

Smokers on parade at festival

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COUNCIL bosses and Manchester International Festival organisers are at loggerheads after it emerged smokers and boy racers could take centre stage of the launch parade.

Procession, which kick-starts next month's festival, is the brainchild of Turner Prize winning artist Jeremy Deller. He was commissioned to showcase the city, its history, traditions and characters.

The carnival-style parade, which is partly paid for by taxpayer-funded AGMA (the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities), will feature smokers and boy racers - issues the council has campaigned against.

Council bosses are now calling for the smoking element to be withdrawn if the parade is to go ahead.

Coun Pat Karney, NHS Director of Smoke Free Greater Manchester, said: "I find this shocking and unbelievably irresponsible. There will be thousands of children and young people watching this parade. How we can use public money to promote smoking in this way is beyond belief. It is at odds with the policies of Manchester City Council and the NHS in Greater Manchester.

"Maybe the artist would like to parade 14 coffins through the streets which is the sum total of people who die from smoking-related illness every day in Greater Manchester."

It is understood Manchester's communities and neighbourhoods committee unanimously passed a resolution on Tuesday condemning the smoking element as 'an appalling waste of taxpayers' money'. Promoters are thought to have advertised in tobacconists and on the internet for smokers to join the parade.

The event is described by London-born Deller as a 'free and uniquely Mancunian procession'.

Other floats include The Alternative Project - which invites 'the young people who inhabit the area outside Urbis' to take part; a musical tribute to Oldham's first fish and chip shop entitled Adoration of the Chip; and the debut of a new piece of music played through the sound systems of modified boy racer-style cars.

Procession organisers are also calling on mill workers, rose queens, ramblers, Happy Mondays fans and descendants of people involved in the 1819 Peterloo Massacre to join in.

It will last one hour and travel down Deansgate, from Liverpool Road to Manchester Cathedral, on July 5 - the opening weekend of the two-and-a-half week arts extravaganza which is expected to cost around £9.6m.

Deller has said he believes he knows Manchester through its music and has visited the area to recruit scouts, mill workers, and the goths and emos that congregate outside Urbis to join his parade.

He said it would pay homage to 'northern social surrealism'.

The Stalybridge Brass Band, 3rd Davyhulme Scout and Guide marching band and Shree Swaminarayan Gada Pipe Band from Bolton will also take part as well as the region's football mascots.

Festival director Alex Poots defended Deller's work. He said: "MIF is an artist-led festival and

sometimes artists do raise challenging questions. Jeremy Deller is an internationally-acclaimed artist making significant work with groups across Greater Manchester.

"The idea behind Procession is to bring in to focus different areas of the local community, including some groups that aren't usually represented in civic parades.

"It's also about public space; who uses it and how. Smoking outdoors isn't illegal and Procession does not promote smoking - but it does encompass a fantastically wide range of groups and communities, all selected by the artist."

Deller, who studied at London's Courtauld Institute of Art, won the Turner Prize in 2004 for his installation Memory Bucket (2003), a documentary about Crawford, Texas, the hometown of George W Bush and the siege in nearby Waco.