



Annual Report
of the
Weston Winter Gardens
Community Board
October 2019 - October 2020



Board Members (12) as at September 2020

Tansin Benn – tansinbenn@sky.com (Community) (Chair)

Nigel Briers (Community)

Chris Bull (Community)

Lorraine Bush - (NSC)

Sarah Codling - (NSC)

Paul Lucock (Community)

Gemma Langley – (WC / WGs Marketing)

Alan Peak (Town Council)

Ian Porter - (WC)

Peter Sloman - (WC)

Lauren Riley - (WC) (Administrative support)

Jon Walton (Community)



History – (Standing section)

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 4th 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’s work started and a Chairperson was elected (with consensus that 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 Terms of Reference, Governance documentation and Strategy, these are reviewed and updated as required.

Impact of COVID 19

While all sectors of the world's economy are affected by the coronavirus outbreak, the hotel, leisure, retail and travel industries have been hit particularly hard. Following a continued increase in the number of positive cases and the signaling of an imminent national lockdown, the Winter Gardens temporarily closed in March 2020.

At the time of writing this report, the ability for the Winter Gardens to reopen its doors to the programme of events and special occasions booked remains impossible in the current climate, with the ability of large numbers of guests mixing being unsafe or the limited number of guests allowed to conform with social distancing making events financially unsustainable and/or failing to meet their intended purpose. We will obviously reopen when the Government and HSE confirm it is safe to do so.

Whilst this position is continually reviewed, the College have progressed two pieces of work. Firstly they have transferred the use of the ballroom temporarily into teaching space, primarily for the use by performing arts where social distancing rules are even stricter. Secondly, recognizing the need to learn from activities since it took over control, especially in the area of economic viability and sustainability, the College has engaged with a market leader to evaluate processes and protocols with the aim of ensuring the Winter Gardens continues to meet its objectives of providing an outstanding community facility while ensuring a secure and sustainable operating model. Ongoing key objectives of this work are to:

- Identify a new *modus operandi* for the WGs, including the Pavilion Florentines and Lasseters, offering packages for the various areas of the business, and managing how the business engages with priorities of the college and the community;
- Establish ‘target’ markets for each part of the venue (Pavilion, Florentines, Lasseters);

- Further to the above, determine appropriate revised Management and Staffing Structure;
- Review and advise on all operational procedures, including procurement and HR;
- Complete Competitor Review for both Retail and Event Management and Catering;
- Review all Digital Marketing and Social Media;
- Establish appropriate Communications, Marketing and Social Media plans to attract `target` markets;
- Identify potential new income streams for the venue;
- Advise on implementation of COVID safe operating practices, including Health and Safety and Food safety requirements; and,
- Identify any potential investment requirements in business.

The results of this exercise are expected in October 2020, with the Community Board receiving a presentation thereafter. These timelines could of course be affected by further interim underlying COVID related restrictions.

Board Activities 2019- 2020

The Board and AGM were held on October 16th 2019, subsequently the Board has met only the once this year on January 15th. At this meeting ongoing events and improved marketing plans were proposed. Details of the continuing wide-range of events were shared and the fact that every weekend was booked throughout 2020. Mid-week activities remain a challenge but a summer tea dance programme was prepared to run March – Sept. The work of the Business Committee was reported but no positive progress had been made on the Friends Charity being established. Sadly the premises closed suddenly in March 2020 due to the impact of Covid-19 and government advice on entertainment venues. Interim meetings have not been held face to face but email exchanges have happened and continuous communications between the Chair and the College have continued during the pandemic.

The previous experience of staff changes and temporary positions, alongside Board member changes continued in the first half of the year making continuity and progress challenging. Changes included - re-allocation of Board administrative support, addition of Community members and fallout from election shifts in Council representation. This is something the Board has managed despite the current ‘hold’ position and intends to return to a revised dialogue with the College after the current review.

The work of the Board has hit a hiatus but we have been assured that the College’s aim is to return the pavilion to community use as soon as it is permitted, safe and viable. Board members do retain responsibility for overseeing a transition back to such usage. Meanwhile members need to continue supporting and reviewing, as necessary, any proposed changes in-line with the Legal Agreement and the governance and strategy of the Board.

Developments with North Somerset Council

The annual meeting with NSC did not take place in 2020 for reasons of COVID but will be pursued again when appropriate. We are fortunate to have strong representatives of NSC and WTC on the Board with knowledge of the value of the WGs to the community of Weston.

Friends of Weston Winter Gardens Working Group

The working group set up to pursue the establishment of a 'Friends of Weston Winter Gardens' Charity met to discuss protocols for gaining Charitable status and ways of establishing a ring-fenced funding source to support specific community events and projects at the Winter Gardens in the future. Prior to the last Board meeting in January 2020 it became clear that finding the right people and establishing such a group at this stage was problematic. For the moment, the WGs has other priorities to find a strategy that will rebuild community usage, at an appropriate pace, when the pandemic and government regulations allow.

Business Community Working Group

Chris Bull (Board member) with College colleagues has progressed this aspect of engagement between increasing Business / Winter gardens engagement. Business Breakfasts, Dinners and other events were increasing and word was spreading among this community across the south-west. Any strategy for further development needs to take into consideration any outcomes of the current review.

Recommendations

- 1. To work with the College and the outcomes of the current Review to re-establish confidence and use of the WGs by the community.**
- 2. To review Board business, strategy and action, in-line with Review outcomes.**
- 3. To keep the Friends Charity on the 'back-boiler' for the moment until the crisis is passed and greater stability has been established at the WGs.**
- 4. To continue the Business Community engagement strategy of cascading information on the success of the WGs for Business events.**
- 5. To support building on the Marketing ideas proposed in January and emerging from the Review in order to find better avenues ahead.**
- 6. To contribute to the reinstatement of the WGs as a prestigious sea-front location for the town that provides a range of community events. The focus must be on appropriate events that encourage a cross-section (eg in age, diversity and socio-economic situation) of the local and regional population to benefit from such a resource in the town.**