



## Annual Report of the Weston Winter Gardens Community Board 2017 – 2018

### September 2018

#### Board Members –

Dr Tansin Benn - [tansinbenn@sky.com](mailto:tansinbenn@sky.com) (Community) (Chair)

Chris Bull - [chris.bull@kingsmeadsquare.com](mailto:chris.bull@kingsmeadsquare.com) (Business)

Linda Burlison - [Linda.Burlison@weston.ac.uk](mailto:Linda.Burlison@weston.ac.uk) (College)

Robbie Burns – [robbieburns@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:robbieburns@hotmail.co.uk) (Events – out of the country this year)

Jill Clarkson - [jill.clarkson@weston.ac.uk](mailto:jill.clarkson@weston.ac.uk) (College & Board administrative support)

Sarah Codling - [sarah.codling@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.codling@n-somerset.gov.uk) (Councillor)

John Crockford-Hawley - [bartjrch@aol.com](mailto:bartjrch@aol.com) (Weston Heritage)

Ian Porter - [ian.porter@weston.ac.uk](mailto:ian.porter@weston.ac.uk) (College)

Doreen Smith – [Doreen.smith@vansmail.org.uk](mailto:Doreen.smith@vansmail.org.uk) (Community – CEO VANS)

Clive Webb - [cclivewebb@aol.com](mailto:cclivewebb@aol.com) (Leader – Weston Town Council)

Gareth Withers - [Gareth.Withers@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Gareth.Withers@n-somerset.gov.uk) (Council Officer)

Co-opted David Burlison (Weston College Marketing) ([david.burlison@weston.ac.uk](mailto:david.burlison@weston.ac.uk)).

#### History –

The Community Board was established as a result of specific clauses in the Legal Transfer Agreement when the Winter Gardens building was transferred by North Somerset Council to Weston College in early 2016. In brief, the Legal Agreement required the setting up of a ‘Community Board’ to “... *oversee and assist with the effective use of the property for Community Purposes*”. Additional stipulations were that the Board holds regular meetings, keeps accurate accounts and records; with the underpinning principles of collaboration and cooperation; accountability and openness; conducted in a positive and proactive manner.

Dr Paul Phillips (College) and Mike Jackson (NSC) held an inaugural meeting on December 4<sup>th</sup> 2015 with invited people from the College, North Somerset Council, and Weston Town Council, local business and the community. Guided by the Legal Agreement the Board was started and a Chairperson was elected (with consensus this always should be someone from outside the College and Council). Over the next 22 months the new Winter Gardens building was reshaped, the Law & Professional Services wing was built, Florentines, Lasseters restaurant and the Pavilion were developed and refurbished. During this time the Board met and established, in close liaison with Dr Paul Phillips, the Mission, Terms of Reference, Governance documentation and an interim strategy.

Difficulties in communication between College staff and Board members at the time led to a meeting between Dr Paul Phillips, Linda Burlison and the Chair, Dr Tansin Benn in August 2017 which greatly improved the situation. Regular interim meetings were set up with the Chair, Jill Clarkson and the Winter Gardens full time staff (Emma Walvin and Gareth Piper) between full Board meetings. These have helped considerably to open communication and build positive relationships. (Gareth Piper ‘operations manager’ has responsibility for the Pavilion, Lasseters and Florentines which together with the Lauriston Hotel forms a business known as ‘Inspirational Events and Investments’). Unfortunately Emma left in June leaving a temporary void in an already stretched team.

## **2017 – 2018 Board Developments**

In the year September 2017 – September 2018 (adopting the Education year timing) there have been 3 Board meetings - 13<sup>th</sup> September 2017, 14<sup>th</sup> March and 12<sup>th</sup> July 2018. Retiring Board members during the year were Cara Macmahon, Jonathan Cook and Robbie Burns. Doreen Smith CEO VANS (Voluntary Actions North Somerset) has joined the Board. Six small group interim meetings were held with the Chair, where updates on events have been shared and any other necessary matters discussed. Information from these small group meetings was disseminated as necessary in December and at the Board in March.

Key areas of progress –

1. Establishment of good communication and relations with the Events Team and shared discussions on early ways of monitoring information on types of events, usage and footfall.
2. Agreement on a new five point strategy (March 2018) which will guide Board members in the future.
3. Establishment of strong and growing networks for events, for example re-connecting and extending the social dancing network locally, regionally and nationally with the Pavilion Ballroom events. This has ensured that each of the dances to date has been attended by between 160 and 220 dancers, leading to the confidence to organize and disseminate a 2019 calendar.
4. Establishment of an appropriate calendar of meetings for the full Board and interim Chair / Events Team meetings. Board dates for 2018 – 19 will be: October 17<sup>th</sup> 2018, February 13<sup>th</sup> and June 19<sup>th</sup> in 2019, and then October 16<sup>th</sup> to start the next cycle. The October meeting of each year will also double as the AGM. Now working successfully the interim meetings will be held bi-monthly.

On frequent visits and from attendance at a large number of events Board members can report that all the staff at the Winter Gardens events have been very positive and helpful, Gareth leads by example here. The College management does not want to reveal finances connected to the Winter Gardens other than a statement that business plan goals are being met; therefore the Board cannot comment on the financial viability of the Pavilion / Events.

***Community Board Summary Reflections on Weston Winter Gardens Developments 2017 – 2018 (Abstract for College’s Annual Report November 2018)***

*The people of Weston and the region are indebted to Weston College for the outstanding renovation and refurbishment of the 1927 Winter Gardens. The closure from December 2014 to the autumn of 2017 enabled the College, with local enterprise partnership support to rescue a dilapidated seafront building, protecting and enhancing its future for the town and its people for years to come.*

*The Winter Gardens Pavilion has been operational since September 2017 as a multi-purpose venue, as planned, to include College, Private and Public events. Public (ie community access events, ticketed), have included regular sports events – boxing and wrestling, social dances, jobs fair, wedding fayres, pop concerts, parties, music concerts – choirs, brass bands, college events, conferences, local charities and sports bodies (scouts, hockey, athletics, bridge) events. Between September 2017 and December 2018 at least 110 events will have been hosted, 32 for the college, 41 private and 37 open to the public. An example of public access is seen in numbers attending events. Between September 2017 and May 2018 a total of 34,090 attended events in the Pavilion, with the largest number – 17,890 for the open public events.*

*The College is to be congratulated for this cautious but successful approach to finding ways to balance a developing business and enabling community access to a historic and iconic Weston building. The Winter Gardens Events Team are to be congratulated for their dedication to welcoming, preparing and hosting such diverse events in the Pavilion, and for their positive support for the specific needs of each one.*

*The Board has a responsibility to ‘oversee and assist with the effective use of the property for Community purposes’ and in this year there have been positive developments in exploring ways of sharing information with Board members on the range of events, processes and numbers enjoying the refurbished Pavilion, alongside inevitable challenges. With the information shared between the College and Events Team and the Board there is confidence that a range of Community events for all age groups are happening, that the Pavilion has functioned successfully with much public access, alongside College and Private functions. Despite there being no finances for a ‘grand opening’, the people of Weston know it is back in action and value the quality of work undertaken during the refurbishment. We are assured that financially the Business Plan aspirations for the space are on track. The Community Board looks forward to supporting the journey towards maximizing the full potential of this iconic space for all people to enjoy.*

## Examples of successful Winter Gardens strategies –

1. Utilizing the prime seafront location and juxtaposing the iconic Winter Gardens Pavilion with Florentines, Lasseters restaurant and the Academic wing has maximized the potential of the former building to enhance the lives of diverse groups in Weston and the region and people's experiences of attending events in the area.
2. The use of Eventbrite ticket agency for many events has eased the administrative burden and kept purchasers up to date with regular reminders and other similar events. It also helps with monitoring footfall.
3. Sea-front / Foyer entrance - Having a member of Staff in the Foyer area Mondays to Fridays 9 – 5pm has enabled access to the Winter Gardens seafront entrance to be maximized. People walk in, find a warm welcome and can learn about what is happening, or enjoy the recent refurbishment. Those unable to access tickets via the internet can buy them here. In addition, constant improvements to the foyer are being made, such as the addition of the larger and more permanent bar which will help in all events. The foyer attracts 'walk-in' visitors who are able to experience the beautiful space and a well-used Pavilion.

## Recommendations

1. Options for making use of the facilities as affordable as possible for community users should be explored and communicated. We believe there may be other sources of funding that could be accessed by community / third sector groups and users that could increase use of the Winter Gardens and it is entirely appropriate given the civic amenity aspect of the venue for potential users to be advised of these and encouraged to utilize them. The Community Board could advise on any grants / mechanisms to help with supporting, in particular, third sector / community group access to the Pavilion, as we recognise that this is an additional burden on a small employed Winter Gardens team.
2. More opportunities for bringing events in during the relatively underutilized weekdays should be focused on. We recognise that the Winter Gardens team is turning their attention to ways in which to boost weekday usage and would be happy to support this process, with Community Board members particularly interested and engaged in community and business user categories.
3. The Foyer space is attractive, especially during the holiday season. Its use could be enhanced to encourage more public access with more visibility of publicity, events leaflets, copies of the Winter Gardens history booklet, photographic exhibitions, teas. Again, some Board members would be interested in assisting with these initiatives.
4. Marketing of the Winter Gardens could be extended. The use of both website and hard-copy marketing materials have been extended since opening but we believe there are still groups who are relatively unaware of the Winter Gardens' full range of facilities. *The 90 year History of the Winter Gardens (David Burlison and John Crockford-Hawley) should be visible and 'out there'*. More use could be made of local media and community connections need to be encouraged, welcomed and celebrated now events are growing and more are needed.

5. Membership of the Community Board should be reviewed at AGMs every autumn and its / their contribution and viability should also be reviewed against the terms of reference, governance and strategic aims and function.

6. Board members should be better utilized to support the Winter Gardens, eg in the role of Advocates agreed in the strategy. Tools are needed, eg flyers, as discussed at a recent Board meeting, and more open discussions on specific ways in which this could happen and help.

7. The College / Pavilion Management could consider setting up a Friends Association, such as that which supports the Playhouse or the Princess Theatre Burnham and the Blakehay. Although a viability assessment would be required, its main purpose would be to use volunteers to alleviate staffing / finance pressures.