

Bonfire and Fireworks Report

Business Meeting Monday 13th January 2020

1. Pre-Event Issues

Cheshire East Council had informed me some months ago that they had a new policy in respect of fairground rides and as Event Organiser I had an obligation to check the documentation which included: -

- a. ADIPS – an industry related validation of the rides safety and mechanical worthiness
- b. Insurance per ride
- c. Risk Assessment per ride
- d. Showman's Guild insurance cover per ride

Jackie MacArthur from the Town Council very kindly undertook all the required checks for me which validated that all the correct documentation had been provided.

The fairground ride operator then informed me that CEC were now using an external company to validate the documentation and would charge £840 for this work, the validation carried out by the Town Council was not accepted.

James Bedford from the fairground rides then stated that he would not be attending our event as he could not afford to pay the fees being imposed.

There followed more than 2 weeks of tortuous poor communication with CEC, first of all them claiming that they had not received the documentation or couldn't read it, even though the Town Council had sent it through 3 times. Eventually CEC virtually issued me with an ultimatum that if I didn't agree to their terms in respect of their new policy, the cost of which had now been reduced to £350, then the fairground rides would not be allowed onto the Park. The terms were then signed under duress.

At a meeting on the 3rd December with Frank Jordan, Executive Director Place and Acting Deputy Chief Executive and Peter Skates, Director of Growth and Enterprise of Cheshire East Council, accompanied by Rod Goodier and Jackie MacArthur from the Town Council, we discussed the circumstances surrounding the implementation of their new policy and how it affected the Bonfire and Fireworks Display.

Both executives were very apologetic concerning the poor response we had received from officers dealing with the implementation of the policy and the lack of response and poor communication from some officers. CEC confirmed that next year the process will be handled in house thus dispensing with the external contractor HSL. Whether or not we will be charged a fee for validating the documentation this year remains to be seen.

2. Rugby Pitch

ANSA who look after the Park and are wholly owned by CEC, suggested that the rugby pitch after the Bonfire event was unplayable, stating that it had been damaged, as a consequence, they want to charge: -

- a. Ground decompaction - £254 –ground slitting with Shockwave/Rota knife
- b. Ground reinstatement – £262.28 - this may vary depending on the ground

This damage is disputed by us, supported by Ruth Burgess from the Town Council's Streetscape Team, as we both agree that the pitch was barred off and there is only footfall damage outside the pitch parameters were the grass will quickly recover

We also asked David Worth to inspect the pitch and surrounding area and he agreed that the damage was superficial and will quickly recover. We inspected and photographed the pitch a week later and it appears to have recovered. This issue has also been raised with Frank Jordan and Peter Skates and we await their response to this as a well.

3. Rotas and Manning

Manning for setting up in the Park on Friday and Saturday morning was sufficient to meet our needs. Manning for selling tickets in the Town was also well organised right up to and including the final day.

All the gates selling tickets were manned, but, once again this proved to be a challenge right up until the last minute, although we have to be grateful to the Lions Club once again, who continue to man the Mill Green gate for us, and of course Friends of Congleton Park who man the busiest gate by far, Park Road.

This year we decided to close the Buglawton gate a 6pm because of the change in the firework display firing zone, this may prove to be unnecessary next year, but, before such a decision is made, a check needs to be carried out to ensure that the egress path from the gate is more than 75m from the firework firing zone.

4. New layout and loss of John and Ken

For the first time in very many years, John Lilley and Ken and Alison Williams were unable to help out to set up the bonfire because of ill health.

This had a number of consequences including: -

- a. Some lack of knowledge on where equipment was kept
- b. Roles of direction and coordination formerly carried out these 3 people were combined into one, and taken on by the Event Coordinator
- c. Some items missed such as the tables for the gates
- d. Flood lights owned and stored by the Rugby Club found to be not in a serviceable condition, leaving no time to make alternative arrangements
- e. The new layout was a challenge as the previous layout had been used for 30 years without change, although in the end it worked well

- f. Consideration should be given to repositioning the Club gazebos and the catering tents next year.

5. Guy Competition

Prior to the Bonfire and Fireworks event commencing, the president judged the "Guy Competition on Friday". The entrants were from a number of local nursery schools, Daintry Hall Nursery were judged the winner.

All of the guys were placed on the top of the bonfire

6. Bonfire

Sometimes it is over looked how much work is put into erecting the bonfire with a considerable number of hours spent on this task directed by Ian Robinson assisted by Pace Farm. The club should thank both for their hard work.

Additionally, on site was Rotarian Rob Lomas with his tractor, which was invaluable, as he pulled a number of vehicles stuck in the mud off the Park.

7. Fireworks Display

This year the fireworks were once again provided by Star Fireworks, and they produced two great displays starting with the children's display at 6.30pm, followed by the main event at 7.30pm. The main fireworks display was spectacular and lasted 26 minutes. In total the public were entertained with 45 minutes of firework's, that is great value for money

The barriers around the firework display and bonfire worked well with a small area only that was not covered by barriers, where we had to use netting instead

The Bonfire and Fireworks Display though was a considerable success once again on Saturday evening in the Park, despite the problems caused by the weather leading up to the event, as there is no doubt that it must have dissuaded some from venturing out as the estimated crowd was substantially down on those experienced in the recent past.

8. First Aid

For the first time for a number of years, St John's Ambulance provided an ambulance and 6 personnel. The cost of providing this facility was discounted from £436 to £244 +VAT.

There was one person treated during the evening and that was related to breathing problems resulting in the individual being asthmatic

9. Friends of Congleton Park

Our events in the past have run so well due to the enormous amount of time and input devoted to setting up and preparing the event undertaken by John Lilley and Ken and Alison Williams. This year Ken was in hospital and unable to direct activities nor was John Lilley

available again because of health problems, although he did help man the Park Road gate in the evening.

Whilst their help and support setting up for the event this year was missed we did cope well although we did omit some items. Nonetheless, Rotary members really stepped up this time and made it clear that we are more than capable of organising the event ourselves and will have learnt from any omissions or shortcomings.

10. Franchises

Rushey Farm seemed considerably more prepared this year; nonetheless, there were still queues for burgers etc., but, the waiting time was about 10 minutes. Prior to 6pm there was virtually no one at all waiting to be served.

The Paella store did not seem to do that well, although those that tried it said it was great

For the second year though Stocks at the Pavillion put on food and were doing a roaring trade once again. However, they did say takings were down on last year.

Mr Whippy did make an appearance this year and contributed £75

11. Income and Expenditure

Net estimated income is £5093 which when compared to the previous 4 years, is down substantially, primarily due to the fact that the weather was not particularly encouraging in the days leading up to the event, denying us a reasonable attendance, also the combination of increased costs amounting to about £2000 helped reduce the level of profit. Perhaps we also need to consider whether our advertising is effective enough leading up to the event, although if you go back to 2017 ticket sales were £9000 higher than this year with the same level of advertising?

Additionally, the role of the Tourist Information Centre located in the Town Hall cannot be underestimated, but, this year they sold tickets to the value of £6024 after discount, £2000 down on 2018.

Income from Rush Hey Farm was £300 when in previous years it had been £400, however, before the event they had informed me that they were having problems staffing their stall and suggested that we allow the Paella Store to attend to compensate. The Paella Store though did not go done very well and sales appeared to be very slow and as a consequence they contributed £75. Whilst Stocks at the Pavilion reluctantly paid £75. Income in this area then was down by £100 overall.

	2017	2018	2019
	£	£	£
Total ticket sales	22,810.8	17,442	13,780
Rotary stalls	1303.2	1,626	1786

Traders	935	800	925
Sponsors and donations	1050	1,250	1050
Total Income	26,099	21,118	17541
Expenses	11,637	10,360	12448
Estimated net income	14,461.7	10,758	5093

	Net profit in Previous years £	Date November
2011	9,163	5th
2012	8,004	3rd
2013	3,313	2nd
2014	5,492	1st
2015	8,180	7th
2016	15,829	5th
2017	14,461	4th
2018	10,758	3rd
2019	5093	2nd

Expenses for 2019 have been revised due principally to two factors: -

- a. No discount from Star Fireworks, it has returned to its original price of £7500 due to the increased cost of fireworks
- b. Last year there was no charge from St John's Ambulance, this year it is £244+VAT
- c. £160 increase in cost for additional security to stop individuals entering the firework firing zone from the woods
- d. £350 for a permit from Cheshire East (not yet paid)
- e. £168 for cost of additional barriers compared to 2018

The factors above have reduced income by about £2000

As can be seen from the above table, income from ticket sales has been very variable during the past number of years, probably as a consequence of two factors.

One is undoubtedly related to weather, as it does not take much to put people off from attending. A second causal factor may be the date of the event itself, the further away the event is from the 5th November may create some sort of disassociation with our event and Guy Fawkes Night, and put people off from attending and the table above seems to point to that being a possible causal factor.

An additional factor is personal income stagnation. Since the recession starting in 2009, many of those in work have either had very low annual salary increases or in many cases zero salary increases. This has substantially reduced disposal income and could well be a factor when families consider whether they can afford to events such as ours.

12. Ticket Sales and Income Distribution

Park Road	£2,689.62
Mill Green	£1,629.80
St. Stephens	£1,891.00
Buglawton	£898.00
SUB TOTAL	£7,108
TIC	£6025
Town on Saturdays	£588
TOTAL SALES	£13,780

- a. Park Road continues to be the busiest gate taking 38% of all gate money
- b. St Stephens nonetheless, still amounted to 27%.
- c. Mill Green 23% and Buglawton 13%
- d. Sales in the Town amounted to 4.3% of total ticket sales, which is below last year, but, its main purpose is to publicise the event.
- e. TIC sales where 46% before taking their discount

13. Lessons to learn

- a. The arena area must be made up of barriers only to make later adjustments easier
- b. Consider purchasing another 25 barriers to make the task of set up easier and to remove the need to use netting
- c. Ensure the exclusion zone around the firework firing range from the bandstand to the Buglawton gate remains closed at the end of the display as the fireworks team may be disposing of live fireworks which could endanger the public
- d. Check the distance from the firework firing zone exceeds 75m on the paths by the Buglawton gate before deciding to leave it open all evening
- e. Check the availability of the floodlights and ensure batteries are charged 2 weeks before the event via permission from the Rugby Club
- f. Gate notices to be handed out when DW does his briefing to the gate personnel
- g. Ensure a table is placed at every gate
- h. Review layout to ensure there are no pinch points

14. Recommendations

- a. Consider making a donation of £500 to Friends of Congleton Park
- b. Consider making a donation of £250 to Lions
- c. Invite TIC ladies to the Xmas Party
- d. Review the Bonfire event at the next opportunity in January 2020

15. 2020 Display

The obvious date for next year's display is Saturday 7th November 2020

Conclusions

Once again, the Bonfire and Fireworks Display was a success, although with lower than expected takings, the weather though was not so kind to us during the few days leading up to the event and undoubtedly put many people off attending.

But, the success of every event is very much dependant on the team involved and the quality of the organisation, in this respect I would like to thank all the members of the Club for the support you provided leading up to display, during the display and in the clear up work required once the display ended. The ladies manning the stalls and those in the office sorting out the money, all helped to make this event a success.

Brian Hogan
02.01.20