

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND CULTURE

THE ROBIN HOOD FESTIVAL

Purpose of the Report

1. The report gives a brief overview of the 2013 Robin Hood Festival and outlines proposed arrangements for the 2014 Robin Hood Festival.

Information and Advice

Background

2. The Festival is held at Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre near Edwinstowe, and is organised by the County Council's Country Parks and Green Estates Service. It has grown over three decades from a small weekend event to a seven day festival and is now one of the biggest free festivals in the region. It is the largest public celebration in Britain of the Robin Hood legend and attracts significant public and media interest. Entry is free, though a £5 car parking charge applies.
3. A varied programme of events ranges from strolling jesters and jugglers to falconry and jousting. Activities take place in and around the Visitor Centre buildings, in the forest at the Major Oak, and at a temporary arena set up adjacent to Edwinstowe cricket ground. The event provides low cost family entertainment and an enjoyable day out for not only local residents but also tourists from further away. In this respect the event has a very positive benefit for North Nottinghamshire tourism.

Promotion

4. Prior to this year's event, an intensive promotional campaign was conducted by the County's Communications and Marketing Team (a summary of this work is captured in **Appendix 1**). There is no doubt that this work made a major contribution to the success of the 2013 Festival which saw visitor numbers at their highest. It should be remembered, however, that with all outdoor events, weather has the strongest influence on visitor numbers.

Site Constraints

5. The Festival requires approval, in advance, by Natural England, the Government's watchdog for nature and the environment, as the Festival takes place on a protected site – the Sherwood Forest Natural Nature Reserve. The fact that the site is of great significance for nature and ecology restricts the scale and type of activities that can take

place within the ancient woodland and heath land habitats. This balance is a challenging one, but one that is managed effectively by officers responsible for the event overall.

6. It is also worth pointing out that the Festival site infrastructure is aging and has a “capacity” beyond which operational problems begin to develop. This is particularly true in relation to toilets, catering capacity, crowd safety and parking.

Attendance and Commercial Income

7. The 2013 event was the 29th year of the Robin Hood Festival and attracted an estimated 50,000 people over the seven day event, with attendances peaking on Wednesday and Sunday (the Festival jousting days in the main arena).
8. The preparatory, operational and wind down costs for the Festival were approximately £140,000
9. The net income (excluding VAT) generated by the event for onsite catering, retail sales, activities, programmes and car parking was £165,293, broken down as follows:
 - retail £57,509
 - catering £59,413
 - car parking £40,839
 - Festival activities £5,200
 - Souvenir Programme sales £2,332
10. The event in 2013 therefore made an operating profit of just over £25,000, helped by excellent trading figures, in catering and retail. Whilst these trading figures are impressive it should be remembered that the event is weather dependent and thus the level of income each year is unpredictable. Festival costs and income are financed from the Service budget, with a reserve account acting as a contingency to cover the unpredictability of visitor numbers due to weather.
11. Any surplus generated by the event is used to offset the wider operating costs of the Service.

Operational Issues – Roads, Traffic and Safety

12. Given the size of the Festival it is inevitable that traffic related issues arise. In particular, Swinecote Road was closed to through traffic during Festival hours to enable safe crossing of pedestrians from the overflow car park to the main event site. It is acknowledged that the closure causes some irritation and inconvenience for local residents, but is strongly advised by Police and Highways officers as the only practical solution for the safe mass movement of visitors. In response to resident requests in previous years, a number of residential streets adjacent to the Festival site were “coned off” to prevent excessive on-street parking by festival visitors. This was achieved by means of temporary parking restriction orders and was pre-notified to local people with the help of the Parish Council. Inevitably traffic and parking issues caused some friction with local residents, but this was mitigated by the potential for local traders, hotels, B&Bs and campsites to capitalise on the influx of tourists to the local area.

13. Overall safety for the Festival is managed in association with the local Safety Advisory Group (SAG). SAGs are triggered for events which expect to attract more than 3,000 people to a site at any one time and chaired by the local district council, in this case, Newark & Sherwood. The SAG plays an important role in reviewing all health and safety related management plans and has representation from the police, emergency planners, fire and ambulance services and individual event managers.

Partnership Opportunities

14. Contact was made with the Edwinstowe Business Forum to invite local high street traders to be involved in the Festival. Efforts are being made to encourage more partnership working for the 30th annual festival in 2014 by initiating early discussions with Edwinstowe Business Forum and also Newark & Sherwood District Council Tourism & Economic Development Team. The Sherwood Forest Trust, the Edwinstowe based charity for Sherwood Forest, was involved in the 2013 event and has shown interest in increasing its involvement at future festivals.

Proposals for 2014

15. Planning for 2014 starts early. Dates have been provisionally advertised for 4–10 August 2014. Activities and entertainments are being considered by the Festival team, and a communications strategy is being developed by Central Communications Team

Other Options Considered

16. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

17. The Festival is possibly the most popular of all County Council run events.
18. Festival costs are largely covered by existing revenue budgets, with the Reserve account acting as a contingency standby.
19. In terms of the amount of media interest in the Festival at local, national and international levels, it provides good value purely in terms of positive public relations for the County Council.
20. 2014 is the 30th anniversary year of the Festival. There is therefore an opportunity to capitalise further on the local tourism benefits of the event by partnership working.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Implications for Service Users

22. The Robin Hood Festival is planned to be as attractive to visitors as possible. However, it is recognised that at peak times on busy days there will inevitably be queues and crowds, and parking spaces will be at capacity. Site logistics at an outdoor woodland site on a National Nature Reserve do not allow the same solutions which can be used at other sites. For example, it is difficult to service portaloos at the Major Oak. It must be accepted that whilst pressures can be managed, it is not possible to entirely eradicate them.

Financial Implications

23. Income and expenditure for the Festival are managed within the Country Parks and Green Estates budget with the aim of breaking even or providing a small surplus. The current year surplus is reflected in corporate budget monitoring as at period 6. A small reserve is earmarked as being available as a contingency to prevent core Country Parks revenue budgets being subject to excessive risk in the coming year.

Public Sector Equality Duty Implications

24. In order to ensure that visitors with mobility restrictions can enjoy the event, Fair Mobility or a similar provider is invited to provide mobility scooter hire. Provision is made for blue badge holders in the car parking plan.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

25. The siting of the Festival within the protected National Nature Reserve (NNR) is subject to consent by Natural England as in previous years and great care is taken to ensure that the significant increase in visitors to the site over the Festival does not damage the NNR.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Committee:

- 1) notes the success of the 2013 Robin Hood Festival
- 2) agrees that the 30th Robin Hood Festival will take place on 4-10 August 2014, organised by the Country Parks Service
- 3) notes that an amount of £75,000 is earmarked in the County Council's reserves to act as a contingency in case of adverse weather etc. for the 2014 Festival.
- 4) notes that the special event car parking fee for the Festival will be held at £5 for all visitors
- 5) notes that the road closure and local parking restrictions carried out this year will be repeated in 2014.

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Constitutional Comments (NAB 21/11/13)

26. The Culture Committee has authority to approve the recommendations set out in this report by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (KLA 21/11/13)

27. The financial implications of the report are set out in paragraph 23 above.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Robin Hood Festival 2013 – report to Culture Committee on 27 November 2012.

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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