

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**MEETING OF CABINET MEMBER – STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP, CULTURE
AND TOURISM**

15 May 2020

Report of the Executive Director – Economy, Transport and Environment

**CANCELLATION OF THE DERBYSHIRE WOODLAND FESTIVAL AT
ELVASTON CASTLE 19 AND 20 SEPTEMBER 2020**

(1) **Purpose of Report** To seek the Cabinet Member's permission to cancel the Derbyshire Woodland Festival to be held at Elvaston Castle on Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 September 2020 due to Coronavirus (COVID-19).

(2) **Information and Analysis** The Derbyshire Woodland Festival is a large, successful, annual event celebrating traditional and contemporary woodland crafts held at Elvaston Castle Country Park. It attracts in excess of 10,000 visitors over the two days and this year's event is planned for Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 September 2020.

The normal process of organising the Woodland Festival has been on hold during April 2020, as staff have dealt with issues arising from the COVID-19 emergency. However, it is no longer possible to defer this preparatory work as many of the actions are time critical. The recommendations in this report are based on current Government guidance and statements around recovery and future restrictions.

The following information details the areas and levels of risk and any financial implications of proceeding with the Woodland Festival in 2020.

1. Promotion

Promotion of the Woodland Festival (printed media, signage, social media campaign/advertising, etc) accounts for 15% of overall Countryside events expenditure. The 2020 campaign has already been impacted by current restrictions as the event is included in the Countryside Events Brochures and Festivity leaflet, which is not achieving full distribution due to the closure of Tourist Information Centres, Countryside Visitor Centres, external attractions and libraries. The normal widespread promotion is not possible at this time and intensive promotion and advertising of the Festival is necessary to ensure its success.

Furthermore, there is potential to attract a lot of negative publicity and reputational loss for the County Council if it is not seen to lead by example, i.e. promoting and organising a mass gathering event that attracts circa 10,000+ visitors which is currently against Government guidance and legislation prohibiting gatherings of more than two people other than in certain specified circumstances. Clearly, it is too early to know what legislation might be in force by September, since this will depend on the future increase or decrease in the infection rate.

2. Contracts/Commitments

First Aid Provision

The main voluntary first aid providers (St John Ambulance/Red Cross) are currently supporting the NHS and not taking bookings. Enquiries with private suppliers have indicated that many of them are also supporting the NHS. Where suppliers are available and taking bookings for events, many have indicated they are booked for the festival dates. Also early indications are that an increase of around 40% in costs for first aid services should be expected. This all suggests that securing appropriate and cost effective first aid provision would be difficult, if not impossible, and the event cannot proceed without First Aid cover.

Stallholders and Caterers

In a typical year, the festival is supported by approximately 90-100 paying stallholders and caterers, this income is one of the critical components (alongside car park takings) of the event meeting its costs.

The number and diversity in stallholders is a key attraction to visitors to the event. A decline in numbers could damage the reputation of the show as a premier event.

Uncertainty around COVID-19 guidance, relating to large events, travel restrictions, etc, has meant that the number of stallholders and caterers confirming they will attend has been very low to date.

Professional Demonstrators

Professional demonstrators are the core offer of the Woodland Festival, they are national and regional skilled demonstrators, craftspeople and performers. They engage closely with the visitors with hands on participation activities and comprise 20% of what the Festival offers, (accounting for 45% of the events expenditure).

Many are retired and elderly, with years of experience, but faced with the Coronavirus risks and implications, will almost certainly not be available to attend. Others may fall into 'at risk' groups and this too is expected to impact on availability.

3. Income Collection

The special event parking charge has been collected each year as a cash only payment with tickets issued by a team of four staff at the gate in close contact with the public.

The risk of virus transmission through handling money means a contactless payment system needs to be introduced to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

A new system of handheld contactless ticket machines would be required to collect the parking charge. Enquiries suggest that to procure the necessary handheld ticket system would cost in the region of £6,000+. However, the viability of handheld card payments is in question because there is not a consistent operational mobile phone signal at Elvaston.

4. Supply Chain Issues and Higher Prices

Supply chain issues and higher prices are anticipated in the procurement of all festival related goods and services. Initial contact with supply companies indicates that prices will be higher (up to 25%). Many are pricing the greater risk, current uncertainty and potential disruption into quotes.

Potentially higher service and infrastructure costs will push the event into a loss making position from its current “break even” point.

5. Car Park and Traffic Management

The car park legal variation notice and advert for special event charges needs to commence in May 2020 and costs circa £500. It requires considerable legal and administrative support to approve and advertise to comply with the Regulations.

Each year, a Temporary Clearway Order is required to prohibit stopping along the B5010, to facilitate a clear access/egress route for the Woodland Festival. This application cannot be delayed beyond May.

Costs can vary between £1,052 and £1,665 in a typical year. Cancellation would incur a significant proportion of these costs the closer to the event date cancellation happens.

6. Event Management

Size and Nature of Event

The risk of getting infected with the COVID-19 virus is too high when many people are gathered, and that consideration is by far the most important.

Although an outdoor event, it is specifically geared around demonstrations, performances, hands-on participation, rides and purchases of goods. So contact and close gathering by visitors is integral, making social distancing almost impossible to manage. Figure 1. Shows the volume of visitors the show receives.

Event Set Up

Meeting and greeting stallholders/demonstrators, etc, on arrival for set-up requires close contact; meaning that maintaining social distancing guidelines would be difficult.

Access to Water

Stallholders and demonstrators access to water is via a shared stop tap on the Events Field and Showground. There is a risk of virus transmission.

Management of Waste

Waste potentially poses a significant risk to staff who manage its disposal, particularly for waste associated with catering.

Provision of Toilets

The Council's ability to maintain the cleanliness of toilets for the anticipated numbers, in light of strict guidance, would be difficult to deliver and high risk.

Staffing

Over the festival weekend, 30+ staff, volunteers and scouts are the minimum required to deliver the festival each day at the scale it has now reached. It is anticipated that the usual support from scouts and volunteers for marshals will not be available.



Figure 1. Woodland Festival, September 2019

It is not possible to delay the event and reschedule it for later in the season i.e. October. This is because the weather becomes unpredictable as autumn advances and ground conditions deteriorate rapidly at Elvaston making outdoor events impossible.

If the event is cancelled, a new date would be selected for 2021 and planning efforts switched to this later in the year.

(3) **Financial Considerations** The Festival is staged at a cost of approximately £22,000+ annually (with capital outlay covered in a successful year by income from special event parking charges and income from charging stallholders and caterers).

This event, whilst covering its capital outlay, does not cover staff costs involved in its organisation and delivery. If a late decision to cancel is taken, after a high proportion of stallholders have been invoiced and paid to secure their pitch, the administrative cost to reimburse each stallholder would be significant.

In addition, there would be cancellation costs for festival infrastructure and support, i.e. toilets, first aid, waste bins, security etc.

Other Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, environmental, health, property, social value and transport considerations.

(4) **Key Decision** No.

(5) **Call-In** Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No.

(6) **Background Papers** Held on file within the Economy, Transport and Environment Department.

(7) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATIONS** That:

7.1 The Woodland Festival 2020, scheduled to be held on 19 and 20 September 2020 at Elvaston Castle Country Park, be cancelled.

7.2 The cancellation of the festival is publicised through normal media channels and all stakeholders are informed.

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- 7.3 A new date in 2021 for the festival is selected and that all planning work concentrates on delivering that event.

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