Local Democracy Week Schools Event
14 November 2013
Report of the Outcomes

1. Background

All local secondary schools were invited to take part in an event at the Town Hall linked to Local Democracy Week 2013 during the afternoon of 14 November 2013. As well as learning about the work of the council and meeting the Mayor, the students spent time discussing proposals for events that could be held in the borough to mark the occasion of the Rugby World Cup 2015 in England.

The top ideas emerging from the discussions were presented to Customer and Partnerships Committee that evening by Rugby Youth Council. It was agreed that the ideas put forward by the students should be presented to the Steering Group which exists to plan how the town can most benefit from the Rugby World Cup. This includes representatives of the Council, Rugby School, Rugby First (the town centre company) and the Chamber of Commerce, along with the Member of Parliament. Although he was unable to attend the event, Mark Pawsey MP sent a message to the students pledging that, as Parliamentary Ambassador for the Rugby World Cup 2015, he would also ensure that the best ideas were brought before the organisers of the World Cup.

2. The Event

Students from the following schools participated in the event:

Harris Church of England School
Lawrence Sheriff School
Rugby High School
Princethorpe College

Each school was asked to give a short presentation, outlining their proposals for events and activities that could be arranged. They were asked to consider the following questions:
1. If you were a rugby supporter from overseas visiting the Birthplace of the Game what would you want to see when you got here?
2. What can we do to maximise the international publicity that the town will get to encourage inward investment?
3. What sort of things would local residents and businesses like to get involved in?

Given the financial constraints, students were also asked to think about how their ideas could be paid for.

Following presentations from each of the schools, Rugby Youth Council members facilitated a discussion of the ideas that had been put forward. The students discussed their ideas in small groups, before coming together for a final plenary session where they agreed their main proposals.

3. Top ideas

The overall concept that emerged from the event was “Rugby: an experience, not just a sport” – encompassing the vision of using the occasion to celebrate Rugby as a town and a community, as well as the birthplace of the game. The ideas proposed are not just for rugby fans, but have wider appeal to all potential visitors and local residents alike.

The key ideas presented to the Committee by Rugby Youth Council are outlined below:

- Big screen

The idea of a big screen in a public space showing matches during the tournament was put forward by two of the schools and proved popular on the day. The students gave examples of big screens used in Warwick (for Warwick Film Festival), Brighton and Leicester (pictured). It was suggested that Whitehall Recreation Ground or Caldecott Park (or even The Close or the town centre) could be suitable venues. It was also suggested that the screen could show a leader board when there was no live match being broadcast.
The idea could be linked with an International Food and Beer Festival (see below), or a craft market, which might appeal to members of the family who are not necessarily interested in watching the games.

In discussion, students talked about the likely expense involved, and the suggestion was made that the screen could display advertising for local businesses. It was also suggested that the screen could be provided in partnership with local pubs, which might, for example, offer food and drink as part of the food festival, and could be asked not to show matches on their own screens at the same time as those showing on the big screen. A further suggestion was that there could be a Twitter feed running, with people’s comments displayed along the bottom of the screen.

- The Time Machine

The premise behind this suggestion was that the current rugby football museum is small and does not necessarily appeal to a wide audience. The ‘time machine’ would be a temporary, interactive exhibition that would take visitors back in time to the birth of the game, and then through key moments in the history of the game, showing its global impact – see the graphic from Lawrence Sheriff School below:

The exhibition would be as interactive as possible, with activities to appeal to families – such as a game involving passing a ball through a hoop, using different shaped rugby balls through the years. There could also be photo opportunities, such as seaside-style cut out boards. There was discussion as to whether visitors should be asked to pay an entrance fee, or whether a voluntary donation should be requested, though it was felt the costs of the exhibition could be minimal. Rugby Art Gallery and Museum was suggested as a potential venue, or possibly use could be made of
vacant properties in the town centre – potentially using a number of adjacent premises.

- Carnival

This idea was of an international carnival, with local schools and community groups being invited to decorate floats celebrating the culture of each of the competing nations. This would be a good way of inspiring and enthusing local communities.

In discussion this idea was further developed, with the suggestion that it be held on the day of the opening ceremony, with the potential that the broadcaster might be encouraged to show a clip of the event in the “birthplace of the game” as part of their coverage of the opening ceremony – “the celebrating starts in the birthplace”. It was proposed that the route could run from Whitehall Recreation Ground, past the key sites – the Close and the Webb Ellis Statue – finishing at Caldecott Park (where potentially the big screen would be sited and could show the opening ceremony).

- Food and Beer Festival

The students suggested combining an International Food and Beer Festival with either or both the carnival and the big screen.

The key idea was to have stalls selling food and drink from all of the countries competing in the tournament, and for local businesses to be invited to participate. Students from Princethorpe College presented the graphics below to show the type of food and drink that might be available.

In discussion, students suggested that if the festival went on through the evening, this would encourage visitors to stay in the town and support local businesses.
• Reduced rent on vacant premises in the town

The final key idea was to offer lower rents on vacant premises in the town centre during the tournament, to encourage businesses to establish ‘pop-up’ shops – potentially selling souvenirs related to the event. It was argued that empty shops would be unattractive to visitors to the town and so the opportunity should be provided to renew the space – and potentially help new businesses to become established in the town. The idea had the potential to leave a lasting legacy, providing more employment and investment in the area.

There was some discussion of this idea, with the alternative proposition that the council could reduce business rates for such businesses rather than relying on private landlords to reduce rents. It was also suggested that empty premises could be used temporarily to accommodate screens showing rugby matches, or to accommodate the time machine exhibition outlined above.

4. Other suggestions

Whilst these were the top ideas the students decided to put forward, there were numerous other good ideas proposed during the afternoon that were not able to be discussed in detail in the time available. Nevertheless, they may be of interest to the Steering Group and are detailed below for reference.

• Competitions – for example, a children’s scavenger hunt in the town, poster making competition, junior tournaments (played on The Close?), penalty shoot-out (with inflatable Goal Posts in the town centre), inter-business challenges such as 7-a-side or mixed touch rugby, opportunities to win tickets to RWC matches

• World record attempt – for example, most number of tries on a pitch, most number of passes, most balls in the air

• Charity Dinner – for local teams, with rugby player connected to the town as guest speaker. Funded by sponsorship and tickets sales. Could include charity auction.

• Youth Whistlers – young people being trained by the Warwickshire Society of Referees and refereeing Parliamentary Sevens matches to be held on the Close. This would provide a lasting legacy.

• Music Festival – showcasing local talent and potentially international acts

• Travel – good transport links to and around the town will be vital. Students suggested travel companies could offer reduced prices on buses and trains, more frequent services and better promotion of existing transport connections between the railway station and the town centre.
• Tour Guides or ‘Gamesmakers’ – several schools suggested the idea of inviting local volunteers, or schools, to act as tour guides for international visitors interested in finding out about how and where the game started. This could link to the ‘time machine’ idea. Potentially applications could be invited from the local community in the same way the Olympics looked for volunteers. There would be particular value in having volunteers who could talk to visitors in their own language – it was suggested that schools could provide Rugby Ambassadors representing the visiting countries.

• Advertising – students also emphasised the need to invest in advertising to promote the town, for example at major transport links, if this was affordable. They also argued there needed to be good online promotion of the town, including through use of social media

• The Rugby Lions – students highlighted the significance of England, Rugby School and The Rugby Lions being the only teams that are able to play in all white, and the potential to build on this by using facilities at Rugby Lions for key events.

5. Further information

For further information about the event or any of the ideas put forward, please contact Debbie Dawson, Democratic and Scrutiny Services, Rugby Borough Council Tel. 01788 533592 or email debbie.dawson@rugby.gov.uk

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