

Melton Mowbray Events Review

1 Background:

Events form an essential part of the Melton visitor offer and contribute to delivering the brand of 'Rural Capital of Food and Drink.' Many of the events are wholly reliant on the good will and enthusiasm of some dedicated individuals. This approach has allowed Melton to punch above its weight with the number and scale of events it stages.

However, all of the events face growing pressures and this is already affecting the viability of some. Approaches for funding support from local partnership funds are becoming more frequent. There are advantages to be had in putting the events programme into a more strategic context, to reach agreement and consensus on why we do events and to recognise properly the role they play in the economic and tourism strategies for the borough.

2 Objectives:

This report aims to;

- Place events within an economic and tourism strategic context
- Understand how event organisers feel improvements might be made
- Draw conclusions as to how partnership and other local funds can best support the sustainability and resilience of events going forwards
- Suggest ways in which economies of scale and efficiencies may be achieved

3 Scope:

There is a wide programme of events, some of which receive support from the public purse, many that do not. For clarity, events are being divided into two categories:

1. Those that are an integral part of the economic development, branding and tourism strategies for the borough
 - Artisan Cheese Fair: organised by the Melton Mowbray Food Partnership
 - British Pie Awards: organised by the Melton Mowbray Pork Pie Association
 - Pie Fest* - organised by the Melton Mowbray Food Partnership
 - Melton Mowbray Food Festival: organised by the Melton Mowbray Food Partnership
 - Victorian Fayre Market – organised by Ruth Wakelin

*Pie Fest was only held in 2012 due to lack of funding in 2013.

These events provide a good spread across the year and contribute to a refreshment of the Rural Capital of Food brand throughout the year.

2. Those that are primarily for the benefit and enjoyment of local residents

- Melton Country Fair
- Melton Days
- Frost Fair
- Melton by the Sea
- Christmas lights switch on
- Rare Breeds Show
- Graze the Vale

Whilst the rest of this report will focus on those events in category 1, as part of a forward-looking strategy, we will seek to identify events that are currently operating in category 2 but have the potential to move into category one should this be beneficial as part of a tourism growth plan.

4 The role that events play in the visitor economy in the Melton area

In 2012 the value of tourism to the Melton Borough economy was 70.71m which represented a 7% drop from the previous year. The drop is entirely due to a significant downturn in day visit activity and is reflected across the rest of Leicestershire and indeed England. However, in other parts of the county and nationally there was a growth in overnight accommodation that more than offset the fall in day visits. This balancing did not occur in Melton, largely due to the lack of capacity for growth in the serviced accommodation sectors. Events form a significant part of the tourism appeal of the Borough and are the main deliverer of the Rural Capital of Food and Drink brand. Without the events calendar, the tourism product on offer, especially in the Town Centre, often fails to deliver on the brand promise.

5 Key Data (from 2013 where possible)

| | Visitor Numbers | Organiser Costs | Marketing and PR costs | Operational Costs | Income from ticket sales | Income from Exhibitors | Sponsorship | Surplus/loss |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Artisan Cheese Fair | 7,000 | 3,000 | 8,000 | 11,000 | 6,870 | 3,000 | 8,200 | 4,000 |
| British Pie Awards | None | 20,000 | 6,000 | 5,000 | None | 20,000 | 11,000 | - |
| MM Food Festival | 7,000 | 19,500 | 8,000 | 48,300 | 41,000 | 34,400 | 17,500 | 20,100 |
| Victorian Fayre | 15,000 | 4,000 | 4,000 | 9,000 | NA | 10,500 | 7,000 | - |

Artisan Cheese Fair – first weekend in May. In its third year, with over 60 exhibitors already booked for 2014 this event will be the UK's largest cheese fair in 2014 in terms of number of cheesemakers. The event will be seeking additional sponsorship (c £6k) for 2014 but from 2015 the organisers expect the event to be completely self-funding.

British Pie Awards – mid April. This is a trade only event which is not officially open to the public due to the constraints of allowing visitors into the church in any large numbers. The event is important however for the publicity it generates which reinforces the Rural Capital of Food brand. The event is funded by the entry fees to the event expected to come from over 1,000 pies. Sponsorship for the event comes from within the baking, meat and food sector.

Pie Fest – Late Summer. The British Pie Awards is a trade only event and there is consensus that it would be beneficial to have a public facing event celebrating pies.

MM Food Festival – First weekend in October. This event is now going through a period of adjustment, the MMFP having taken over the direct running of the festival. The cost of a stand at the event is one of the highest in the country and the MMFP is aiming to significantly reduce the price of the stands to local producers which will affect the profit generated by the event towards break-even. It is likely that one of the major sponsors of the event will at least halve their contribution.

Victorian Fayre – First Sunday in December. The visitor numbers are difficult to estimate for this event as there is no entrance fee and therefore no method of calculating visitor numbers. Because there is no entrance fee, the event is totally reliant on sponsorship and income from exhibitors.

6 Future Approach

The events strategy needs to;

- place appropriate events into an economic and tourism development framework
- provide a mechanism by which events can be evaluated for the part they play in driving forward the local economy
- encourage a more commercial approach to delivery to ensure long term sustainability
- ensure that any public sector investment gives maximum return on investment and is deployed in a strategic way
- provide a mechanism to determine which events have the potential to become part of the supported calendar and a formula to determine what financial support, if any, is appropriate.

7 Action Plan

Action 1

Introduce a new events management partnership. The partnership should include a representative from each of the events covered, a representative for the BID, Council and Town Estate and the Destination Organisation. It should be independently chaired by someone not directly connected with any of the events or other Melton events. A draft Terms of Reference is attached as Appendix 1.

Action 2

Agree a series of 'tests' to ensure that funding is used effectively and for long term benefit

Tests:

- I. Strategic fit – does the event add to, or have the potential to add to, the tourism product and/or brand proposition in a way that will grow new business or at least protect and sustain existing business? Priority will be given to events that are able to grow overnight and extended stays. Consideration will also be given to the existing calendar of events in order to maximise impact on the local economy.
- II. Cost per head – public funding should not generally exceed £1 per head of forecast visitors in year 1, falling each year.
- III. Match funding – contribution should be seen as leverage to secure other income. Therefore, each £1 of contribution must attract at least another £1 of earned revenue (i.e. not other subsidy or sponsorship) from year 2.
- IV. Pump-priming – events must be able to be put onto a commercial footing in order to be sustainable in the longer term. Therefore contributions will be released subject to receipt of a robust business plan that demonstrates how the event will continue after three years without the need for additional public sector subsidy. All events will be given a ‘clean sheet’ and year one will be 2014 for these purposes, regardless of how long the event has been running.

These tests will be applied primarily to consider applications from new events that are considered to be able to meet the objectives of the events strategy.

Action 3

Review other existing events against the new strategy to determine which might be suitable for support from the new events group. Suggestions include;

Graze the vale – thought to be a strong concept that has the potential to drive significant new business into the Vale areas of the Borough

Pie fest – there is believed to be a need to have an event that offers a more ‘public’ facing side to the Pie Awards

Rare Breeds Show – considered to have the potential to become an event that attracts overnight stays and fits well with the brand.

Action 4

Explore the employment of a permanent events organiser. Savings, efficiencies and improvements could be achieved by employing a permanent professional event organiser to deliver and manage the events portfolio. All stakeholders interviewed agreed this would be an improvement. The use of the organiser to run individual events however, would not be a pre-cursor to future funding or other support. The events group could, however, require this as part of a funding or support agreement if they felt it would be beneficial. Stakeholders felt this post should be independent of the Borough Council or Town Estate. This post is likely to cost less per annum than the sum of the existing management and organisation fees incurred by the individual events and could form the basis of a more strategic approach for financial support to existing sponsors who fund a number of the events already.

Action 5

Opportunities to work smarter. There are some clear areas of consensus among the organisers of the various events. These can be summarised as:

- All events would benefit from working closer together
- A more structured, clearer, transparent and strategic approach to funding is to be welcomed
- The public sector should be a partner in the process, not the leader
- Better cooperation will lead to economies of scale and efficiencies being achieved

8 **Other areas for consideration**

During the course of stakeholder interviews, other related issues were raised. There is a desire to see the constitution of the tourism body, Melton Promotions, formalised with a process put in place to ensure the blueprint is refreshed and the role of chair is revisited to an agreed time frame. A Service Level Agreement with Leicester Shire Promotions would also allow for a more efficient deployment of resources.

The reliance on the good will of individuals to manage much of the borough's promotional strategy at exhibitions etc. is seen as a strength but a vulnerability from a sustainability perspective and needs to be looked at.

Not all partners are clear about the support already available to them through organisations such as Leicester Shire Promotions, for example to coordinate and manage group travel related to events. Participation in an effective events group would allow these issues to be clarified.

Increasing the supply of quality guest accommodation across the Borough, but especially in Melton itself, is seen as a major priority for the economic development of the area.