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Thousands back borough culture bid

Council leader on why Mayor of London should choose Waltham Forest as the capital's first 'Borough of Culture'

by Clare Coghill

Ever since Waltham Forest launched its bid to become the first ever London Borough of Culture this summer, we were confident we'd be mining a rich seam of talent.

However, we did not appreciate the true scope nor scale of what we would uncover over the following five months. The Mayor of London says he wants to select a borough that can "deliver outstanding cultural initiatives" and we have proved that's something Waltham Forest has in abundance.

We put culture at the heart of everything we do; we are culturally led and creatively driven and, as such, we believe we are front-runners to win. Since July, we have shone a light on the fantastic cultural programmes taking place in the borough – with 150 cultural highlights demonstrating the rich tapestry of opportunities Waltham Forest offers. Culture is thriving; be it in on our streets, in art and dance studios, or in our booming boutiques.

But what makes much of our culture exceptional is the way

it actively engages and involves the community. As well as council-run events such as our hugely popular Walthamstow Garden Party, fireworks night, and Mela events, numerous community-run programmes enrich and energise local people.

That community focus is perhaps best personified by our 20 'Cultural Stars'. These are incredible individuals who go that extra mile to enthuse local people. They include the husband-and-wife team putting on community plays, a group of friends working together to rejuvenate their local area, and the bookshop owners transforming their shop into a community hub.

Over and over again, we have seen culture has the biggest impact on a community when it comes from within that community. Our Cultural Stars have shown they can break down barriers, bring people of all backgrounds together, prevent loneliness, and above all, enhance our lives.

That is what we have already but we know we could do more because it's not just our culture that comes from the community – it's support for our bid. More than 11,000 people have signed up and there is barely a street in



Waltham Forest Council leader Clare Coghill (centre) and other councillors show their support for the Borough of Culture bid

the borough where you won't find at least one 'Back the Bid' sign. It has been incredible to see the whole community come together and we are hugely grateful for your support.

Whether we win or lose, rest assured Waltham Forest will continue to put on a programme of world-class cultural events, and

members of our community will still go above and beyond to serve people living here.

That said, £1million of additional funding would help put Waltham Forest firmly on the map and we could look forward to welcoming an influx of new visitors to boost our local economy. Most importantly, we could put on a once-

in-a-lifetime cultural programme unlike anything we have ever seen here, offering an even greater range of cultural activities to be enjoyed by everyone.

We are proud of what's already on offer in Waltham Forest, but we are even more excited about what we could achieve as London's first Borough of Culture.

A cool solution to food waste

Diana Korchien from Transition Leytonstone introduces a new project aiming to cut waste and reduce poverty

When I came to Leytonstone 30 years ago, homelessness and hunger were a largely invisible problem. But recently street sleepers huddling in doorways have become a common sight, and Leytonstone Food Bank has been operating in top gear.

Our choice is stark; we either ignore the problem, or try to find a solution. With £13billion of food thrown away each year by British households and a further £3billion wasted by restaurants and shops, my local sustainability group Transition Leytonstone decided to take action.

Last year we started running a popular monthly stall stocked with out-of-date food supplied by the Best

Before Project, which aims to save food in the gap between 'sell by' and 'use by' dates from being discarded.

On its own the monthly stall – run on a pay-as-you-feel basis – was hardly going to solve the problems of food poverty and waste. What about fresh produce, baked goods, surplus sandwiches from cafés, and restaurant dishes being taken off tomorrow's menu? How could we get our hands on those? And how could we store them safely and offer them to those in need?

Our answer was Leytonstone Community Fridge, to be stocked with surplus food from local businesses and households and open to all. We had heard about the community fridge idea earlier this

year when sustainability charity Hubbub announced the world's first Community Fridge Network, an initiative to combat food waste. We were among the first to express an interest.

Hubbub had already successfully trialed a pilot in Swadlincote, Derbyshire. The pilot saw more than 9,000 items of food redistributed in seven months – an average of half-a-tonne of food saved each month!

Unfortunately, we were left frustrated when the network launched in July with the participation of two other London locations, Manor House and Old Street, as well as others in Milton Keynes and Northern Ireland. These fridges all had one thing in

common; they were safely situated inside community centres. Leytonstone's was totally different; a fully public-facing facility, sited outside the Café de Montmartre in Church Lane, near Leytonstone Underground Station.

We reasoned that the fridge would be very hard to ignore on such a well-trodden pedestrian route. But it also needed to be protected from the weather and from criminal damage. How were we going to find a designer prepared to work with us? This was when we really got lucky. Posting our predicament on a local residents' forum, we had a speedy response from local spatial designers Made With Volume. Sharing our values of sustainabil-

ity and offering their services for free, Made With Volume created a visually stunning solution. Transition Leytonstone would build it, Café de Montmartre would host it. After obtaining planning permission in November, we are now working hard to be ready to open for the new year!

We'd like to thank the Sainsbury's 'Waste Less, Save More' programme for their support, and Bosch for supplying our fridge and freezer.

Transition Leytonstone is seeking volunteers to help with the project.

Email info@transitionleytonstone.org.uk