

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND CULTURAL SERVICES**THE ROBIN HOOD FESTIVAL 2014****Purpose of the Report**

1. The report provides an overview of the 2014 Robin Hood Festival and seeks approval for:
 - i) the proposed dates for the 2015 event
 - ii) the continuation of appropriate road closure arrangements to support the safe operation of the Festival in 2015.

Information and Advice

2. 2014 was the 30th year of the Robin Hood Festival, which has grown from a modest weekend event to a week long event, and one of the biggest free entry festivals in the region. As well as providing excellent value for money entertainment for local residents, the event attracts visitors nationally and internationally, impacting positively on the local visitor economy.
3. The event is staged at the Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre near Edwinstowe, and is organised by the Country Parks Service. The event has a well-developed and structured management plan with a focus on the health and safety of visitors, staff and volunteers. The event management plan is scrutinised by the Newark and Sherwood Safety Advisory Group (SAG) and by County Council Health and Safety officers to ensure high levels of health and safety compliance.
4. The event attracts a large amount of media interest, being the largest public celebration in Britain of the Robin Hood legend. The County Council Communications and Marketing team is responsible for a publicity and marketing strategy.
5. This year, in addition to the usual publicity channels, communications activity for the Festival secured around 60 pieces of positive regional, national and international coverage. Social media worked well, with the Robin Hood Facebook page attracting 2,780 'likes' compared to 1,742 in 2013; more importantly, many members of the public actively engaged with the Festival through Facebook, with 555 'shares' and 508 comments which were then 'liked' and re-shared a further 3,008 times. Other digital activity included seven 'emailme' bulletins which were sent out over a 10-week period to 2,154 people who had subscribed; this represented a subscriber increase of 79% on last year.

6. During the Festival a variety of live entertainment is provided across the forest site, ranging from strolling jesters and jugglers to a medieval jousting contest. Activities take place in and around the Visitor Centre buildings and within the forest at the Major Oak. The Festival is not a historical re-enactment, aiming instead to provide family fun during the school summer holiday.
7. Admittance to the Festival remains free, but a special event car parking charge of £5 is made to help offset the costs of the entertainment provided. Additional income is generated through paid for activities such as children's theatre performances, and through sales at the in-house catering and retail offer at the Visitor Centre shops.
8. To help safely manage the large numbers that attend the event each year, a traffic management system is adopted to ensure public safety. Specifically, Swinecote Road is closed to through traffic for the duration of the event on the recommendation of police liaison representatives and highway officers. It is this essential action that enables safe crossing of pedestrians from the overflow car park to the main event site. It is recognised that the closure causes some inconvenience for motorists and local residents, but is felt to be the only practical solution to cater for the mass movement of pedestrians in a controlled manner.
9. For this year's event 14 community volunteers were recruited to assist site staff in a range of roles and duties. In particular, volunteers were engaged in helping to marshal visitors, selling programmes, keeping the site clean and tidy and playing a crucial role in directing visitors around the site. The volunteers are becoming increasingly essential to the smooth running of the event and this year's team provided excellent visitor services.
10. As an event held almost entirely outdoors in a forest setting, the Festival is weather dependent. This year, unfortunately, the event coincided with a period of very unsettled weather and took the brunt of the tail end of Hurricane Bertha. On the final Sunday of the Festival exceptionally heavy rainfall meant that the arena entertainment (jousting and falconry displays) were cancelled for safety reasons. A reduced programme of entertainment was quickly improvised at the Major Oak. Event staff and volunteers were diverted to emergency maintenance to clear areas that had flooded.
11. Despite the appalling weather on the final day, few complaints were received from the public and a number of glowing reviews on Trip Advisor and Facebook indicate that the public appreciated the efforts that staff and entertainers made to ensure that the site remained open and a programme of activity, albeit reduced, was delivered.
12. Estimated visitor numbers this year were reduced from 2013 due to the inclement weekend weather, but exceeded 40,000. The event cost approximately £60,000 to stage, with the majority of the expenditure paying for the entertainers and extra staffing costs outside of the core hours worked by the on-site team. Net income was around £61,000, resulting in a small operating profit. Commercial takings were, however, reduced compared to the 2013 event, again demonstrating the impact of the severe weekend weather conditions on attendance and onsite trading. Taking account of the financial risks associated with the weather dependent nature of the Festival, a small reserve account is held as "insurance" against the eventuality of extreme weather conditions.

13. Efforts continue to be made by the Council's Communications and Marketing team to engage the private sector in the event with a range of sponsorship opportunities available during the Festival. This met with some success, in terms of small scale sponsorship. To date however, a major sponsor for the event is yet to be secured.
14. Overall the 2014 Robin Hood Festival was a well-attended and managed event which generated much positive feedback amongst visitors, and provided a boost to the north Nottinghamshire visitor economy. The proposed date for the 2015 event is Monday 3rd August to Sunday 9th August.

Other Options Considered

15. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

16. The event is successful, well loved, and cost neutral for the Council.
17. Effective and safe highways management arrangements are critical in ensuring the safe operation of the Festival.

Statutory and Policy Implications

18. 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

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

Public Sector Equality Duty Implications

20. 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

21. The siting of the Festival within the National Nature Reserve is approved by Natural England.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That:

- 1) the Robin Hood Festival for 2015 takes place from 3rd to 9th August 2015.
- 2) the road closure and local parking restrictions carried out at the 2014 event be repeated in 2015 (subject to Police and Highways Authority approvals)

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Constitutional Comments (LM 25/09/14)

22. The recommendations in the report fall within the terms of reference of the Culture Committee.

Financial Comments (KLA 29/09/14)

23. The financial implications of the report are set out in paragraph 12 within the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

Rufford Cllr John Peck

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