

Stakeholders email – presenting new theme

Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to announce the development of our final UK City of Culture theme for South Hampshire, led by Portsmouth and Southampton: **P.S. I love you**. I have attached the theme proposal for your information and comments. This is an independent document and whilst it will inform our initial bid submission, it is not the bid document itself, which remains draft confidential during the competition process.

The timescale for the UK City of Culture bid process has been exceptionally tight. Following the announcement of the title by DCMS in July, no meaningful action could be taken by prospective bidders until September, when the seminar for bidding cities took place in Liverpool to inform the development of bids. Following this, work commenced on the outline proposal submitted on October 15th, and we received feedback on our proposal from Regeneris at the beginning of November. Throughout, our engagement with you as our stakeholders, with our other supporters, and with PUSH has helped us to achieve a substantive amount of work in this very short timeframe.

We received a real breadth of feedback on Cities of the Sea, comprising a diverse array of positioning on the concept. We also received a high level of response to our questionnaire, and have commenced work in partnership with the Cultural Consortium on broadening our levels of engagement on the bid process. There was a strong feeling for many that the theme perfectly captured a real sense of the identity of both cities and that this was a strength, but many of you also felt that there was too strong an emphasis on the sea/maritime theme, and that this did not adequately reflect the diverse cultural identity of both cities. Our feedback from the region and from Regeneris (the consultants leading the bid process on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) expressed concern that an over-reliance on a sea or maritime theme would be difficult for the whole of South Hampshire to engage with, and that we needed to be clearer on the role of the region in supporting the final programming of 2013.

In developing **P.S. I love you** we have responded to all these concerns, retaining Cities of the Sea as one of our three central programming components for 2013, whilst broadening our core theme to fully represent the whole of South Hampshire, in line with the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire – a partnership of 11 local authorities across the sub-region. We have been inspired by the model used in the Find Your Talent PUSH project (more information on this is attached in the latest FYT newsletter). Our aim is to build on this model, in order to capture the richness of the broad cultural offer of South Hampshire and to undertake a journey that will enhance and support the overall goals of the PUSH sub-region (please visit http://www.push.gov.uk/what_we_do/culture/intro.aspx for an overview of PUSH's work in relation to culture, and to download your copy of the Cultural Strategy).

The new theme captures the partnership across the eleven local authorities of South Hampshire, and both supports and enhances the central vision of PUSH:

“to put culture at the heart of South Hampshire, which will be recognised as a national and international beacon for and capital of all forms of cultural activity, to the benefit of residents, visitors and the local economy”

We are confident that – with a huge amount of help from you – we have now arrived at our final theme and work is now underway on our initial bid submission. This is a 30 page document that answers the questions supplied by DCMS. If we are successful in being shortlisted, we will be informed in January 2010 and will be required to submit a final application following more feedback from Regeneris by May 2010. We will know if we are to be the very first UK City of Culture by summer 2010, and we can then start work on preparing the programme for 2013 across South Hampshire.

As we have always said, we are in to win it, but we set out a clear strategy from the outset that we intended to use the bid process to support the overall cultural development of the city and of South Hampshire, as part of PUSH. We were clear that no work undertaken for the bid would be wasted – all information and feedback received, and the partnerships developed in the process would continue to inform our individual cultural development and the overall development of the sub-region. Moreover, if we are not successful in our ambition to be City of Culture in 2013, we will continue the process to inform a bid to be City of Culture in 2017.

The considerable amount of work undertaken so far has shown us that this strategy has already been a success. The level of engagement, enthusiasm and support we have received from stakeholders and supporters is unprecedented in any other project that we have worked on before and supports the overall aim to increase levels of collaboration, co-ordination and co-operation across the region. This represents a huge step change across the region, and supports the work of PUSH as part of the Living Places Partnership (see the link on PUSH above and <http://www.living-places.org.uk/about-living-places/> for more information on this).

The new theme supports, and our initial bid submission will demonstrate:

- our commitment to delivering a step change across the region
- a coherent and distinctive programme for South Hampshire in 2013
- our ability to deliver this programme
- and our commitment to participation and engagement at the heart of cultural development and delivery

We are now developing a website to represent the bid and to act as an information portal, and as an active and interactive presence for the bid online. This will be hosted externally and will be a constantly evolving project throughout the bid process and beyond. I will update you on this as soon as we have a launch date in the next couple of weeks.

I continue to welcome your comments and thoughts, particularly to inform the outline programme of events in 2013, once you have read the proposed theme. Many thanks for all your help, comments and constructive criticism thus far – we would not have come so far nor can we win it without you.