



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Request for use of City Hall grounds by ArtsEkta for a Hindu Festival of Navratri event
Date:	21 st November 2014
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects, Ext: 6217
Contact Officer:	George Wright, Head of Facilities Management Ext: 5206

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	A request has been received by ArtEkta to have a cultural event celebrating the Hindu festival of Navaratri (meaning nine nights) in the grounds of the City Hall on the 24th October 2015 .
1.2	Members will be aware that the Committee has delegated authority for routine requests for the use of the City Hall grounds to the Director of Property & Projects on the basis of an agreed set of criteria. However it was recognised that there would still be occasions when the nature, scale and/or scope of the request means that it is appropriate to place the matter directly before the Committee. This request from ArtEkta below falls into this category, and the direction of the Committee is therefore sought.
1.3	Navratri is the principal cultural festival celebrated by the Indian community at home and abroad. The proposed event in the City Hall grounds will involve up to 800 cross community participants from around Northern Ireland. It is being held in Belfast for the first time and will be the only Navratri festival taking place in Europe during 2015. Up to 14,000 people are expected to attend the event with visitors coming from all parts of the United Kingdom and further afield.
1.4	In February 2014, the Development Committee awarded ArtsEkta funding of £95,000 through the Council's Creative and Cultural Belfast Fund. When making their application for support for the Navratri festival, ArtsEkta indicated the City Hall grounds would be the preferred location for the event.
1.5	The stated purpose of the Creative and Cultural Belfast Fund is 'to challenge social exclusion by providing everyone in Belfast with the opportunity to experience bold, ambitious, high-quality arts and heritage'. Projects must be cross-community, cross-city, delivered in partnership between cultural and community organisations and benefit hard-to-reach areas and communities.

1.5	<p>The event at the City Hall takes place in the evening and follows a torchlight procession from Custom House Square. The procession will include music performers, dancers and large puppet structures. Although the overall event itself on the day will only last an hour at the City Hall there is a significant lead in time required for set ups, dress rehearsals etc.</p>
1.6	<p>The set-ups for the event, which involves a couple of large structural lighting towers and a catwalk stretching the length of the City Hall's front façade, will need to be built a few days prior to the event. Access to the public, although restricted, will still be available during the set up and de-rigging periods.</p>
1.7	<p>The main event will take place on the catwalk and involves a number of performers. Colour is a big part of the festival and special illuminations on the façade of the City Hall will be augmented by additional lighting. It is proposed that the performance will conclude with a pyrotechnic show, although the organisers are aware this has to be low level in nature.</p>
1.8	<p>The event which is free to the public is being organised by Walk the Plank, a professional outdoor arts event management company. The usual indemnities, insurances and obligations would be required from the organisers, supplemented by a detailed event management plan including full risk assessments for the entire event.</p> <p>Although the event is taking place in the grounds the organisers have asked for use of a couple of areas within the City Hall for changing. They have also asked for permission to use one of the function rooms in the event of a reception being organised for invited guests including Members.</p>

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>The event in the City Hall grounds which follows a torchlight procession from Custom House Square will take place between 7.30pm and 8.30pm on the 24th October 2015. Due to the catwalk and lighting tower requirements, set ups will commence up to 5 days before the event itself although public access to the grounds and the City Hall will still be maintained.</p>
2.2	<p>Dress rehearsals will be required before the event however disruptions involving sound checks etc. will be kept to a minimum and will not impinge on other events taking place inside the City Hall.</p>
2.3	<p>The pyrotechnic show at the end of the catwalk show will be discussed in detail and the organisers are aware of the limitations which are in place with regard to the type of fireworks etc. which can be used.</p>
2.4	<p>It is anticipated up to 14,000 will attend the free event. In addition to the grounds spectators will also be allowed to view the event by the use of large screens placed in Donegal Square North.</p>
2.5	<p>The event will be planned and arranged by Walk the Plank. They have successfully delivered a number of large events including the Belfast Mela in Botanic Gardens, Diwali, Samhain, the Festival of Colours and the Lord Mayor's Parade in 2011.</p>
2.6	<p>A robust and detailed event management plan will be in place including the provision of risk assessments and health and safety, crisis and continuity plans etc. Full consultation will take place with Belfast City Council's Health & Safety and Building Control and Licensing staff. Discussions will also take place and the necessary permissions will be in place from the PSNI, and the Parades Commission.</p>

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p><u>Financial</u> There will be no direct financial implications, other than allowing connection to the building's electrical infrastructure and the associated utility costs (which would be minimal). There will be no Security-related costs as the organisers will be providing all security/stewarding staff needed in the grounds.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Human Resources</u> The organisers will be providing all of their own catwalk builds and other infrastructures using their own contractors and there will therefore be no HR implications.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Assets</u> Given the scale & scope of the event and the potential for damage to statues etc in the grounds, a detailed event management plan will be required. However it is not anticipated that any significant risk to BCC assets is posed by this event. Full Public Liability insurance will also be provided prior to the event.</p> <p>Furthermore while every effort will be made to accommodate this event in terms of City Hall rooms the organisers will be made aware that potential availability of a particular room may be subject to change as other projects and decanting exercises get underway in 2015/16.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
4.1	The Creative and Cultural Belfast Fund is a project under the Council's Cultural Framework for Belfast 2012–15, which is the subject of a full Equality Impact Assessment.

5	Recommendations
5.1	The Committee is asked to approve the request to have a cultural event celebrating the Hindu festival of Navratri in the City Hall grounds on the 24 th October 2015 (with set up and take down for a number of days on either side) and to have use of one of a number of rooms in the City Hall during the event.

6	Decision Tracking
Not applicable	

7	Key to Abbreviations
None	

8	Documents Attached
N/A	