

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR YOUTH, FAMILIES & CULTURE COUNTRY PARK EVENTS 2016

Purpose of the Report

1. This report informs the Committee of the proposed event programme for Rufford Abbey, Sherwood Forest and Bestwood Country Parks in 2016.

Information and Advice

2. All three country parks traditionally offer an events programme. This is designed to encourage visits to the parks, to support onsite commercial activity, to engage visitors with heritage and nature, to support Nottinghamshire tourism, and to provide leisure entertainment for service users. They also generate positive PR for the Authority.
3. Events range from simple but popular self-guided trails, which can bring high numbers of family visitors to the park for a low outlay (e.g. the 2015 Halloween Trail at Rufford Abbey with over 3,000 participants) to major festivals such as the Robin Hood Festival at Sherwood Forest. Small scale events based around nature aim to interest and engage visitors in the park's flora and fauna, whilst some events are purely for seasonal entertainment, such as band concerts.
4. Events can increase "dwell time" on site (and thus commercial sales) or boost visitor numbers. Not all are provided direct by parks staff. The falconry offer at Rufford Abbey for example, operates in the park by licence, and pays a rental. At Bestwood Country Park, the "Friends of" group facilitates a number of small scale but popular park events, backed by a community run café.
5. There will be some changes to how events are staged at Rufford Abbey post 2015/16 because temporary planning permission for seasonal marquees is unlikely to be granted in the proximity of a historic listed building. This limits summer marquee use to 28 days in total.
6. In 2015 the country parks Events Officer post ceased as part of that year's required budget saving. Event programming and support has now been absorbed into the role of Assistant Site Managers and Park Rangers.
7. In times of reducing Local Authority budgets, opportunities to reduce costs are being embraced. For example, the main living history event at Rufford Abbey this year will be the multi-period Historical Bazaar event, where the majority of event costs are offset by a stall fee to traders. This provides a major event for only the cost of first aid and portaloos.

8. The service has also worked successfully with external local partners to help fund public events. For example, the 2015 Woodland Festival at Sherwood was assisted by sponsorship from a local construction company, brokered by the Sherwood Forest Trust,
9. For some events, alternative delivery arrangements are now in place. For example the Earth and Fire Ceramic Fair 2016 is to be delivered by an external freelance events specialist.
10. Many events would not be feasible without strong support from volunteers, in particular the Robin Hood Festival, where volunteers undertake a vital role in assisting with marshalling and crowd management.
11. The following seasonal events are planned:

Rufford Abbey	Sherwood Forest	Bestwood Country Park
Easter Trail – a week long self-guided family trail encouraging exploration of the park during Notts school half term. Small charge.	Easter Trail around the woodlands and Visitor Centre. Small charge. Nature and woodland themed walks and talks, inspiring visitors to understand, appreciate and respect ancient Sherwood Forest. Free events.	Spring nature walks – ranger led walks including information about trees, plants & wildlife. Free, or small charge.
Historical Bazaar – May 2015 A large scale two day living history festival incorporating historical traders, demonstrations and historical re-enactment. Free entry. Special event car park charge applies.	Living History weekends. Authentically costumed and equipped re-enactors depicting past eras of Sherwood Forest, staged within the woodland. Free event.	Saturday openings of the historic Winding Engine House by volunteer group and community café refreshments. Free entry.
Earth & Fire Ceramic Fair – Major three day event in June, showcasing high end ceramics from British and continental potters. Free entry. Special event car park charge applies.	The Robin Hood Festival – iconic week long family fun celebration of Nottinghamshire’s famous hero. August. Free entry, special event car parking charge applies.	Social engagement activities to combat loneliness e.g. “Knit & Natter,” “Board Games afternoon”, at the Dynamo House. Free events.
Summer brass band concerts – a programme of traditional musical entertainment for summer Sundays. Free events.	Major Oak Woodland Festival – a major weekend celebration of woodland crafts and skills, featuring traders and demonstrations. Sponsorship funded last year.	Specialist nature themed group activities e.g. Dawn Chorus. Walk for bird enthusiasts. Small charge.

Hawks of Steele falconry static display – spring & summer weekends.	Halloween Event – a themed event taking place in the woodland at dusk. Charged.	Health Walks every month. Free.
Halloween Trail – spooky outdoor family trail and reward, through the October half term.	Sparkling Sherwood – continuing an extremely popular family evening event. Held over three evenings. Charged.	Goddess Camp – week long community led women's / family celebration.
Christmas Trail and Santa's Grotto at Rufford Mill. Modest charge.	<p>"Santa Paws" charity dog grotto for visitors and their canine friends.</p> <p>St Nicholas' Christmas Grotto Within the Visitor Centre</p> <p>Modest charge for each.</p>	Christmas celebration and 'thank you' party for park conservation volunteers. Free to active volunteers who have assisted in work programmes.

Other Options Considered

12. The report is for noting only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

13. The events programme aims to provide a varied and appropriate selection of seasonal entertainment, enhancing visitors' enjoyment of the park and (where appropriate) stimulating visitor numbers and 'dwell time' to ensure good take up of income generating catering and retail facilities.

Statutory and Policy Implications

14. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the 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

15. The events programme is traditionally well patronised by visitors and refreshes the offer for regular park visitors. It assists in family cohesion by offering enjoyable days out at a modest cost.

Financial Implications

16. Event costs are part of the country parks revenue budget. There has been no overall change in event spending since last year. Wherever feasible, opportunities are taken to render events financially self-sustaining, for example, by incorporating fees to traders.

17. It should be noted that the size and scope of country parks events is determined not only by the amount of finance available, but the capacity of the staff.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the proposed event programme for Rufford Abbey, Sherwood Forest and Bestwood Country Parks in 2016 be noted.

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Constitutional Comments

18. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

Financial Comments (SS 20/11/15)

19. The financial implications of this report are contained within paragraph 16 above.

Background Papers and Published Documents

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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