

Title of Report: Halloween 2020 Update	Officer Presenting: Head of Culture Author: Festival and Events Manager and Marketing Manager
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1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on planning, programme development and Health & Safety position for the Halloween Festival 2020.

2 Background

- 2.1 Established over 33 years ago, by the people of the City as a small community event, the City's Halloween Festival has developed into the city and region's largest annual event that offers both locals and visitors alike a unique and authentic experience of the place. Still very much loved and owned by the people, the festival has grown to become one of the largest Halloween Festivals in Europe.
- 2.2 Members will note the report submitted to Business and Culture Committee in June 2020 that reflected the impact of the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) and subsequent lockdown that was in place in Northern Ireland from March 2020, where numerous events across Northern Ireland were postponed, rescheduled or cancelled. This report also anticipated the continuation of restrictions for some time particularly in relation to events where there were gatherings of significant numbers of people.
- 2.3 It was clear in June that the usual full programme of events would not be possible for the 2020 festival as by their very nature they would draw large crowds. Events such as Awakening the Walls, LegenDerry Food Village, Little Horrors Family Programme, Samhain Sessions, Tours n Trails, Halloween Carnival Parade, full fireworks displays along the quay would simply not be possible.

- 2.4 Officers have been following guidance from the relevant authorities on managing the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) and have been working closely with Tourism Northern Ireland (TNI), Tourism Ireland, Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance and Industry bodies as the situation evolves.
- 2.5 The risk of proceeding with a full Halloween programme in its usual format during the pandemic is not only a risk to the general public who will attend the event, but Council staff, Contractors, Artistes, Statutory Authorities and Agencies who collaborate with Council to deliver the event. Council's exemplar reputation for holding safe public events would be seriously questioned if the event was to go ahead in the current environment.
- 2.6 The planning for Halloween that had started in January has been reassessed in light of the pandemic and officers have been working with public, private, voluntary and community sectors to creatively develop suitable programme content for Halloween 2020.
- 2.7 Officers are confident that even with restrictive public safety guidelines in place an exciting programme could still be rolled out which would include; Community Participation and Dress up, Citywide Dressing Scheme, Hay Bale Sculpture Trail, Multiple dispersed Fireworks displays, 1st Light (1st November), Halloween digital content including Little Horrors & Samhain Sessions, quality music event and the possibility of a television broadcast.
- 2.8 Officers are aware that due to restrictions the primary focus is likely to be more on a local and domestic audience, however there is still an opportunity to target an international audience for future events through delivery of quality digital content. Marketing officers are working on creative digital content in order to maintain brand positioning of the event. Offering a digital experience and insight for those near and far and capitalising on the opportunity to tell the story of the best destination in the world to celebrate Halloween. Working with partners such as Visit Derry, Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland officers will showcase Halloween across digital platforms and campaigns to future visitors.
- 2.9 The theme of the 2020 event is 'The Awakening', a broad theme that encapsulates the essence of Halloween and celebrates the indigenous lore and legends, which makes our Halloween unique. 'The Awakening' theme can also be expanded in a more optimistic manner to suggest the awakening of community spirit, the awakening to things that are important in life, coming out of darker times and so on.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 The main elements of the 2020 Halloween festival are outlined below:
- 3.2 **Halloween Dressing Scheme** - Designs in Air have been appointed through a Single Tender Action to supply Large Scale Themed Inflatables that will form a City Centre Dressing Scheme from the 24th - 31st October 2020. This scheme will reinforce the Halloween destination brand and provide a focal point to the city center that will encourage safe interaction. These will be visible both during the day and at night and as they are in place across multiple days it will no encourage large gatherings at one particular time.
- 3.3 In Strabane and the wider district officers are working with various organisations and community groups to develop further the **Hay Bale Sculpture trail** as part of this dressing programme. These will be in place from Mid-October and will be located in key locations across the wider district.
- 3.4 **Community Participation** - Officers are working with the five Neighborhood Renewal Areas of Outer North, Outer West, Triax Cityside, Waterside and Strabane through the North West Carnival Initiative who will support various community outreach programmes including; All Hallow 1st Light Community Lantern Installation, Costume & Prop Support for Community Activity and Care Home/Residential Centre Window Displays.
- 3.5 **Fireworks** – It is anticipated that three Halloween Firework sites will be used across the City and one in Strabane for Halloween Night. Shorter Fireworks displays will fire from all sites simultaneously to encourage people to stay at home, stay safe and enjoy the fireworks from their communities.
- 3.6 **Wheelie Banshee Bike ride** – Officers are working with Sustrans to enable a Wheelie Banshee Bike ride through the streets around Halloween encouraging cyclists and family groups to dress up themselves and their bikes as the meander through the city streets.
- 3.7 **First Light** - As First Light dawns on Allhallowtide, 1st November, a number of services, installations, musical and choral experiences, prayers and meditations will run throughout the day and night in the spirit of remembrance and reflection for All Saints and All Souls Feast Days. This element of the festival was first introduced in 2018, working with the local churches and community organisations and has become a popular addition to the programme. For 2020 the sentiment will have even more significance given everything that our communities have endured this year and the anticipation of what lies ahead in the winter. First Light will deliver a magical and meditative experience, bringing people together in a positive mind-set as winter commences.

- 3.8 **Inside Out Animation programme** - On the key dates of Saturday the 31st October (Derry and Strabane) and Sunday 1st November, officers are planning an animation programme that will complement the aims of the business grant scheme and infrastructure investment recently administered by Council with funding by Department of Communities and DEARA COVID-19 Revitalisation and Recovery Programme. The main purpose of this activity is to help organisations and businesses attract customers back into the urban centres. The Inside Out Halloween themed animation programme will provide wrap around support for these centres, creating an ambient atmosphere, dressing, music and overall enhancing the visitor experience on key dates
- 3.9 **Business Engagement** - Officers from the business teams in Council are implementing a business engagement programme that will see various food and retail trails and initiatives rolled out to help promote the activities and programming content organised by the various businesses across the city and district. This, as always is a key element to the event and will ensure that the place is promoted as a must see cultural and food destination for a short break around this time.
- 3.10 **Digital and Online Content** – There will be a big focus on digital content that best portrays the story of Halloween not just in 2020 but in previous years. Officers are currently in discussions with a broadcaster to look at broadcasting this content across multiple digital and broadcast channels.
- 3.11 Officers were awaiting the outcome of an international application for Halloween submitted to Tourism NI, which would have been used to enhance to overall event and the promotion of Halloween for future visitors. Due to travel restrictions imposed by Covid19 the event is no longer classified as an international event by TNI, therefore a letter of offer for international funding is unlikely to be achieved in 2020. Officers are continuing the discussions for support around the online content provision. This is ongoing.
- 3.12 TNI will offer Marketing Support, any other funding and the offer of financial assistance is generally proportionate to the investment made by Council.
- 3.13 Officers have liaised with relevant community and statutory agencies and have agreed that despite there not being a formal large scale event in the City on Halloween Night itself that the carnival care package will still be put in place supported by DCSDC's event control to support the community and statutory agencies on the ground.

4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement, Rural Needs and other Implications

- 4.1 Officers have procured additional programming for the Halloween Festival for large scale installations in addition to those procured under annual tenders.
- 4.2 Officers have appointed through Single Tender action some specialist installations to enhance this year's programme. Other smaller items will be procured by way of quotation request subject to our existing policy and procedures. All other items required are covered on current annual tenders.
- 4.3 Given the likelihood of a reduced economic spend at this year's event in terms of visitor attendance, spend and bed nights it is proposed, that an overall budget of £50,000 plus £30,000 to enable fireworks be allocated to this year's Halloween events in Derry and Strabane, from existing rates budgets.
- 4.4 While this is a significant reduction on the budget approved by the committee in February it should still allow for a celebration within the current public safety guidelines that would ensure that the city and district is still firmly on the map as the main destination for Halloween.
- 4.5 Members should note that the event programme and associated costs will be reflective of guidance and restrictions on events from Government and the Public Health Agency due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 Members are asked to note the content of this year's Halloween activities as set out in line with current COVID -19 guidelines.

Background Papers

None.