

Partnership Committee

Date: 17 December 2015

Title: CHILDRENS TRAIL UPDATE

Purpose of the Report: To provide the Committee with an update on the current Children's trail project 2015/16 and consider the recommendations.

Contact Officer: Jo Martindale, Partnership Officer

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 To use the remaining funds from 2015/16 (budget codes 970/9027 & 503/4509) for the following project highlighted in item 5.2.
- 1.2 To allocate £2100 in the 2016/17 (budget code 503/4509), to extend the work of the Children's Trail Guardian for another year (*as highlighted in Item 7: Budget allocation and review outlined section 3*)
- 1.3 To allocate a further £4720 in the 2016/17 (budget code 503/4509) for future publicity and maintenance of the trail, see in item 7.
- 1.4 To advise Officers on preferred options in para 7.3 regarding future activity.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Children's Trail was launched in August 2012 and is a series of 22 artworks celebrating children's stories. The trail starts at the Library and weaves through the town centre, with artworks placed in prominent and unusual places. The trail provides the community and visitors with an inspiring free local outing and in doing so, an opportunity to explore various town locations.
- 2.2 Annual maintenance is undertaken by the Town Council.

KEY FACTS

- 2.3 **A free activity map and pencil accompany the Trail.** They were redesigned and launched in the spring of 2015. Previously maps were distributed from the Library and the White House. As of June 2015 they were also available at other key community locations: the Children's Centre, Astral Park and Mentmore Pavillion, and an A4 'print-at-home' version of the map is available to download from the Town Council website for use by the

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public and large groups /schools. 1500 maps will have been distributed by end year 2015/16

- 2.4 **Children are rewarded for their participation.** In 2015 the rewards were redesigned to be more useful and retainable, to further inspire Children's own reading and creativity, and with a dual purpose of publicity and visibility.
- 2.5 **Twice a year schools outreach is undertaken.** Previously, a general pack of merchandise was sent to the local schools. In 2015 this was streamlined into a Teachers Pack, which focuses on the Trail Book plus samples. This is sent out in January and followed by pre-summer awareness-raising, undertaken in co-operation with the Library team, piggy backing on the Reading Agency National Summer Reading Challenge publicity visits (June/July) to all the local schools.
- 2.6 **The Trail anniversary occurs in August.** In August 2017, it will be the fifth anniversary of the Trail. Any current steps to build local profile and followership are done with this key moment in mind.
- 2.7 **The Council continues to publicise the trail.** Promotion has always been done through the Council website, and social media channel. The main focus of Trail promotions is a dedicated Facebook page (380+ Fans), managed by 'The Guardian' supported by posters on community boards/Parks, self-promoting reward items, at council events, and via relationships with the Library, Children's Centre and other key local influencers. The Trail is also advertised in Bedfordshire family press, makes use of local press and TripAdvisor.
- 2.8 **The Trail currently has a Guardian.** 'The Guardian' is a local resident who, during 2014, not only regularly took the trial, but was informally promoting it locally. She approached the Partnerships Officer and provided a valuable insight (good and bad) into the Trail experience and offered her media skills and experience to encourage wider use, appreciation and engagement with the Trail. She took on a trial phrase at an agreed negotiated fee and submitted recommendations in December 2014.

3. THE ROLE OF THE 'GUARDIAN OF THE TRAIL'

- 3.1 During 'The Guardian's' trial phase her activity re-framed the Trail as something current and timeless. *"A free public trail of 22 artworks celebrating children's stories, for little people, with big imaginations, to explore."* With 'The Guardian' in place, from August 2014 to December 14, there was an increase in Social Media 'Likes' from 70 to 115. The public became active with the page. There were over 240 new interactions on the Facebook page from individuals and organisations including submitting pictures. ***See appendix 1**
- 3.2 The Guardian's marketing and service user skills enabled a reassessment of the Council's promotion of the trail. The expenditure proved to be cost effective in raising the profile and participation, increasing the Council's reach to a 'Fan' network that promotes the trail and brings the Town's residents into the town centre.
- 3.3 It is recommended that the Partnership Committee continue working with the Guardian throughout 2016/17 on future projects as listed in section 6 and continue the online social media project interaction.

4. CHILDRENS TRAIL ACTIVITY 2015/16

- 4.1 In December 2014 the Partnership Committee approved a report to **complete a full redesign of the project**. This took on board the feedback that the Guardian provided with great effect and financial benefit, i.e. reduced costs for purchasing trail related products.
- 4.2 During the year **'The Guardian'** was commissioned by the Town Council to continue Facebook activity and interaction, develop key relationships through opportunity and promotion, and in particular to provide strategy and management for the redesign project, subsequent launch / roll out of new stock. 'The Guardian' has continued to manage **the online community**, strengthening relationships (Library Theatre, TACTIC, Children's Centre, nurseries), adding new relationships (Sure Start Supporters, Leighton Buzzard NCT, GROUNDWORK) and generating individual interaction / advocacy by public.
- 4.3 There are now **380+ Facebook 'Fans'** with thousands of interactions. Between January 2015 - November 2015, 47 public posts were made to the page (45 photographic), generating 728 Likes, many comments and even conversations arranging trips to the Trail. Photo Posting is actively encouraged through consistent call-to-action messaging across the newly designed materials, and most powerfully via a monthly Goodie Bag Competition. Via the photos the Trail message is propelled wider than local, due to the participation of non-local friends and family. ***See appendix 2 for more Facebook stats.**
- 4.4 Product changes:
- A new **z-style activity map** that is far more usable, practical and easier to follow.
 - **The pencil** has been reduced (similar to Ikea) and now mirrors the map.
 - **Postcard is now a Tear and share bookmark**, which is stamped on completion as reward. By using a stamping reward format means we are able to track participation.
 - **Art cards** were introduced and are now given on completion as reward. Cards provide content for a wall that has been secured above the 'Beginning to Read' area of the children's section in the Library.
- 4.5 The re-design project was also supported by new footprint signage around town to allow the Trail to be joined up for people and visible at street level (bear prints), a new permanent focal Library area for artcards and promotions (ongoing), new stand-out advertising templates, self-contained 'pop-up' point of sale in 6 locations, large format promotions, badges / stickers, and a re-enforced physical destination by putting it on the map literally through Trip Advisor/Google places, MumsNet website listings. ***See appendix 3 and samples provided, see appendix 4 for TripAdvisor and social media feedback ***
- 4.6 **Key events 2015/16 events & community interactions** include:
- National Storytelling Week (Jan) map listing, Schools Promotion (Feb) letter & schools welcome pack, World Book Day (Mar) competition / LBO article, addition of the permanent Children's Trail promotional wall in Library (Mar), Bedford Clanger (May) article, addition of Blue Paws around town (June) word of mouth / social buzz, 'Local Landmarks' Mumsnet listing (June), Google Places new listing (June), TripAdvisor new listing (June), Redesign / Big Lunch (July) LBO article press

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release, Children's Centre Summer Open Day (July) maps / promotional banners, Roald Dahl Day (Sept) mini competition plus:

- Big Lunch (June) new materials launch with face to face promotion, children's activities, + 200 maps distributed,
- Reading Agencies annual national Summer Reading Challenge (July) maps explained / offered to the 800+ children who signed-up for the Reading Challenge, + 500 maps provided, in conjunction with Trail prize incentives to registrations
- Awarded Trip Advisor 5 Star recommendation (August)
- Leighton Buzzard NCT Newsletter (Nov) article (to mailing list 1500, FB 600 Fans)
- *And, notably, a visit from Northampton Council*

5. ANNUAL COSTS FOR 2015/16

- 5.1 The current cost of the project incurred to date is Children's Trail expenses/projects/re-design work £3935, Guardian fees £3225. Total £7,160
- 5.2 Currently £3200 is available within 2015/16. The £1500 available for maintenance is being recommended (should no major maintenance work be required before end March 2016) to carry forward these funds into 2016/17 and use to refurbish the artworks which adorn the trail. Quotes have been obtained and work can commence in Spring 2016.
- 5.3 Estimated costs to 1st April 2016 total £1,350 and cover Facebook competition prizes, publicity writing, additional maps, pre-Easter press, schools packs/outreach (January), Library wall updates/stock management.

6. 2016/17 FUTURE PROJECTS & BUDGETS

- 6.1 A schedule is being put together around 3 key school holidays, specialised book and literacy weeks and library events, which will allow Officers to build on relationships and to build anticipation on social media, pre-plan advertisements, press releases and school's engagement.
- 6.2 To continue to look after the Trail and build upon our growing followership, focusing on local community engagement, with the view to establishing the basis for a 5th anniversary celebration and wider tourism agenda in 2017/18. Including growing Facebook base, monthly competitions. Continue to reward photo posts with goodie bag prizes. Continue to add images to the Facebook 'About Town Gallery' to highlight local vibrancy and activity. Take opportunity to link the Trail with national youth, arts, literacy and Trail stories /projects etc.
- 6.3 Carry forward the £1500 Maintenance cost from 2015/16 and work with fabricator to refurbish pencil, clean knob and ticket. Continue to work with the Town Council grounds team to maintain paintworks.
- 6.4 Take advantage of large council community event (The Big Lunch 2016) for Spring/Summer promotion. Promotion at a number of smaller events to continue to raise wider public awareness.

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- 6.5 Use "Bedfordshire family" print press advertising at key moments and link it to a unique web page on the Town Council site to measure the effectiveness.
- 6.6 Start to use Facebook paid advertising on 'Bedfordshire'+ group at key moments and measure effectiveness via stats, compare against print press.
- 6.7 Build upon on the more engaged Library relationship. Maintain a vibrant display within the children's area. Provide stock and fact sheet for easy advocacy. Co-ordinate with their successful Summer Reading Challenge.
- 6.8 Build on relationships within the community. Work with schools to make them aware of the ready-made lesson nature of the activity map. Encourage schools to adopt the Trail as part of this school trip calendar. Strengthen the relationships with Children's Centre, TACTIC and LB NCT.

7 Recommended Budget allocation for 2016/17

7.1 2016/17 total recommended budget **£6820** to include:

- 1. Contingency **£500**
- 2. Key Stock – **£2020** (2000 Maps/2000 Pencils/1500 Bookmarks/1500 Art cards, 1500 Badges)
- 3. Ongoing Maintenance (paintwork updates art/paws, materials for Council pencil/brass maintenance going forward) allow = **£1000**
- 4. Expenses Facebook (Book Prizes 12 + 2 extra competitions, Library update materials) = **£250**
- 5. Advertising Budget = **£950** (£750 2/3 print press, £100 FB, £100 flyers)
- 6. Guardian Facebook/Social Media project (April 16 - Mar 17) £75 x 12 = **£900**
- 7. Guardian annual project work allowance £150 x 8 days = **£1200**

7.2 Key annual project work to be carried out by the Guardian include:

- a) *Guardian promotional press writing 1 day = £150*
- b) *Guardian Key Promotion Day (event attendance) 1 day = £150*
- c) *Guardian update report writing (Mar) and (Dec) 2 days = £300*
- d) *Guardian Library wall updates / stock management (5 locations, 12 months) = 2 days = £300*
- e) *Guardian print checks / small miscellaneous tasks allow = 1 day = £150*
- f) *Guardian lower schools outreach (Jan 2017 Schools letter/packs) 1 day = £150*

7.3 Wish list of additional projects:

Should the Council choose to invest further budget for additional project work, the Committee could choose from one of these options:

- a. Look to expand into relationships with Early Years nursery and healthcare providers as outlets for maps and advocacy. *Option Guardian outreach - Early Years /Healthcare = £300 (plus £145 promotional material stickers)*

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- b. Create new relationships with local retail, encourage window stickers and advocacy. *Option Guardian outreach - Estate agents/retailers = £300 (plus £400 promotional material badges/window stickers)*
- c. Start to explore 5th anniversary project 2017/18, for example Lower schools 'Artwork adoption' scheme, sponsorship to fund event *Option Guardian – 5th Anniversary scoping = £300*
- d. Look to engage with other projects that recognising strategic issues of health & well-being, tourism and residents appreciation of their towns cultural assets. Town Council initiatives, for example Living History project, Fit and Fun' themed projects, or projects targeting those of grandparent age. *Option Guardian – Single Council Project tie-in = £300*

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