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COMMERCIAL PROPERTY, LAND & REGENERATION CONSULTANTS

### **UK City of Culture – A Point of View**

It was the renowned Aneurin Bevan who said: 'the biggest hurdle we face is the poverty of our imagination'.

In that context, am I the only one to be astonished that Cardiff City Council, who administers the capital city of Wales {the seat of a devolved government}, is not going to participate in the UK City of Culture Competition?

Surely, this is 'poverty of imagination' and it would appear that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport agree with me: "We are particularly surprised because Cardiff came forward to bid for European Capital of Culture in 2008."

The current position is that the deadline for outline bids is 16<sup>th</sup> October 2009 with initial bids required by 11<sup>th</sup> December. Locations in the running are: Aberdeen, Barnsley, Belfast, Birmingham, Bradford, Brighton & Hove, Carlisle, Chester, Chichester, Chorley Council, City of Bath, Cornwall, Durham, Derby, Derry City, Gloucester & Cheltenham, Hull, Ipswich & Haven Gateway, Leicester City, Manchester, Norwich, Oxford, Pennine Lancashire, Reading, Sheffield, 'The Countryside', Urban South Hampshire and Wakefield. But where is Cardiff??

The opportunity to compete in the UK City of Culture comes at a time when the Ashes Test has just been hosted at Sophia Gardens in Cardiff and was a tremendous success. The reason why is that in the face of adversity, Paul Russell's team was prepared to demonstrate leadership and guile in pulling off an incredible – dare I say - extraordinary feat. He suggests 3 key reasons for the success:

- Planning (to the power of 10) – very quickly it was decided that a **team Wales** approach was the best way forward (comprising WAG; CCC; Visit Wales; Chamber of Commerce; Cardiff Hoteliers; Local Government Association).
- The team (e.g. having the best grounds man)
- A determination to succeed.

According to Mr Russell, The Ashes Test in Cardiff led to an extra 'spend' in Cardiff of £20M and an extra 'spend' in Wales per se of £120M. Glamorgan CC had a turnover of £5.8M and a profit of approx £1.0M plus the trading profit.

As a regeneration practitioner, I look at this in terms of outputs (e.g. actual 'spend') and outcomes (E.g. putting Cardiff & Wales on the map). The inaugural test and the first International Test Cricket match to be held in Cardiff was a resounding success – a fantastic example of Sport and Regeneration working hand in glove. Indeed, we can also point to other sport related successes – now and yet to come: the Millennium Stadium, the new dual purpose Cardiff Stadium developed by PMG Developments, the Liberty Stadium in Swansea and next year's Ryder Cup at the Celtic Manor, Newport.

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But sport is not the only game in Town. Culture is in the blood of the Welsh psyche and participation in the City of Culture competition is an opportunity that must not be thrown away for financial expediency: we cannot afford to participate in this competition. Perhaps the Leader of the Council should be encouraged to read the seminal book – The Creative City – in which Charles Landry recognises that it is one thing 'to speak of people in the creative city as the most valued asset', but (quoting from Rose Moss-Kantar from a speech at the Commerce Labour Department summit on the Future of the Workplace, Washington, 1993) 'accounting systems have not caught up with the shift that is needed. They have not moved from measuring only the use of financial capital to measuring the building of human capital. Within corporations financial measures can swamp other measures of performance and value and claim disproportionate time and attention'.

Rather than saying **I can't** (poverty of imagination), why not turn this round and say: **Why Can't I??** (Anecdotally, when I asked a client (working in the creative industries) what regeneration meant to him, he said imagination. Is this a happy co-incidence??

Actually, I think Oscar Wilde was 'spot on' when he said: "A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything but the value of nothing." Are accountants cynics or are cynics accountants???

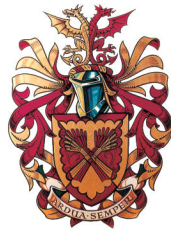
### **So what are the potential benefits and why should Cardiff participate??**

Let's look at Liverpool:

- Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture boosted the regional economy by £800m, attracting millions of new visitors to the city. The Liverpool Culture Company said the city welcomed 3.5 million first time visitors in 2008, representing a quarter of all tourists this year. Culture bosses said 70% of people in Liverpool visited a museum or gallery - above the national average of 59%.
- Research found 75% of new visitors to Liverpool were influenced by the fact it was culture capital for the year.
- Impacts 08 were a joint project between the University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Mores University. It found that many of the landmark Capital of Culture events brought in millions of pounds to the city's economy. The Tall Ships event, held in July, brought in £8.2m, and the Liverpool Sound Paul McCartney concert brought in £5m. Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Howard Newby, said: "The University has played a major role in the city's cultural programme throughout 2008 and we will continue to support the city in its development."

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- He added: "Liverpool's year as Capital of Culture generated great energy and excitement in and around the city and we hope this will be sustained as we look forward to 2009."

Let's look at Glasgow:

**Glasgow (1990)**

- 40% increase in theatre, museum and gallery visitors. Almost all residents said it improved city's public image. 61% said it made Glasgow a better place to live - 1991 Glasgow City Council report
- Glasgow is the third most popular tourist destination in the UK for overseas visitors behind London and Edinburgh, according to tourist board figures.
- Boost to tourism and economic regeneration remains the same.
- The 1990 success marked the next stage of the city's transformation
- But the title from the European Commission provided a further catalyst for regeneration.
- The win gave the city a new profile. Attention was paid to Glasgow's many museums, art galleries and three universities.
- Coming to a vibrant attractive cultural city – adding to ongoing regeneration
- When Glasgow put in its bid in 1983 visitors numbered tens of thousands. It now attracts millions of tourists a year (4M+). It also boasts it is Europe's fastest-growing conference destination.
- The tourist board increased annual conventions sales by more than 200%, from £15.3m in 1997/98 to £51.1m in 2001/02.

Why should Cardiff compete?

- I have a straight forward view. With due deference to Swansea and Newport, it is my opinion that a capital city is the best conduit for spreading benefits. The concepts of the creative city can benefit the hinterland (the capital region) as well as the nation. I like Phil Redmond's Vision Statement about the City of Culture: 'one of the overriding principles of the City of Culture programme must be to celebrate not just the shared lifestyles but the diverse interpretations of arts and literature which make up the mosaic that is the UK'. But as he admits, perhaps Huxley's is the best – it speaks to the totality that is Wales.

*Culture is like the sum of special knowledge that accumulates in any large united family and is the common property of all its members.*

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**Aldous Huxley**

- Cardiff is home to Wales's principal performing arts organisations and without significant expenditure could provide a joined up approach in making the bid. Surely, there is already a lot of infrastructure in place with the likes of the Millennium Centre, the Sherman (to be refurbished), Chapter (nearing the end of a refurbishment project), the extension to the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (which will provide creative facilities in the heart of the city, greatly expanding their range of performances, community activities and creative industries at home and abroad)
- In a previous essay in your paper, Dr Kevin Higgins British Council Wales (BCW) Director stated that '.....Wales needs the world more than the world needs Wales ... especially if you are young'. BCW take pride in their relationship with the ACW and Wales Arts International in supporting hundreds of creative international collaborations for young, established and emerging artists. Surely, winning the UK City of Culture would help BCW in facilitating even greater cross cultural relations / exposure and international experiences for young people, thereby helping in the global challenge and future economic development.
- A recent report by The Work Foundation suggests that in these recessionary times, Cities need to be innovative and imaginary in sustaining economic performance. An aspirational bid for Cardiff to compete for UK City of Culture could be the conduit for the rest of Wales, including the rich diversity of cultural organisations across the length and breadth of Wales.
- Competing in and winning the UK City of Culture has the potential to be hugely beneficial to Wales and Cardiff. An American Urban Studies Theorist, Richard Florida expresses the theory {evidenced by Manchester according to a recent NESTA report} that if you attract enough smart people to a city, they will build your economy for you. Surely, this is what is required: a thriving, vibrant city which is going places because of creative energy.

### **The Way Forward**

- If Cardiff and Wales can succeed in securing the first Ashes Test, why can't it succeed in securing the UK City of Culture?
- Nigel Howells (who holds the culture portfolio in Cardiff Council's executive) is 'mindful of the significant financial challenges facing the council over the next few years'. The Leader Berman contemplates how ..... 'we might cope with an even lesser increase in funding in the new year.....'.

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- I suggest that they are enjoined to think creatively and laterally. A report by PWC - Core Cities & PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (2008) Unlocking City Growth: Interim Findings on New Funding Mechanisms – suggests that National Government should ‘allow local authorities and sub regional partnerships, such as city regions, to have greater freedom and flexibilities in relation to funding, enabling them to respond to local circumstances’. Perhaps this is an opportunity for WAG and Cardiff Council to show its creative muscle by joining-up the aspirations of their respective regeneration, economic development and culture portfolios and seeking support from the private sector: a public / private partnership.
- If – as they say – push comes to shove and Cardiff feels that it cannot compete, then, assuming that Newport is focussed (quite rightly) on the Ryder Cup, what about a collaborative WAG assisted bid between Cardiff and Swansea City Councils acting as a conduit for participation from other parts of Wales? Now there’s a thought.
- In order to have a sporting chance, we must compete otherwise this will be a missed opportunity for the City Region and Wales. A thriving city region means a thriving Wales – a team Wales approach must be the way forward.

**Robert Chapman**

**6<sup>th</sup> October 2009**

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