

Doncaster Pride - Annual General Meeting 2021

Chair Persons Report

Twelve months ago at the 2020 AGM we had hope and optimism for a return to 'normal' in 2021 following the Digital Pride we had delivered in 2020. How soon were our hopes and plans shattered again as we headed into the pre Christmas lockdown and took the heartbreaking decision in January of this year to once again postpone plans for Pride.

As a team cancelling once was bad enough but twice has hit us all hard and although we have continued to meet regularly there's something 'missing' and we talk plans but we do little to put them into action.

Once thing I was adamant about – and the team agreed - we wouldn't have another digital event in 2021, but then what would we do?

We knew August might be 'fine' we knew also that it might not, but what we were certain of was that we wouldn't risk the organisation and its future taking financial gambles with the 2021 event. We could have paid deposits, and lost them, we could have made commitments, and cancelled them, but ultimately the survival of Doncaster Pride was the first, and at that time ONLY priority.

As we emerged again from winter lockdown into spring hope thoughts turned to 'had we been hasty, should we have gone ahead…' but the one thing was certain – and that was the uncertainty of the event world and even as we approached June, July and August this uncertainty was still there and hasn't yet fully gone away.

So… no digital pride and no real pride so what would we do…? We felt that we needed to do something and from the conversations we came up with the seeds of a plan… small prides, a series of them. A chance for people to come together in the permitted way. Small events, across town that would give the opportunity for people to get together, to celebrate, to have fun, to reconnect and to do SOMETHING!

Funds are always our biggest challenge, so seeing the email from Doncaster Voluntary and Community Fund offering Grants to try and reconnect groups and people land in my inbox was the start.

An application for the maximum £5k was approved in no time and Pride 2021 was ON!

The bid stated 8 venues would be chosen to host mini prides and that it would help up to 500 people over the day to connect… so we smashed that then!

We made the decision to go out to the pubs, clubs, venues and businesses of Doncaster with a plea to help us deliver the mini Prides we'd boldly stated in the grant application that we could deliver. The 8 venues were chosen in less than a two hours and the nominations and requests to be a part of the event just kept coming.

Those of you that know me know I've always said seeing the flag on the Mansion House for the first time was the most emotional personal experience for me in my now 15 year Doncaster Pride journey… well the response to the plea for business support in 2021 will now go down as the second.

Doncaster stood up for the LGBT Community and for Doncaster Pride. They said in their droves… we can do this for you…. And all I could do was remember all those years that I couldn't get people to take calls or return emails let alone fly a rainbow or a trans flag and open their venue to the community! Places you would never dream of… cafes, pubs, the new Library, restaurants, offices, shopping centres… and not just in the town centre but borough wide, and they just kept coming.

I've said on the record that this felt like Doncaster opening their arms and giving the community a big warm hug and saying… its ok, we got this for you this year!

On the day still more 'moments' - as we came in to town the first place we passed was The Salutation – complete with rainbow flag… they werent on the list, but that list went out of the window as the number of places joining in just kep growing – it was the most incredible day.

We have ARRIVED…(without Trevor, who thanks to me had Covid… I missed him being beside me on the day and sharing the special moment we usually share) We have arrived - we had the visibility I've fought for for years and the acknowledgement and acceptance we've all strived to achieve.

The day was immense. Miss Penny did the 8 official venues and we supplied acts and support, as well as marketing for alll the rest of the activities taking place.

Over 40 venues… FORTY on a day that I will never, ever forget.

Cath will also report in the Finance report the value of the day – we had a better response to the charitible collections this day than we've ever had at Pride… and that, I'm afraid regular Pride goers means you really need to value your FREE pride when it returns in 2022 and you need to dig deep!

The legacy of 'town pride' is huge… the relationships made, the businesses welcomed into the Doncaster Pride family many and this relationship MUST continue. We have learned many things from Covid and one is that you value those who stand by you when you need it.

So it gives me the great pleasure to announce that Doncaster Pride 2022 will actually now have TWO Weekend events as we evolve into a FESTIVAL.

July 30th will be 'town pride' and 6th August will see the return of the main event – the week between will be filled with as much as we and the huge big rainbow family of Doncaster can cram into it.

How could we not repeat 'town pride' ? after the support shown to us as a community by the businesses of Doncaster – and farther afield too… how can we not do this all again. So we will be looking for venues and businesses to support Doncaster Pride and we will commit to drawing all this together into a single programme so that the town can once again have it's day and we can support the town and the businesses that supported us.

To name a few… the 8 official venues

The Olde Castle, The Library, The Gallery, The Wool Market, The Queen, Social, The Hallcross, the Staff of Life. Then Wow Burger – who created a Rainbow Shake and £1 from every one sold came to Pride. Then Glass Strawberry who did amazing things and still do to raise funds. Drag storytime in the new Children's Library went down a storm, the Danum Hotel flying our Pride Lion Flag for the whole summer on the front of the Hotel. The Little Theatre, Cast, The Savoy, Bake Battle and Roll the game café had quizzes… so, so many more and then I got the email… with the photos… Meadowhall had lit the entire centre in rainbow colours for us… for Doncaster, in support of the communtiy!

Huge thanks as always to Doncaster Council for putting up the flags again, even though we had no Pride and no parade.

So what's in store for the Main Event… well we have more huge plans. Not one but two or three (at least) stages and a much more inclusive and diverse offer. The usual market will be there, with a family area, a childrens space and a space for more quiet reflection and participation for those less happy in the crowds. We're looking at a whole host of new features and here's another BIG bit of news.

Doncaster Pride is committing itself to going GREEN. We are looking to implement a series of measures that will be more environmentally friendly and will help us to move over a number of years to a position as close as we can be to Carbon neutral.

We're looking at alternative power sources, recycling and only contracting with suppliers who have the same ethos as us and do all they can to reduce their waste themselves… so no more single use plastics and no more non recyclable food cartons… This is a HUGE undertaking but at this stage we commit to making Doncaster Pride more environmentally aware and to do our bit for future generations. So yes, you heard it here first Doncaster Pride goes Green!

Once again, thank you to the entire team behind Pride, the committee that give their time and expertise to this event is second to none.

We have a huge job ahead of us… but Doncaster Pride has never stepped back from a challenge!

Jenny

22/11/21