an update on his opinion of the rides in Brewery Street.**
- Staffordshire CC decided to use the day of the Christmas Lights Event to repair the damage to the bollards and holes in Market Square, from 8.30am until lunchtime. This caused us many problems, and took away emergency access should we have needed it. I have contacted Mark Keeling about this on the day but have had no response.
- Thank you to all of the councillors who supported us at the event and to the staff who always go above and beyond for our events.
- Adrian Basford had his first outing as our Town Crier at the event, and I hope you will agree with me that he was marvellous and brought a great addition to the festivities. **Our ongoing use of Adrian as our official Town Crier is included as a separate item**

- Feedback from any councillors who were present at the event.

Pantomime

The Pantomime is well underway now, with fabulous feedback from the schools. All performances have been extremely well attended. We are utilising the highly celebrated snow machines for the public performances!

Newsletter

The next edition of the newsletter is currently being written and will be circulated as soon as possible.

Victory Church events

We have lent our support to the Victory Church Christingle event and Carol Service this year, as they were struggling with a venue to hold it, given the closure of the Taylor's Lane Car Park. We have allowed them to use Market Square for these events in the interim, but these are really positive community events and perhaps an offer should be made to relocate these events to Market Square if they wish, moving forwards. **Councillors to discuss.**

Theatre heating upkeep

We have had several issues with the heating over the past few weeks in the theatre, and as you are aware, it is an extremely busy period. I'd personally like to thank Anthony Johnson Coles, who has stepped in and looked at all of the air-con/heating vents and system, which has not been maintained for several years. He has a background of working in Air-Con and has cleaned and used an anti-bacterial treatment on 19 units for us. I know that the discussion of 'ad-hoc' staff has been discussed at F&M, and I'd like it to be noted that support of this nature is saving the theatre a considerable amount of time and money.

AOB

Any other updates will be shared verbally.

Sam Bird

Development Manager and Theatre Director