

## Notes from Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> October, Community Play meeting:

Finn Jackson introduced Jon Oram and Deborah from Claque to the 30 or so attendees. Jon showed a film depicting people who have enjoyed the experience of being involved in a Community Play. The film illustrated cameos from early production through to the finished community production whilst Jon conveyed tales from his past experiences across the UK, Canada and beyond. Jon painted a picture of benefits that can be achieved by individuals and for a community at large.

The process undertaken will form an initial steering committee, instigate a feasibility study and establish the viability of developing a play for Farnham. From this, a vote will be taken to establish whether to go ahead with a Community Play. The committee will then present the findings of the feasibility study at a well published public meeting where a vote will be taken.

A play may take the form of contemporary issues - a look back at history (and historical characters/notable people) - finding comparisons with issues that arise today that mirror experiences from the past or any other ground-breaking themes.

In parallel with a Community Play other projects can be associated/linked as a series of social community based events. Examples from the past have been - an evening street parade with lanterns, schools' sharing plays (typically a private school and a state school), short lease holdings of a shop to focus community organisations along with the Community Play, inclusion of needy individuals/groups, recordings of local people sharing their early life experiences and stories, historically themed events etc.

All projects are designed according to the needs of a given community once the seeds are sown the result blossoms into more than a play - bringing colour to a community by looking at itself.

Professional writers/authors are brought in to ensure an outsider's perspective reflects local community experiences, facts and tales. The outcome hopes to achieve a 'Celebratory Play' that is thought provoking - all casting is inclusive (you ask to be in the play and you are!). Plays usually run for 12 nights, although any participant can be accommodated for other engagements/timetabled needs during this period.

Usually the audience is positioned in the middle and the players perform around the perimeter. Participants become involved with all aspects of the production, props, costumes, design, management etc., etc.

Gestation period is around 18 - 24 months and funding is sourced from grant providers (£190,000 was given as an example).

Benefits of a Community Play were indicated as:

- ❑ Give a community an opportunity to discover and celebrate its history.
- ❑ Challenge some of its contemporary views, prejudices and preconceptions.
- ❑ Give people a collective voice to express their concerns through democratic process.
- ❑ Give individuals a sense of identity and personal association with the town in which they live.
- ❑ Bring together disparate groups and potentially relieve any sense of separation that they might feel or experience and help to restore flagging community spirit.

- ❑ Help to break down cliques by drawing everyone together with a new, wider and inclusive enterprise.
- ❑ Be a great leveller - no class, social, racial, sexual, political, interest or age barrier. Individuals can demonstrate that they have a valuable contribution to make - preconceptions and prejudices are diminished.
- ❑ Professionals engaged in the process help to strengthen and broaden horizons, stimulate, set new standards and encourage ideas.
- ❑ Individuals have the opportunity to stretch themselves and gain a vision of the extraordinary being possible.
- ❑ Develop existing individual skills and explore/build new ones. The community becomes aware of its range of skills and the asset a cohesive community can bring to the benefit of individuals.
- ❑ People can learn to respect others ideas, explore common ground and develop skills in group problem solving, rediscover the joy of co-operative participation and collaborate in the pursuit of achieving collective goals.
- ❑ Demonstrate that cultural events and the idea of celebration can be fundamental to the growth of a healthy society.
- ❑ Encourage a community to make a greater personal investment into the future because the individual feels more empowered and effective.

The scale of the play touches the lives of almost everyone in the community. They absorb anyone and everyone who would like to participate and reach out to people who would not normally get involved. Not least, Community Plays can give enormous pleasure, and special memories. Many people experience a new lease of life and new and some lasting friendships are invariably formed.

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