

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND CULTURE**THE ROBIN HOOD FESTIVAL 2016 AND PROPOSALS FOR 2017****Purpose of the Report**

1. The report provides an overview of the 2016 Robin Hood Festival and outlines a suitably flexible format for 2017 to support site preparations for the new Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre.

Information and Advice

2. 2016 was the 32nd year of the Robin Hood Festival, which has grown from a modest weekend entertainment to a week-long major Nottinghamshire event. It traditionally takes place in the school holiday month of August.
3. Festival entertainments usually take place at the Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre near Edwinstowe and on the Major Oak woodland path. Arena events requiring more open space use "Forest Corner," where the village cricket club is also sited.
4. The event is planned, staffed and managed by the Country Parks Service, assisted by a pool of enthusiastic volunteers and a body of costumed entertainers. The number of visitors attending stretches site staffing capacity to the maximum and generally requires some assistance from the staff pool of nearby Rufford Abbey.
5. The event attracts great media interest. As in previous years, the Council's Communications team handled Festival marketing and public relations, ensuring that the County benefitted from maximum positive publicity.
6. The event is outdoors, thus weather dependent. Sunshine brightened five out of seven days of the 2016 event; visitor numbers overall were comparable to previous years, and the event still managed to cover its costs.
7. Sponsorship of approximately £2,000 was this year received from local coach company Stagecoach, brokered by the Communications team, which helped to offset some of the event marketing and advertising costs.
8. The 2016 Robin Hood Festival was again a hugely popular event generating valuable positive publicity for Nottinghamshire on social media, and in newspapers, TV and radio. It provided a welcome low-cost day out to families in need of school holiday entertainment, supporting the Council's aims of community cohesion, community volunteering and local pride.

Proposals for 2017

9. Following a partnership contract signed in 2015, the RSPB will build the new Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre, scheduled to open in spring 2018. To maximise likelihood of on-time completion for the new building, it will be advisable to avoid potential hold ups to ground works and site preparations. This is particularly important at Forest Corner, where it is proposed the Centre is to be built, and at “Naish’s Field” opposite – site of its future main car park.
10. As construction works will be in full swing in August next year, plans for the 2017 Festival must be flexible and adaptable, necessitating some modifications to the traditional format. The most effective strategy is a format that will spread the visitor ‘load’ rather than concentrating it into a small number of busy days, and to avoid use of the arena area at Forest Corner which is immediately adjacent to the proposed site for the new centre.

Format for 2017

11. The event proposal for this year of transition is “Festival August – the Merrie Month”. This would see favourite acts and Robin Hood characters entertaining visitors not for one single week, but each weekend through the school holiday month of August.
12. The plan would be to work within the current event budget – the cost of stretching the entertainment budget across four weekends being offset by moving from the current concentration on large scale jousting and falconry displays more to ‘strolling players’, trails, children’s theatre, have a go archery and ‘impromptu’ skirmishing by Robin and his band around the Visitor Centre and Major Oak.
13. It is anticipated that the Festival would return to its traditional format in 2018.

Other Options Considered

13. The option to suspend the Robin Hood Festival for 2017 was rejected, due to the public popularity of the celebrations and potential detriment to local tourism.
14. Relocation of the event to other nearby sites was considered and rejected for logistical and cost reasons.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

15. The event is successful, well loved, and largely cost neutral for the Council. Positive PR generated is beneficial to Nottinghamshire.
16. The site is in the process of transition to new management arrangements and the building of the new Visitor Centre will necessitate some disruption. Flexibility must therefore be built into planning for the 2017 Festival.
17. Managing customer expectations around the scale and nature of what can be offered will be assisted by the Council’s Communications team.

18. Given discretion to flex the current format for a year, Robin Hood celebrations can still be provided and enjoyed in the outlaw's legendary woodland home.

Statutory and Policy Implications

19. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

20. These are contained in the main body of this report.

Public Sector Equality Duty Implications

21. In order to ensure that visitors with mobility restrictions can enjoy the event, additional mobility scooter hire is made available at each Festival to supplement the scooters usually available at the Park.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

22. The siting of the Festival within Sherwood Forest National Nature Reserve is subject to approval each year by Natural England.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the success of the 32nd Robin Hood Festival and the proposals for the 2017 Festival at Sherwood Forest, in a suitably modified format to reflect anticipated site pressures, are noted.

Derek Higton
Service Director, Youth, Families and Culture

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Gareth Broome
Service Manager, Country Parks & Green Estates Service
T: 0115 977821313
E: gareth.broome@nottsc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments

23. As this report is for noting only constitutional comments are not required.

Financial Comments (TMR 11/08/2016)

24. Financial implications are contained in the main body of the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C0872