

FESTIVAL PLAN





Harmony 88

Harmony 88
Oriental Health Centre

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WE ARE THE CULTURAL HEART OF BIRMINGHAM

Festival Strategy

A combination of the decline in the traditional High Street, COVID 19 lockdowns and a cost of living crisis has seen a large decrease in footfall in city centres, we are therefore looking at how footfall can be increased by **using events and festivals as a catalyst.**

Southside has been home to several of the city's major festivals however the issues above has had a negative impact on everything from funding through to footfall for the organisers of these events. Consumer and visitor confidence is at an all-time low and, while the shoots of recovery are beginning to show, this might be too late for some of our cultural festivals, like St Patrick's Day.

As a once thriving district we are seeing a significant drop in footfall, visitors and visitor spend. Alongside the global economic factors there are other influences that are causing issues. This strategic plan will include a breakdown of those findings alongside some suggestions.

Lunar New Year
Birmingham Pride
Chinese Autumn Festival
Summer in Southside
St Patrick's Day
SHOUT Queer Arts Festival
B-Side
Latin American Festival
Flatpack
Birmingham Weekender

SUMMARY

Southside District is the festival hub of the city. However to sustain and develop quality festivals plus attract new festivals & visitors, we need to secure and develop spaces and funding.

Out of the 9 festivals that currently call Southside home it is likely that 2023 will only see 2 to 3 festivals return. Whilst it's clear there are significant barriers we have also highlighted significant opportunities to retain and grow festivals and potentially attract new festivals into the area.

The *Hippodrome Festival* team, *Birmingham Pride* team and *Chinese Festival Committee* highlight the importance of a surrounding infrastructure and supporting team to make events happen on an annual basis. The commitment to finding and applying for funding and sponsorships is key to this but also having space and place to make things happen. The continued development in the area means that spaces to make events happen are in short supply with a reliance on just a few key areas.

Southside's match funding to Festivals is in the region of £50K per annum Further investment is needed to support with infrastructure and staffing



It is clear that there is a social benefit and impact to holding festivals across Southside, especially those that are embedded within the Chinese and LGBTQ+ BID community.

The economic impact is harder to quantify in real terms as only one of the festivals has the mechanism to capture this information. However, anecdotally it is apparent that the area's businesses, especially restaurants, hotels and bars, are able to benefit significantly from an uplift in visitor numbers.

What is clear is that while the festival offer has been strong in Southside it needs further coordination to help support organiser goals, to achieve better visitor numbers, to retain existing events and to work better together.

The BID's pledges to enhance the district as a key visitor destination would be greatly advanced with a joined up approach that would benefit from an additional / impartial person to oversee and coordinate plans for a successful festival calendar alongside supporting funding bids & identifying sponsorship opportunities.

OPPORTUNITY

A large open space (preferably green) in the centre of Southside that will not be under threat of development

A festival committee that can join together on funding applications, share insights and resources and lobby for infrastructure changes

The appointment of a p/t coordinator to help support the creative network and be a one-stop-shop contact and encourage more festival activity

The appointment of an evaluation team to research more closely the social and economic impact of the festivals to make the case for further investment

The development of the Cultural Action Zone to secure Southside as the Cultural Heart of the city and assist with further support, funding and infrastructure

PLAN

To work with Southside Board, partners, stakeholders, BCC and investors to identify an interim use area that can be used alongside Arcadian, Car Park spaces, Hippodrome Square until the Smithfield development is complete: *Festival Square will be a major new public space for the city that is a lively hub for cultural, community and arts events, activities, festivals and an attractive place for people to meet and relax.*

Bring together a regular 'festival committee' of key organisers & stakeholders.

The coordinator role below would help with marketing and coordinating a Festival calendar plus identifying opportunities for funding.

Additional funding to help support the BID team to coordinate the cultural and festival offer of the area with a part time / freelance role. A stronger, joined up approach would benefit the BID and ideally would be someone impartial and independent who can help with funding applications and sponsorship as well as liaising with businesses to capitalise on the additional audience and visitor numbers.

Effectively monitor numbers of visitor/audience numbers or spend. To understand the benefits to the area, the local business / economy and find out what is working well (as well as audience feedback).

To firmly consolidate Southside District as a Cultural Action Zone, investing in master plans and projects that will enable the BID's commitment to a safer, smarter and greener District.

SOUTHSIDE FESTIVALS IN CONTEXT

Southside is the cultural heart of Birmingham. It has a world class theatre, the hippest live music, a vibrant Gay Village, street art, comedy and is home of Chinatown; with some of the best food in the City.

Culture, cinema, music, outdoor arts and creativity: Southside celebrates it all.

Home to the city's most vibrant festivals (such as Birmingham Pride, Chinese New Year, Summer in Southside and BSide) the BID plays a vital role in making these events happen.

These festivals play an intrinsic role in constructing a meaningful sense of place as well as contributing to the social, cultural, and economic growth of the area.

Southside's festivals encompass a wide variety of cultural practices which, overtime, can enhance the cultural richness and traditions of place. These events are grounded in local identity and emphasise the cultural distinctiveness of this unique area of the city.

Our festival offer is more vital now than ever. Few sectors were as hard hit by the pandemic as the cultural sector, with festivals being particularly vulnerable.

For Southside these unique festivals represent opportunities for increasing the area's visibility as an attractive visitor destination as well as offering opportunities for the local communities to engage in a vibrant and innovative cultural activity.

The area's festivals create feelings of togetherness, and demonstrate Southside's cultural institutions as centres for community. They allow people to integrate and reinvigorate by creating a rich sense of community. These events change perceptions, boost confidence in the area and offer a lot of fun in the process.

The festivals successfully grow the local economy, draw visitors to the area, raise the profiles of local business and people proud of the place they call home, adding a sense of community pride.

This is all vital to the social and economic development of the area, and creates positive interactions with diverse communities, attracts tourists and strengthens the 'Southside' brand.

Celebrating these cultures through events and festivals can help to promote Southside as an inclusive destination of cultural significance; creating and maintaining place identity; and as an intrinsic part of the area's economy.

Local festivals contribute to a sense of belonging, providing 'opportunities for drawing on shared histories, shared cultural practices and ideals.'

***Arts festivals and the city - Urban Studies**

SOUTHSIDE AUDIENCES - OVERVIEW

Southside has developed a vibrant festival portfolio as part of its cultural programming which brings people together and attracts tourists and diverse audiences.

Festival audiences contribute to the local economy, beyond the confines of the festival's venues. Cultural tourists tend to have higher disposable incomes than other visitors and spend more within the region.

This can arise directly through purchasing of festival tickets, merchandise and programmes etc and indirectly through expenditure on hotels, drinks and eating out.



Birmingham's working age population is significantly more ethnically diverse than the country as a whole. According to 2019 data from the Annual Population Survey, 40.2% of Birmingham's population is non-white, making the city the most diverse of all the English core cities. A diverse population in the city offers an array of international connections, a variety of languages, and a vibrant blend of different cultures.

"The city region is second only to London for its diversity with a growing young population with more under sixteens than any other city region and the biggest population group being the 25 to 30 year olds. Birmingham is a city with a young, and growing labour force, not facing the same levels of aging population issues as other places in the UK. This is driving a growing entertainment and social infrastructure in the city, providing for a young vibrant population."
Rebecca Riley - Business Development Director, City-REDI, University of Birmingham

Birmingham Pride has contributed in excess of £380,000 to local community and support groups, providing much-needed funds for essential services within the LGBTQ+ community.

It has helped to raise over £275k for LGBTQ+ projects plus in excess of £105k in additional subsidies for LGBTQ+ organisations.

'Cultural tourists to Southside are those who: Participate in 'passive, active and interactive engagement' with culture and communities to gain new experiences of the arts, creativity and entertainment.



The Lunar New Year committee made a triumphant return in 2023 with a total footfall of 60,000 at Lunar New Year 2023

SOUTHSIDE AUDIENCES CHINESE AND HONG KONG COMMUNITY

Southside has a large and established Chinese & growing, Hong Kong community & as a result Southside is changing – with more residential buildings appearing on the skyline.

This community has a strong and important presence within the annual festival offer – both in terms of organisation, visiting & social impact. As chair of the Chinese Festival Committee *James Wong* has been instrumental in supporting the area's Festivals including bringing investment in to the area for Chinese New Year and Autumn Festival.

2020–2022 Lunar New Year festivals were cancelled due to the Pandemic and the festival has found challenges with the additional pressures of funding, business sponsorship and most importantly visitor confidence. In 2023 the festival returned with an 10% increase on pre Covid audiences and renewed visitor confidence

Dorian Chan, owner of Ming Moon
"Over the years, thanks to the migration of Mandarin speakers from mainland China to Birmingham – including Chinese students, our Chinatown restaurants are much more varied – showcases regional cuisines rather than just Hong Kong Chinese. But there is new influx of Hong Kong residents coming to Birmingham and bringing welcome investment."

Co-owner Tommy Chan added: "We have helped many Hong Kong families to set up home here – at least a few thousand people. Birmingham is such a vibrant city and has so much going for it – with the Commonwealth Games, HS2 and of course a very strong Chinatown – the beating heart of the Chinese community."

Tommy also added: "It is not just about people investing money in the area. They are choosing Chinatown as a place to live. There is a lot of confidence in Birmingham as a city and the fact that we are building properties in the Chinese Quarter shows confidence and that is a lot of prosperity here."

Dorian added: "And let's not forget, there are so many other people living in Chinatown that are not Chinese. It is a brilliant location And that is only going to increase with more housing."



SOUTHSIDE AUDIENCES LGBTQ+

Birmingham Pride is the biggest festival in the city with a wide reach beyond its core LGBTQ+ audience.

Free to attend, the Birmingham Pride parade starts at Victoria Square in the heart of the city centre before heading towards the LGBTQ+ village, where festival goers can make their way to the main festival activities.

"Organising Birmingham Pride is a complex and sometimes difficult undertaking. It is primarily a community event held to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community in Birmingham and the wider West Midlands. It exists to raise money for LGBTQ+ charities and community groups. It is also a political and social movement and protest remains central to everything we do. That said, it is through its commercial element, the stages, the artists, the attractions and the ticket sales that make the community element effective. Striking the right balance is often challenging. Satisfying all of the needs of the diverse LGBTQ+ community is challenging." *Event organiser David Nash.*

Pride is funded by a combination of ticket sales, commercial sponsors, food and beverage concessions, parade entry fees and grants.

2023 PLANS

"Birmingham Pride will be held this year on Saturday 27th & Sunday 28th May 2023 on multiple sites, as in 2021, including main events in the Smithfield development, in and around the LGBTQ+ village in Southside, Victoria Square and the city centre. In addition the festival will hold community based events in the Mac Birmingham, Birmingham LGBT centre and other locations throughout the city.

The Birmingham Pride parade will return, with what we expect to be our biggest parade in the events history. It will start from the city centre and make its way through the main retail areas of the city before making its way back to Southside.

Our main stage, cabaret marquee, dance arena, community areas, fun fair and food stalls will be situated within the main Smithfield development and our Future Stage, Community Stage and the LGBTQ+ bars and clubs will form part of the street party, held in the streets of Southside.

However with the current plans for the Smithfield development having no room for a festival site which would accommodate a world class festival like Birmingham Pride, it's difficult to see how a main pride festival site can persist in the city in 2024 onwards.



BIRMINGHAM PRIDE STATS

5.5% of attendees are aged up to 20 years
22.6% of attendees are aged 21-25 years
25.4% of attendees are aged 26 - 30 years
15.8% of attendees are aged 31-35 years
10.3% of attendees are aged 36-40 years
20.3% of attendees are aged 40 or over

55.4% of attendees are from within the West Midlands
44.6% of attendees are from outside of the West Midlands

Pride attracts attendees from, amongst others, from Greater London, Greater Manchester, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire, Cheshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire.

Based on sales information on tickets and food and drink average spend is approximately £105 per day.

PRIDE is currently the only festival that is able to collate visitor spend in the area.

Festivals are powerful tools for building social cohesion, advancing international relations, celebrating heritage, fostering community well-being and providing safe zones for artists to innovate. How festivals are programmed, managed and curated affects who can access art, community and ideas. As festivals reimagine their future in a post-pandemic landscape – one that will be defined by economic constraints, the continuing climate crisis, and structural injustice – questions of equity, inclusion, responsibility and empathy must be at the forefront of the conversation.

Festivals need to return to their essence, offering people a chance to come together, to escape the oppressions of everyday life, to rethink collaboration, community and culture. There is value in sharing experiences that cannot be calculated through ticket sales and audience numbers. However, reimagining a future for festivals must also involve reimagining business models, stakeholder partnerships and community needs. A path forward needs to be practical, healing, characterized by solidarity, and open to all.”

Enrique Avogadro
Minister for Culture
Buenos Aires, Argentina



HIPPODROME FESTIVALS

Festivals in Southside remains a Hippodrome commitment for 2023/24 where they will be delivering B-Side, Chinese New Year plus other festivals & events in the city centre and region.

The festivals are increasingly tailored towards urban, cultural diverse and younger audiences however the presence in Southside requires further investment.

FUNDING of Hippodrome festival events comes from a mix of public (ACE/BCC) & commercial sponsors/partners

AUDIENCES Hippodrome festivals are increasingly tailored towards inner city, culturally diverse and younger audiences

Key suggestions from the Hippodrome Festivals team:

- A hospitality forum that can support events with discounted hotel rooms
- More connectivity with the local business community to support festivals when they happen
- Further investment in street cleaning after weekend nighttime activity so that it doesn't affect daytime visitors to festivals
- Tailored & ongoing marketing campaign for the district & its offer (venues, bars, festivals) both in the city, west mids and UK
- More High St food / restaurant options alongside independents
- More creative industries / artist studio spaces to genuinely rival Digbeth & Jewellery Quarter
- Free public wifi

When looking to re-engage visitors Southside BID are considering how:

We can use the big strategic opportunities that Southside can benefit from.

How we might use the experience gained in the 2022 Commonwealth Games as a case study on how Southside's cultural and hospitality offering attract peoples to the District.

How might we monitor visitors / audience average spend?

Prior to 2020 there were 9 annual festivals that called Southside home with a combined visitor count of over 250,000.

Since 2020 we have seen a significant (75%) drop in the festivals that are taking place.

While Southside has a very engaged cultural visitor* (40% above Birmingham's average) the offer has been diminished due to a number of external factors. We are now looking at how to re-engage visitors and how to align future plans with the BID's pledges.



Key Issues identified across the festival organisers

- Gentrification

The building of new residential apartments and squeezing out of commercial businesses and in return increased cost of space. This has and is an issue for many of the cultural venues and festival organisers - especially BOM who are unable to secure a longer term lease of space in the area.

- Crime

Hate crime and anti-social behaviour have increased throughout the city and Southside is also suffering from some of these issues. The communities in Southside have been targeted.

- Festival monitoring

Festivals are not monitoring visitor numbers or gaining feedback and to understand the impact festivals are having on the city's economy and cultural life, we need independent evaluation methods in place.

Aligning a festival plan with our pledges and the needs of our festival partners

Pledge

To improve the public realm in Southside by investing in new and existing public spaces

What we hope to do

Within the 40-foot traditional Chinese arch will welcome visitors to Birmingham's Chinatown when it is installed as part of a multimillion-pound new public square.

The Southside Square development will transform the area around Hurst Street, Ladywell Walk and Thorp Street into a vibrant public space fit for markets, festivals and outdoor performances.

Seriously delayed and with a temporary surface put there for 2022 games, this project should be finished by 2025.

Festival partners comments

All festival partners expressed a desire for outdoor spaces:

Birmingham Pride: Providing a permanent, green, sustainable, accessible and safe space amongst the development of the Southside area is essential. It is imperative that the LGBTQ+ community in Birmingham and the wider community have spaces beyond the night time economy in and around the Southside BID area. The need for additional green spaces, accessible to all has been an ongoing issue for a number of years and the development of the area has failed to offer long term solutions thus far.

Developing a robust transport and infrastructure strategy

Southside District have commissioned research on a access plan for Southside to look at transport links, way finding etc. This plan will be taken forward to a committee and presented with key recommendations.

Better transport links, bus routes, safer parking areas, improved lighting, safe routes.

Maintaining a safe and welcoming environment

The BID currently employs 7 wardens who patrol the area, greet visitors, speak with businesses and deal and record anti-social behaviour.. Wardens are connected directly to the local Police and are able to deal with issues quickly and effectively.

Improved lighting and CCTV. Improved channels for reporting LGBTQ+ specific hate crime would be a welcome improvement.

Pledge

Upholding standards of street cleanliness

Sustaining additional investment and added value

Making Southside greener and more environmentally friendly

Building on local events and their legacy

Establishing a sense of place in Southside with on street branding

Collaborating with other Birmingham BIDs

What we hope to do

Southside is committed to keeping its streets and areas clean. We will continue to lobby with the council to increase regular patrols. Our wardens are able to react quickly to any big issues around dumping and unsolicited graffiti.

Investment in Southside continues to grow and our aim is to lobby developers to include green space and public use buildings beyond residential.

Our plan is to triple the number of trees in Southside and transform as many pedestrian barriers into green screens to improve air quality.

We are building the case for the Cultural Action Zone and what this might mean in terms of funding so that we can support events and help them grow.

Our plan is to (where possible) make the most of Southside's branding in outdoor spaces so that visitors know where they are in the city

Where possible we will cross-share promotion of events and festivals resource. - closer alignment with broader city council plan and a strategic approach

Festival partners comments

There was worry about the state of litter and cleanliness across the area after busy Friday and Saturday nights - especially for family events that start earlier in the day.

Gentrification is a real issue for festivals and cultural venues as buildings are repurposed and leases are not extended. Available commercial property in the area is the lowest in any BID area.

There is a real desire for a multi-purpose GREEN SPACE in Southside that is safe to use and can be an asset to festivals.

Securing funding and sponsorships has been hard over the last 3 years - additional support would mean that more events could happen in Southside.

An outward facing PR and Marketing campaign would benefit the events and local businesses.

Don't forget the new Tourism Strategy and the WMCA Visitor Strategy plus the new Cultural Compact.

NEXT STEPS

- A Commissioning Strategy and Delivery Plan to set out an ambitious & innovative plan for digital & public art commissions to drive footfall & kick-start the visitor economy.
- A Festivals Plan, to map Southside's support to a diverse festival calendar including Birmingham Pride, Chinese New Year, Chinese Autumn Festival, Summer in Southside, St Patrick's Day, SHOUT Queer Arts Festival, B-Side, Flatpack and Birmingham Weekender.
- Scoping and identified funding for an augmented reality visitor app, unlocking hidden Southside Stories across our eclectic district including local characters and personalities and stories from across China Town and the Gay Village.
- A costed & deliverable plan for permanent festival infrastructure needed to support a range of festivals for Hippodrome Square, due for completion January 2025.





Welcome
to
Southside