



Outside Broadcast of the Year entry: *The Marlow Christmas Drive-In*

The community came together to put on some free feel-good events complying with the Covid social distancing rules

- After months of event after event being called off, community groups in Marlow decided to stop the town's Christmas celebrations from being completely cancelled by running several days of free drive-in events.
- With no time to sort out specialist drive-in audio equipment, Marlow FM broadcast all the events each day so that people in their cars could tune in on FM radio to hear the sound from the stage and the screen.
- We solved the technical challenge of syncing the picture on the big screen with the sound in people's cars.
- The project was a success, but was sadly cut short after four days as we went into the tier 4 restrictions.



Refusing to cancel Christmas

By the beginning of December 2020, everyone in Marlow was fed up with cancelled events - we at Marlow FM were meant to have broadcast from many of them. With the Christmas break looming, several community groups came together to do something about it.

Local company Brand Events had had to cancel its *Pub in the Park* event, backed by local chef Tom Kerridge, in Marlow twice already. Its chief executive, Chris Hughes, suggested a programme of events in a drive-in format to bring the community together safely. This would involve people pulling up in their cars, and watching the action on a stage and a big screen.

Marlow FM would broadcast all the events each day so that people in their cars could tune in on their radio to hear the sound. And, of course, it meant a wider audience, locally and around the world, would get to hear it all on FM and online.

Keeping things in sync

There was a big technical challenge to overcome. We'd normally use an internet connection to do an outside broadcast, but this introduces a delay into the audio of up to 15 seconds - this is unacceptable, of course, when there's something on the stage or on the screen to watch at the same time.

Instead, we used a microwave data link (pictured here) between the site and our studio to eliminate the delay. But this actually went 'too far the other way' - the sound would arrive *before* the picture. So we had to carefully inject a delay into the audio to sync everything.

Our director of transmission, Tim Ashburner, explains more in the audio submission.



Bringing the whole community together

The project was a collaboration between Brand Events, Marlow FM, Marlow Town Council, Marlow Rugby Club, whose car park the events took place in, and MyMarlow, a local news website.

There were performances from local schools and Marlow Town Band, a tribute to local resident Mark James, and a lunch organised by Tom Kerridge as part of his Meals from Marlow operation that had been operating since lockdown.



On the Saturday night, we at Marlow FM held our own *Hidden Heroes* awards ceremony to recognise those people and organisations who had been doing so much to help others during the pandemic.

Sadly this was the last event as we went into the tier 4 restrictions the next day, and drive-ins were prohibited. But at least our town had managed to get together in some way for Christmas.

The whole series of events had planned to run from Wednesday 16th December to Tuesday 22nd December.

HIDDEN HEROES

