

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE
19 JUNE 2007

PROPOSED WINTER ICE RINK 2007

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To present proposals for a temporary ice rink in the city centre for the Christmas season 2007.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Last year the City Council successfully promoted a temporary ice rink on the Bampfylde Street car park next to the bus station. In spite of a number of difficulties, notably the unseasonably warm weather, more than 30,000 skaters enjoyed the experience.
- 2.2 The Council had little information to base its cost estimates on last year, although a budget of £35,000 was set aside, Members were advised that the total net cost could be a good deal higher up to £100,000. In fact however the final cost in 2006/7 was £49,679 for a six week season. In view of the success and popularity of the rink Members asked that we explore provision of a rink again in 2007.

3. PROPOSALS FOR 2007

- 3.1 In preparing proposals for this year, we had in mind very much the lessons of last year. The site and its appearance, the quality of the service received by the skaters, and the overall ambiance are crucial factors. In seeking possible operators and sites therefore, we have ensured that we can achieve higher standards in those areas. The consequence however of reducing the operating risks are that the financial risk has grown.

3.2 Site

With the new Princesshay opening shortly before, it was obviously not a sensible option to use a car park again. We have therefore negotiated the use of the courtyard of Rougemont Castle which the owners GL50 have generously agreed to make available free of charge. This has major advantages, in that the site can be easily controlled and managed, both during the day and at night, and it provides an excellent setting. On the downside it is not so easily visible to potential casual users, but this can be largely dealt with by better signing and marketing.

3.3 Operator

Further research was carried out on how the market works before we advertised again for expressions of interest. Visits were made to other areas to observe operators in action. A select list of operators was asked to tender, and three tenders were received. A separate report on this agenda looks in detail at the tenders and seeks Executive

approval to the recommended operator. The terms and conditions in the tenders for this year have included all the issues we felt could be improved over last year.

3.4 **Budget**

The proposed budget is a realistic one, designed to take into account the lessons of last year, and to be prudent in terms of the risks as well. Although we sold 30,000 tickets last year, we felt it more sensible to budget on the basis of 25,000 skaters, (40% of capacity) to allow for possible bad weather and the effects of the site. In addition we have increased the size of the marketing budget. This is because last year the rink was the centrepiece of the city's Christmas marketing campaign which itself was exceptional in order to counteract the effects of Princesshay being under construction. This year Princesshay will be open, which will of course bring additional people into the city, but will reduce the profile of the rink itself. The budget will also allow for additional signing in the city centre itself. The budget is proposed at £90,000. However Members should once again be aware that the financial risk is bigger than that. If only half the number of skaters use the rink, the total deficit would rise by £50,000 for example.

3.5 **Risk factors**

- Last year the temperature frequently reached 15°C, which meant that the chiller units struggled to maintain the ice. The company we recommend this year have access to additional units, which should be able to cope with these extremely warm winter temperatures, but there is of course risk that the weather will be even warmer.
- Stormy and very rainy weather will not necessarily make the rink unusable, but will deter skaters. Last year there was very little wet weather, so this did not cause too much of a problem.
- The issue of the site being away from the main shoppers' routes has been mentioned above. This cannot be quantified, but the team will do everything it can to ensure that its effect is minimised.
- There is of course always the risk that the site will change hands.

3.6 **Timings**

It is suggested that the operating period be brought forward slightly, opening on 23 November, and closing on 2 January 2008. This will overlap better with the Christmas shopping and holiday periods.

4. **RECOMMENDED**

- 1) that the City Council engage a contractor to operate a temporary ice rink in the courtyard of Rougemont Castle, from 23 November 2007 to 2 January 2008.
- 2) that a budget of £90,000 be allocated to operate the winter ice rink.

HEAD OF LEISURE AND MUSEUMS

S:LP/Committee/607EXEC4
7 June 2007

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:

None