

# BBWCVS Arts & Culture Forum



**Arts & Culture Forum      26<sup>th</sup> July 2005**  
**At Studios 2, Bardfield School, Clay Hill Road,**

## **Minutes**

### **Present:**

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Denise Gannon (Chair) | BBW CVS   |
| Fiona Cheek           | BBWCVS (Minutes)  |
| Tony Guyon            | Interlock   |
| Vin Harrop            | Essex Gallery   |
| Mike Peart            | Basildon Theatre Company  |
| Barbara Bowhill       | Basildon Locality Youth Service, Essex County Council                   |
| Gina Stickings        | Basildon Youth Service, Essex County Council                            |
| Lucy Regan            | Space for Sports and Art  |
| Peter Patterson       | BAT   |
| Penny Keys            | Essex Libraries   |
| Becky Clarke          | BBWCVS  |
| Annie Archer          | EEMLAC  |
| Debbie Rogan          | Wickford Church of England Infant School<br>(Wickford Schools' Cluster) |
| Mike Beecher          | Essex Youth Roadshow/BandTrain Young Stars                              |
| Moira Brock           | La Danse Fantastique  |

### **Apologies:**

|              |                                      |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| Tim Balogun  | Basildon District Council            |
| Paul Nagle   | Basildon & District Arts Association |
| Steff Parry  | Cherry Tree Primary School           |
| Lyn Colderoy | Grange Primary School                |
| Sue Chapman  | Basildon Stitching Club              |
| Ann Coltman  | Basildon Stitching Club              |

## **Minutes of the last meeting**

These were agreed as a true record, and there were no matters arising

### **Future of the Towngate Theatre – Vin Harrop**

Vin Harrop gave an overview of the Towngate Theatre. The theatre has a design fault in that even though there is a large stage area the seating capacity is regarded as too small, although it can seat around 500, which is in line with other local and municipal theatres in Essex and East London.

When the Towngate was built, Basildon District Council had little outside help financially; therefore there is large historic loan on the building. Subsequently, hire charges have been high and Vin believes that this has pushed out many touring shows as well as community groups.

The early theatre administrators were not from an arts background; therefore there were no seasonal pantomimes or summer shows. There was a community outreach programme, which bore some successes. Vin feels that the excuses that have been made about the Towngate not being viable are not acceptable, nor are suggestions that top rate shows cannot come or be accommodated.

There have been periods when the Towngate was closed, and Vin believes that this has hindered its development. Vin suggested that although it looked as if the proposed Centre for Sporting Excellence would be good news for the arts, the spaces designated for arts would be

too flexible for certain events such as drama productions and rock and pop concerts. Vin wondered if there would be the right atmosphere in the new facility if it was built to current proposals.

Vin felt that if the Towngate was allowed to close for good, there would probably not be another arts centre in Basildon. The old arts centre that used to occupy a site at the west of the town centre was the first purpose built arts centre in the country, although it was a temporary structure. Basildon District Arts Association campaigned for a theatre. However, when the Towngate was to be built, BDAA were not consulted. When the theatre was eventually built, there were visions of big West-end shows coming to Basildon. It didn't feel like it would be a community/amateur dramatics theatre. Vin felt that if Basildon lost the Towngate, there will be nowhere in the District for 'live theatre'.

Vin has written to the Arts Council, the Save London's Theatres Campaign and the Theatres Trust, who have, in turn, written to Graeme Bloomer, Head of Planning at Basildon District Council advising that there cannot be a change of use at the Towngate unless they are consulted (a copy of the letter to Graeme was passed around the meeting). The Theatres Trust is a statutory body established by the Theatre's Trust Act 1976 "to promote the better protection of theatres". The Town & Country Planning (General Development Procedure Order 1995, Article 10, Para (v) requires that "all planning authorities must consult the Trust before a decision is issued on any planning application or development involving land on which there is a theatre". Vin feels, that in his opinion, Basildon Council will sell the land and building to a developer, and it will be the developer, and not the Council, that will have to apply for planning permission to demolish the Towngate and replace it with buildings that have other uses. Vin feels that when this happens, the Council will point to the Centre for Sporting Excellence at Gloucester Park which will have a community based arts facility that replaces the Towngate.

The Palace Theatre in Southend received 22,000 signatures in support to keep it open. Therefore Vin suggested that we begin a petition to keep the Towngate open. It was also suggested that the Forum writes to:

- Bala Mahendran, Managing Director of Basildon District Council
- Cllr Malcolm Buckley, Leader of Basildon District Council
- Cllr Sandra Hillier, Chair of Basildon District Council
- Cllr Tony Hedley, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Open Spaces, BDC
- Cllr Nigel Smith, Leader of the Labour Group, Basildon District Council
- Cllr Geoff Williams, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, BDC
- Angela Smith MP, Basildon & East Thurrock
- John Baron MP, Billericay

And also to copy in Graeme Bloomer, Head of Planning, BDC and Ian Butt, Manager of Basildon Renaissance Partnership (who are commissioning master planning exercises for the town centre).

***Agreed: That Denise Gannon drafts a letter as above and circulates to the Forum for comments. The letter needs to emphasise the need to be consulted on the future of the Towngate Theatre; that the Forum would like the theatre back in use; and to explain that the Forum has been formed to bring together and promote the arts in the District. The Council would be invited to come and speak to the Forum about plans for the future of the theatre.***

The letter, it is hoped, should instigate some dialogue in the first instance. If a positive response was not forthcoming, famous names would be asked to become involved.

Members of the Forum were also encouraged to write as individuals/groups to the planning Manager, requesting to be consulted on any proposals for the Towngate Theatre.

The raising of a petition was discussed. Denise would formulate a form for discussion at the next meeting.

### **Taster Season**

A discussion about the taster sessions took place. Some proposals already drawn up were distributed to the Forum (see enclosed). Debbie Rogan, Headteacher of Wickford C of E Infants School, talked about the need to include video production and other visual media arts in the workshop proposals. It was felt that volunteers could do a lot of the workshops. Tony Guyon, Events & Outreach Officer at Interlock, suggested that Northlands Park could be a venue for some of the events associated with the Taster Season. A suggestion was made that Ros Sanders, Principal of Basildon Adult Community College, could be added to the circulation list as the College do a lot of work through holding arts courses and people go on these courses as a 'taster' to arts.

**Action: Fiona/Denise to get mailing details and put on database.**

It was hoped that taster season would involve local groups within the district and that events that had already been arranged could be publicised under the umbrella of the Arts & Culture Forum.

It was suggested that there was a need to start talking to the Council now about getting arts and culture much higher up the Basildon Festival agenda for next year. It was also decided to ask people about which parts they would like to be involved in.

### **Update on Funding**

Deferred to next meeting, as Paul had given his apologies.

### **Dates for Next Meetings**

|                                |        |                                  |
|--------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------|
| Weds 7 <sup>th</sup> September | 7.30pm | Hilltop Infants, Wickford        |
| Tues 4 <sup>th</sup> October   | 7.30pm | Timberlog Youth Centre, Basildon |
| Weds 9 <sup>th</sup> November  | 7.30pm | Wickford C of E Infants          |
| Tues 13 <sup>th</sup> December | 7.30pm | The Fold, Billericay             |

### **Any Other Business**

Denise proposed that as London had been awarded the Olympics in 2012, the Centre for Sporting Excellence should be back on the Forum agenda sometime in the future.

Vin, through his work at the Commission for and Essex Gallery and Centre for Architecture, Design and Environment, would like to see a Centre for Architecture in the Thames Gateway. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) had suggested that it would be interested in funding this sort of project. Vin added that Thames Gateway, through the Chief Executive, Mary Spence, is interested. There is a similar facility in Hackney, set in an old school. If anyone would like to visit it, it is at The Building Exploratory, The Professional Development Centre, Albion Drive, Hackney, London. E8 4ET. Phone: 020 7275 8555. email: [mail@buildingexploratory.org.uk](mailto:mail@buildingexploratory.org.uk)

Vin would like to include a project on Architecture through photographing Basildon buildings from different angles. This would be taken into schools and the idea would be to get children to look at the town from a different angle and appreciate it for what it is.

Fiona mentioned that Graham Sandford at the Council has an archive of old photos of Basildon in it's early days and that this might be something that people might be interested in.

Information about the Heritage Lottery Fund Community Lunch put on by the CVS on 8<sup>th</sup> August was distributed. Diaries and posters for the Thurrock Arts Festival were distributed. The festival runs through July and August in locations across the district of Thurrock.