Capital of Culture
Plea for views on failed Culture bid

BY STEVE SWINGLER

Investment and tourism windfall An inquiry into the failure could have been launched by a council scrutiny committee last month and its members are now anxious to hear the thoughts of men and women on the street.

Opinions

They want to find out if there are any lessons to be learned from the failure and what can be done differently when bidding for similar prestigious titles in the future.

Scrutiny committee chairman Councillor Ken Hardeman said: "We would love to hear the public's views in general, but there are also specific questions that if answered would greatly help."

The questions include:

- Were you surprised at Liverpool being chosen?
- Why do you think Birmingham was unsuccessful?
- Did you feel involved in the bidding process?
- How do you think we could increase Birmingham's chance of success in future bids?
- People should send their views to Councillor Ken Hardeman, The Scrutiny Office, Council House, 1 Victoria Square, B1 1BB or via ken.hardeman@birmingham.gov.uk.

City opens its inquest into lost campaign

An official investigation to discover why Birmingham failed to become European Capital of Culture has begun.

The City Council's leisure and arts scrutiny committee wants to examine the doomed campaign to win the coveted title, which cost almost £1 million to put together.

Committee chairman Ken Hardeman insisted he did not intend to "point a finger" at anyone but it was important to discover if Birmingham could have done better and whether any mistakes were made in compiling the bid.

The Government announced last week that it was announcing Liverpool, to become European Capital of Culture 2008, beating Birmingham and several other shortlisted UK cities.

Some city councillors and business leaders criticised the Birmingham campaign, claiming it was remote from ordinary people, while the decision to award the whole West Midlands region in the bid was described as a mistake by the chairman of the cabinet committee judging the project.

Councillor Ken Hardeman (Lab, Mosley Street) said Birmingham's failure to attract prestigious national projects was worrying.

He added: "It is not just that we failed with the regional bid. We seem to be failing with almost everything we have been trying to do.

"We didn't get the Olympic Games, the Millennium Dome or the National Football Centre."

The committee should be asking hard questions about why we are failing, he said.

Coun Hardeman said he believed there would be occasions in future when Birmingham would bid for national projects. It was important to learn lessons from the past.

He added: "I think we should have done better with the capital of culture bid. We were confident we had a bid that would top the list, but we failed to tell the story of Birmingham."

The committee will interview key players in the bidding process and hope to produce a report later in the year.

The decision to scrutinise the process had been resisted by Labour council bosses, although Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors are backing the inquiry.

Councillor John Thomas (Lab, Leafwood), leader of the city council, said after the capital of culture judges announced their decision that an investigation would serve no purpose.

"We will never find out why Birmingham was not selected or, indeed, why Liverpool was. It would be pointless to try to take a view on why we lost," he said.
Lessons to be Learnt from the Outcome of the European Capital of Culture Bid

By Paul Dale
Chief Reporter
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Birmingham’s campaign to become European Capital of Culture generated positive publicity worth £4 million for the city, it was claimed last night.

Even though the attempt failed, with Liverpool winning the coveted title, the national and international focus on Birmingham during the bidding process was almost as great as that generated by the G8 conference of world leaders held at the ICC in 1998, a senior Labour councillor insisted.

Ian Ward, Cabinet spokesman for leisure, sport and culture, said the culture campaign cost £5.2 million to put together, with the split between the council and the regional development agency Advantage West Midlands.

However, the money was well spent and helped deliver a lasting impact on the image of Birmingham in this country and abroad, Coun Ward (Lab, Small Heath) added.

He said: “It has been widely accepted that the bid process brought more positive publicity than any other single activity since 1998. If Birmingham had not put in the bid the city would not have been in the running for the title. The city would have been losing respect and the image of Birmingham would not have been damaged in the way that it was. The campaign was a great success and the outcome was a great disappointment.”

Comment, Page 8

Albert Bore, Page 9

Bore pointed out that the campaign included supportive statements issued by former American president Bill Clinton, a leader column in The Daily Telegraph and numerous articles in national newspapers and magazines.

Other benefits from the campaign included the publication of a comprehensive list of cultural organisations, festivals and events in the West Midlands, the first time such a database had been created.

Coun Ward said he would not be conducting an inquiry into why Birmingham did not win the culture title. The important thing now was to maximise the benefits of the work undertaken during the bidding process.

A large number of new initiatives were proposed and the council aimed to deliver many projects in the bid document, including a plan to develop collaboration between cultural organisations such as the Bibo, the Birmingham Royal Ballet, Birmingham museums and the Barber Institute.

It is hoped that new capital schemes that formed the backbone of the culture bid, including development of the Midland Arts Centre, the New Library of Birmingham and a city park at Eastside, will go ahead.

Coun Ward said meetings between the council and Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell indicated that National Lottery funding may be available to support initiatives.

Birmingham’s strategy to attract international cultural and sporting events would continue, he said.

The final of the World Snooker Championships, at the ICC on Sunday, was watched by a TV audience of a billion in China and the Far East.

B’ham Post 05/08/03

Vital bid questions yet to be answered

Birmingham entered the Capital of Culture contest with high hopes. The intention was never to come an honourable second. The city aimed to win, and was capable of doing so.

No other competitor could boast the range of high quality cultural institutions and events in Birmingham, from world class ballet to world-renowned street carnivals.

The result, which saw Liverpool named the champion, was a crushing disappointment.

Of course, no matter how convinced we may have been that Birmingham deserved to win, victory was never guaranteed.

And it makes sense to avoid self-pity and make the best of the result, whatever it may be.

But Birmingham Council’s “post mortem” into the contest makes depressing reading. It smacks of complacency.

The bid cost around £1.5 million from public funds. It also generated a substantial amount of media coverage for Birmingham, most of it positive.

It may well be that the value of this coverage exceeded the cost; but the truth is that there is no way of knowing.

The figure of £4.5 million suggested by the council is undoubtedly based on careful research but it can never be more than an informed estimate.

This attempt to bandy specific figures around appears to be a politically-motivated act of self-justification.

What helps the authority avoid some of the difficult questions which arose after the result was announced.

There is no doubt Birmingham was right to enter the competition, and did submit an impressive proposal. But it has been convincingly argued the city failed to engage most of its residents and rally them to the cause – in stark contrast to Liverpool.

Questions have also been raised about the decision to submit a “West Midlands” rather than a city bid.

Recent prestige projects such as Millennium Point also suggest that Birmingham may still be failing to recognise the importance of appealing architecture.

None of these issues has easy answers. But they should not be swept under with some assertions that the bid was a great success.
Lessons to be Learnt from the Outcome of the European Capital of Culture Bid

We need a wide debate on culture bid

The interest shown by Birmingham’s movers and shakers in a city council inquiry into the failed European Capital of Culture bid is impressive.

So here are some people to have their say on what went wrong, and how things might be better organized on a future occasion, that they volunteered to appear before a scrutiny committee without first being asked.

This is to be welcomed, for it is vital that as wide a cross section as possible contribute to the culture debate.

The scrutiny process, however, can only address its ultimate aim if it hears from all of those who were most closely associated with the bid.

The apparent failure of Stephen Hetherington, who compiled the bid, to reply to a scrutiny summons is not the snub it first appears. Mr Hetherington has assured The Birmingham Post that he has not received an invitation and, when the latter does reach him, he will consider its contents very carefully.

Hopefully, he will attend the committee and explain in detail his approach to the capital of culture bid. There is certainly no reason to imagine that he will not do so. The position of Dr John Hayes, former chief executive of Marketing Birmingham, is less clear. Dr Hayes, now working in Nottingham, has turned down a request to give evidence to the scrutiny committee, apparently on the grounds that he no longer has links to Birmingham.

We hope he will think again. It has been suggested that Marketing Birmingham’s input into the culture bid was not so great as it might have been, but only Dr Hayes can say for certain.

While it is important the scrutiny process does not turn into a witch hunt, there are severally a number of points to be answered. Was the culture bid really glove, secretive and removed from most Birmingham people?

A decision to ask members of the public for their views should cast valuable insight into the way the culture campaign was regarded away from the claustrophobic atmosphere of the Council House. If it transpires the people of Birmingham did not know what the bid stood for, it is hardly surprising that the culture judges chose Liverpool instead.
Lessons to be Learnt from the Outcome of the European Capital of Culture Bid

OFFICIALS behind Birmingham's failed bid for European Capital of Culture behaved in an "elitist, arrogant and secretive" way, a leading businessman claimed.

Andrew Sparrow, giving evidence to a council scrutiny committee, criticised the city council-led bid team for failing to capture the public imagination and refusing help and advice from the business sector.

Mr Sparrow, a director of the professional services lobby group Birmingham Forward and chairman of the Birmingham Press Club, said the business community became concerned about the bid's low profile.

MAIL REPORTER

Business leaders felt so strongly about the issue that, in December 2002, a letter was sent to council leader Sir Albert Bore expressing misgivings.

Failed

Mr Sparrow, who stressed he was speaking as an individual, told the committee: "The bid just wasn't being communicated well. No one understood the substance of the bid, or what it consisted of." "Concern was becoming great. People were asking why is this campaign not being raised?"

B'ham Evening Mail
15/10/03

Culture bid ignored key smaller groups

By Paul Dale
Chief reporter

One of Birmingham's best known areas was excluded from the city's bid to become European Capital of Culture, despiteootimes that the local area's contributions are not visible. He said the exclusion was particularly difficult to understand when the bid was supported by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

A campaign was recently launched to help business communities in the city's suburbs.

Dr Ian Feuer
The campaign's co-ordinator

"Much more time should have been spent looking at the wider scene and not just concentrating on the city's centres."

Dr Ian Feuer said he believed the city council bid had much greater potential than was realised and did not con- cern enough of Birmingham.

The city council bid should have been opened to the smaller organisations. There are a lot of them and some of them have international recognition.

Dr Ian Feuer
The campaign's co-ordinator

"We need to be cleverer and use more imagination in promoting our bid."

B'ham Post 16/10/03
Leaders 'wasted' £2.5m

CITY leaders have wasted £2.5 million in a flawed bid to win the coveted European Capital of Culture title for Birmingham, it has been claimed.

A scrutiny team has heard three days of evidence from businessmen and civic leaders who claim the campaign was doomed because it failed to recruit support among Brummies.

Instead, the bidding team, locked behind office doors in Brindleyplace:
- Enumsely rebuffed offers of help from local businesses, companies and arts organisations
- Drew up a bid spanning an area from Stratford to Ironbridge rather than concentrating on Birmingham.

Condemned

Central TV’s Ian Squires said he screamed a last minute ‘I’m backing Brums’ campaign featuring Jesper Carrol.

“We did it off our back,” he told councillors.

“Had we waited I have a fear nobody would have asked us.”

Neil Mayberry, of Birmingham Business Focus, explicated: “The bid team was looking to lobby London rather than getting people in Birmingham really enthused. Even many of Birmingham’s own MPs seem to be scared to go public.

“If it had all been handled differently I think we would have come out on top.”

Brummingham historian and broadcaster Carl Chinn condemned the way rules were changed to rob Birmingham of the National Stadium and the Millennium Dome.

“I feel we wasted our time,” he told councillors.

“The only way we should spend money on any further bids is if we have a cast iron guarantee of a level playing field - and I don’t think we shall ever get that.”

Scrubbing chairman Coun Ken Harding said there had been a repetitive theme running through the evidence.

“Nobody gave the people of the city any encouragement to join in,” he said.

B’ham Evening Mail
18/10/03
Culture bid ‘very weak’

By Paul Dale
Chief Reporter
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Birmingham’s bid to win the European Capital of Culture crown was underfunded and failed to win the full backing of city council officials and MPs, it was claimed yesterday.

Former deputy council leader Andy Howell, who led the political input into the bid team, said uncertainty about whether Birmingham should enter the competition in the first place led to a “hit and miss” campaign.

Giving evidence to a scrutiny committee, Mr Howell spoke of his frustration at what he said was the council’s failure to get behind the culture campaign. This was partly because the bid director, Stephen Hethertingon, and the chairman, Brian Woods-Scawen, believed the bid should be processed with minimum publicity.

Mr Howell said: “There was a strong view from the chairman, supported by the MPs, that this had to be a low-key approach. I don’t think you can embark on something like this without really going for it.”

Mr Howell said he was glad the culture title was awarded to Liverpool because its bid had “engaged with the people”. Birmingham, however, failed to gain any public support and even members of the bid team had little idea of the issues they were supposed to play.

He added: “Birmingham, and particularly the council, didn’t get behind it. I spent some time in Liverpool and everywhere you went you were aware of the fact that they were bidding.”

The bid team was frustrated that city council departments did not highlight the fact that they were trying to become European Capital of Culture.

Although the Birmingham bid cost more than £1.5 million to process, Mr Howell pointed out that Liverpool’s campaign was considerably more expensive.

“If we were really serious bidders we would have made a more realistic assessment of the financial requirements,” he added.

He was also critical of the council’s failure to emphasise the economic benefit that would flow to Birmingham and the West Midlands from a successful bid.

“I was asked to go through the final bid documentation and the thing that really stood out was a big section on the economic impact prepared by council officers, which was very weak.”

Chinn slates culture bid team

By Paul Dale

Birmingham’s bid to become European Capital of Culture was a ‘hit and miss’ approach, remote and almost totally ignored by the city’s grass-roots community leaders.

The allegations were levelled yesterday by Dr Carl Chinn, the Birmingham University academic.

He said executive members of the council refusal growing concern about the success of Birmingham’s bid.

He said: “The bid team, led by Stephen Hethertingon and Brian Woods-Scawen, adopted a “hit and miss” approach and failed to secure support from the community.”

Mr Chinn said that the bid was a ‘hit and miss’ approach, remote and almost totally ignored by the city’s grass-roots community leaders.

He said: “The bid team, led by Stephen Hethertingon and Brian Woods-Scawen, adopted a “hit and miss” approach and failed to secure support from the community.”

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Lessons to be Learnt from the Outcome of the European Capital of Culture Bid

Too late now for culture bid insight

After several weeks of scrutiny hearings into Birmingham’s European Capital of Culture bid, a depressing picture of disunity, poor organisation and ultimate failure is beginning to emerge.

Evidence given yesterday by Andy Howell, the former deputy leader of Birmingham City Council, mirrored previous contributions and also offered fresh food for thought.

Mr Howell is the latest among those closely involved with the bid to talk about tensions behind the scenes, needless secrecy, poor communications, the failure to engage the people of Birmingham and the unwillingness of the region’s MPs to embrace the campaign because they could not stand the thought of failure.

Add to that the apparent snubbing of the business community whose representatives were given the distinct impression that their input was not required, and it is hardly surprising that Birmingham did not land the culture crown.

As far as the city council is concerned, Mr Howell offered a fascinating insight into corporate inactivity.

After much soul-searching about whether Birmingham should bid in the first place, it was decided to enter the race. But if Mr Howell is to be believed, the decision did not attract the full support of senior council management and this lukewarm approach was reflected in the failure to embrace and promote a three-year culture campaign.

That there was a lack of joined-up thinking, which meant that civic, business and arts organisations were not moulded into one effective force, is undeniable and must be borne in mind should Birmingham bid again for high-profile projects.

Of course, if all those who are now criticising the arrangements had done so publicly a year or more ago it might have been possible to restructure the bid and get the campaign back on track. Sadly, they only speak now with the benefit of hindsight.
Lessons to be Learnt from the Outcome of the European Capital of Culture Bid

Judges ‘moved bid goalposts’

Birmingham Post

Admit defeat and move on

The scrutiny investigation into Birmingham’s failed European Capital of Culture bid has been a difficult, sometimes painful, but ultimately necessary exercise. It is right, in view of the large amount of public money spent on attempting to win the culture crown, that city council leaders should take a look at why the venture was unsuccessful and whether lessons could be learned in the event of a similar bid in the future.

However, after several weeks of hearings, enough is enough. As Aston Villa chairman Doug Ellis pointed out yesterday, the capital of culture saga is history. It is time to move on.

The scrutiny committee must have listened to more than enough evidence by now to come to a conclusion, although it is difficult to imagine that members will be able to deduce any clear-cut reasons why the bid did not succeed.

On a technical basis, Birmingham’s bid was the best and most comprehensive of any of the competing cities. Stephen Hethersett, who wrote the document, did all that was asked of him and has been congratulated by the scrutiny team for the quality of the submission sent to the Government.

The bigger questions remain unanswered. Should Birmingham have engaged in a hearts and minds publicity campaign? Was it wise to include the whole of the West Midlands in the bid? Was the Birmingham business community properly engaged in the process? Should the city council have taken more of a lead? Was Liverpool successful because it put forward a case for economic regeneration off the back of the culture title?

Underlying all of that is the long-held suspicion that Birmingham’s chances of progress are routinely demolished by a London-centric Government. Failure to win the Millennium Dome, the National Stadium and, now, the Capital of Culture weighs heavily in this city. Too much scrutiny and navel-gazing, however, can be debilitating and ultimately self-defeating. Other culture contenders, notably Newcastle-Gateshead, Bristol and Oxford, decided against dwelling on the past and are intent on using the experience of the past three years to strengthen their cultural infrastructure.

Birmingham should admit defeat, accept that the reasons for defeat will probably never be known, and move on.