

Outdoor arts events and activity in London

Executive summary 10 June 2010

'We believe that the arts have the power to change lives and communities and that outdoor arts of all types have a particular ability to engage, inform and entertain audiences that might not otherwise attend an arts event.' **New Landscapes June 2008**

Background

In June 2008 Arts Council England launched New Landscapes, a plan for the development of high-quality outdoor arts activity across England, to include both performance and visual arts based work.

New Landscapes made a number of recommendations about understanding and improving the working environment for outdoor arts, building a clearer picture of working practices, and increasing the longer-term sustainability of the sector. It recognised the unique and crucial role of local authorities, as supporters, funders, licensors and promoters of outdoor arts events and activity.

The Mayor of London's cultural strategy direction of travel document, *Cultural metropolis* has also acknowledged the importance of this sector to the capital, and the opportunities to strengthen London's festivals and outdoor events, particularly in the context of the Cultural Olympiad and London's 2012 legacy ambitions.

Arts Council England, in partnership with the London Events Forum, therefore commissioned this research and mapping of current approaches to supporting outdoor arts events among London's local authorities. As part of the



Bashy at The Mix, Burgess Park, August 2009
Photo: Jody Kingzett

London Cultural Improvement Programme, further funding from Capital Ambition has been secured to take forward key recommendations rising from this research, and to support London Events Forum in a shared objective to improve efficiencies and processes of staging outdoor arts events across London.

Introduction

London has a long tradition of producing world-class festivals and cultural events that gain national and international recognition. From Notting Hill Carnival to Carnaval del Pueblo, A Baishakhi Mela to Dagenham Town Show, whether it is on a housing estate, on public roads or in a local park, the 32 London boroughs

and the City of London support thousands of festivals and cultural events, bringing together millions of people and playing an important part in creating a dynamic and exciting world city.

Festivals and events can make a major impact on the agendas of community cohesion and well-being. Participation broadens horizons, increases life chances, taps potential, realises aspirations, improves educational attainment and contributes to health through feelings of self-worth and well-being. Events create vibrant public spaces, bring positive economic benefits and improve reputations.

This research takes a snapshot of London's events today and looks at how the London boroughs might move forward strategically and pragmatically, to ensure that, working both individually and together, they build on the diverse array of existing creative, fun and safe events and move towards London 2012, with the capacity and skills to deliver world-class events that meet and exceed the standards set.

Key objectives

The key objectives of the research were to map the current resources and processes in place across London's local authorities to support, enable and grant permissions to stage outdoor arts events, to highlight how variations in the above are affecting the number and range of outdoor arts events in each area, to identify good practice and barriers to good practice, and to make recommendations on further joint work to extend good practice and promote minimum standards.

Methodology

The methodology for this research included:

- collating existing information, reports and data
- identifying key individuals and organisations to be consulted
- face to face interviews with over 80 relevant local authority officers (predominantly staff working in events,



The audience at the Carnaval del Pueblo Parade, Elephant & Castle, August 2006

Photo: vividphotography.co.uk

arts and parks, but also where available staff working in licensing, traffic management, health and safety and environmental health) from 29 of London's local authorities and the City of London Corporation

- gathering questionnaire forms completed by officers in a further two local authorities
- interviews with representatives of the Greater London Authority, London Councils and the Thames Festival
- preparing a borough profile for each of the 32 London boroughs and for the City of London Corporation.

The research focused on outdoor arts events and activities, which is to say events that are either entirely arts-centred or community festivals and events that have significant arts content. The report is however also relevant to the thousands of non-arts events held across London, such as sporting events and festive markets.

Key recommendations

- All boroughs should establish an event safety advisory group if there is not one already in place
- Training and mentoring for all staff who organise or facilitate events should be a priority, even if events are only one part of an officer's job description
- Sharing of best practice between the boroughs should continue
- Best practice needs to be shared with organisers of community events, and we recommend that boroughs – either individually or jointly – explore training programmes for community event organisers
- Where boroughs do not have designated event officers, we recommend that they create a network of all council staff involved in events who can work together to devise and deliver an overall outdoor events programme
- We recommend that London boroughs continue to explore ways of working together and that there are increased networking and information sharing opportunities for staff whose work relates to events, regardless of their role
- We recommend that London Events Forum draft an advocacy document that highlights the benefits of outdoor events, with evidence, and that an advocacy group is established to ensure that these benefits are widely promoted
- We recommend that the advocacy group explores ways of encouraging and supporting outdoor arts events in boroughs that currently have no outdoor arts events programme
- All London boroughs should have a specific policy for outdoor events, however basic, that is relevant to their borough and which ties in with the main targets of the borough's wider strategies. This policy



Instruments in air at Lewisham People's Day 2009
Photo: James Parkinson

- needs to inform the work of all staff involved with outdoor events, regardless of their role.
- We recommend boroughs look at ways of streamlining the process for organising events and the methods of granting permissions (for example, for street parties) to ensure the process is as easy and cheap as possible. All council officers whose work relates to outdoor events need to fully understand the process.
 - All boroughs should have a designated first point of contact for those wishing to organise festivals and events
 - Fees and costs charged to non-council event organisers need to take into account the difference between income-generating events, such as major events and commercial events, and small events with benefits to the community. Boroughs should aim to reduce costs for the organisers of free community events and a good practice guide on fee waivers and concessionary fees would be helpful.
 - Fundraising and sponsorship need to be acknowledged as specific skills and both council staff and community event organisers need to be trained for this. Best practice in this area may be informed by the current research into fundraising by the London Capital Improvements Programme.

- Council directorates within the London boroughs need to pool or direct their resources to support outdoor arts events that meet wider agendas (for example, funding outdoor dance events as part of a health strategy)
- London Events Forum and the boroughs should investigate the opportunities for efficiencies through shared procurement
- Monitoring and evaluation is a key area that needs to be explored and where best practice needs to be established, taking into account:
 - Audiences London's report on monitoring and evaluation at outdoor arts events
 - London Development Agency's recent work on an event impact assessment toolkit, www.eventimpacts.com
 - London Capital Improvement Programme's Measuring social outcomes toolkit and training to help evaluate and plan events to meet wider social outcomes and local priorities as set out in the local area agreements
 - the benefits of economic impact multiplier models
- To maximise the impact and profile of the boroughs' events programmes, we recommend that boroughs work together to devise a best-practice document for marketing outdoor arts events through print, press, media and most vitally through the web and social networking. The advocacy group would need to open up a dialogue with heads of borough communications teams in order for the best practices to be adopted.
- We recommend that the boroughs and partner agencies (for example, Arts Council England, Visit London, the Greater London Authority) explore further opportunities for joined-up marketing of outdoor arts events
- We recommend that borough websites give information on all forthcoming



Bodies in Urban Spaces, London Bridge, October 2009
Photo: Soulaf Rizki

outdoor events taking place in their borough (council, commercial and community) and also have a year-round 'get-involved' page so that performers, traders, volunteers etc can know in advance how they can participate. Boroughs' websites should provide links to the events pages on the websites of neighbouring boroughs.

- Town centres are particularly important outdoor event venues as they reach audiences that might not otherwise experience any live arts. London Events Forum and individual boroughs need to look at ways to include town centre events in their outdoor arts programme.
- Both Londoners and visitors to London need access to a comprehensive, up-to-date 'map' of outdoor arts events across the capital. We suggest that London Events Forum explore with partner organisations, such as Visit London and Greater London Authority, how this might be possible. This should tie in with the registration of outdoor arts events taking place in 2012 on www.theculturediary.com

Conclusion

The map of outdoor arts events and activity across London is dazzling and diverse. The commitment and enthusiasm of local authority staff to delivering an increased and improved programme of accessible, high-quality, outdoor events in the lead-up to 2012 and the Cultural Olympiad is similarly impressive.

The map is extremely 'patchy', however. Residents, workers and students and communities in some boroughs are definitely missing out, not only in having enjoyable, safe, exciting, inspirational, well-managed, outdoor events but also, most importantly, in access to the spin-off benefits of these events.

The recommendations in this report aim to extend good practice and promote minimum standards in the ways in which outdoor arts events are organised and facilitated. Through the joint, determined efforts of London Events Forum, Arts Council England, Visit London, the Greater London Authority, London Council, the London boroughs themselves and other key partners, we are confident that these recommendations will be rigorously pursued.

Determined efforts alone, however, will not ensure the success of the Cultural Olympiad or its desired legacy. Investment in resources and skills is an imperative although the likelihood of



Southwark Youth Carnival at Peckham Square, August 2009
Photo: Jody Kingzett

this in the current economic climate is slim unless there is a widespread and thorough understanding among decision makers of the importance of outdoor events and the benefits they bring in increased opportunities for engagement in the arts, positive activities for young people, volunteering and improved community cohesion, health, education, well-being and positive economic impacts.

To achieve the desired increase and improvement in the provision of outdoor arts events and activity, the report's most vital recommendation is for setting up an advocacy group that will champion outdoor arts events as major contributors to the wider National Indicators as part of the boroughs' local area agreements.

The full report includes forewords on behalf of London Events Forum by Paul Cowell and on behalf of Arts Council England, by Clive Lyttle, and an assessment of themes with recommendations. The appendices include a list of the outdoor events in the London boroughs and in the City of London, local authority profile reports, sample process maps of how applications for events in outdoor spaces are processed in six boroughs, a local authority key information grid and the main contacts for outdoor arts events in the London boroughs.

A copy of the full report is available from clive.lyttle@artscouncil.org.uk