



CASE STUDY: Brightlingsea Free Festival



Cultural Organisation Group:

Brightlingsea Free Music Festival

Sector: Festival / Community Arts

Key groups targeted by this project: All

Author: Culture team, Essex County Council

Delivery period of project:

August 2022



INTRODUCTION

Brightlingsea Free Music Festival is a two-day open-air event held on Hurst Green, Brightlingsea, and is family friendly and open to all age groups. The festival features live music from a wide range of genres supported by professional and high-quality stage and sound equipment and engineers.

The 2022 festival saw 15 musical acts take part, ranging from a local choir and shanty singers to a rock 'n roll band fresh from a US tour.

THE STORY OF THE BRIGHTLINGSEA FREE MUSIC FESTIVAL

The Brightlingsea Free Music Festival was established in 2001 with the aim of providing a platform for new and established bands from across the mainstream spectrum of popular music.

Apart from 2020, due to Covid-19 restrictions, it has been held every year since over the first weekend in August.

The 2022 festival - which was the twenty-first time the event had been held - was recognised for its achievements at the Pride of Tendring Awards.

The aim of the 2022 Festival was to deliver a high-quality music festival and maintain, as well as build, on the 6,000 plus visitors the event attracts each year.

THE “CHALLENGE” OR “OPPORTUNITY”

After the 2021 festival, several longstanding committee members decided they could no longer commit their time, and at that point a decision was made not to have any more festivals.

However, the few remaining committee members felt the festival had become an important part of the Brightlingsea culture and should carry on, especially at a time when communities were emerging from the pandemic restrictions and required the mental boost that a festival can bring.

Therefore, the festival managed to recruit new members to the committee who brought fresh enthusiasm and ideas. However, funds were particularly low, so the festival needed to secure funding and sponsorship.

After approaching local authorities and businesses funding was secured, enabling the delivery of the festival. The challenge was then to deliver a high-quality music festival that the Brightlingsea community could be proud of.

The festival also wanted the project to help improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of all participants, volunteers, and audience members, especially following the issues of social isolation and poverty resulting from the recent pandemic.

WHY THE GROUP OR PRACTITIONER CHOSE TO PARTNER WITH ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL (ECC)

The festival had been fortunate enough to have had funding and support from ECC during previous projects and have always found ECC very supportive and informative, throughout both the application process and project management.

HOW THE ECC CULTURE TEAM RESPONDED

The Brightlingsea Free Music Festival application to the Arts and Cultural Fund clearly outlined the Essex residents it aimed to engage with via an exciting programme.

The ECC Culture team has supported the project via regular catch up's, offering assistance wherever needed in terms of marketing, PR, and general project advice.

THE RESULTS

The festival delivered a two-day, free entry open air music festival primarily for the residents of Brightlingsea and the local area. The festival featured 15 bands and/or artists, 10 food and drink stalls, a licensed bar, a tea tent run by the local Foodbank, first aid provision and site security.

This year's festival also saw the highest ever audience attendance, with 3,500 maximum and 7,000 to 8,000 overall attending, and the feedback received found that 2022 was not only one of the best festivals in the town's twenty-one-year history, but it gave a sense of pride and community spirit back to the people of Brightlingsea.

Also, the festival made a financial profit for the first time in several years, thereby enabling planning for 2023.

A particular success was that the festival decided to directly run its own beer tent rather than book a third party to manage it, and whilst this meant a lot of extra work and volunteers, it proved to be a great success.

GETTING INVOLVED

Here at Essex County Council, we are passionate about arts and culture and keen to support projects across the county. If you have an idea you would like to share with us, take a look at the Arts and Cultural Fund page on the Explore Essex website: www.explore-essex.com/culture/arts-culture-fund and get in touch via email: culture@essex.gov.uk

TESTIMONIALS

Bob Walsh, Income Generation Officer, said: "I can honestly say we had no negative feedback whatsoever. We had several new members on our committee - three previous longstanding members having resigned following years of stalwart service - which brought a freshness and enthusiasm to our approach.

"The best feedback was from the Brightlingsea Mayor, Mick Barry, who was previously a long-standing committee member and he said it was the best festival he had been to and was particularly impressed with the level of organisation."