

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 12 MARCH 2013
title: EVENTS IN THE CASTLE GROUNDS
submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To ask members to consider incorporating capacity restrictions in contracts on futures events in the Castle Grounds.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
 - **Council Ambitions** - to make people's lives safer and healthier
- to ensure services are accessible to all

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Castle Grounds hosts a range of events throughout a given year, varying in size and complexity, the most prominent being Last Night of the Proms, Sport Relief Mile, Bonfire and annual fairs.
- 2.2 The two main areas where events take place are the Bandstand and Castle Field.
- 2.3 There has always been a robust, yet supportive, approach to each event which has included the production of an event plan, which varies in complexity to reflect each individual event.
- 2.4 In the vast majority of cases, event plans are agreed, and events take place with little, or no, adverse issues.
- 2.5 For most events, the suitability of the event, and accompanying event plan, is determined in-house and, subject to approval, a contract is issued.
- 2.6 For large-scale events, and those that require a detailed input from external agencies (predominantly emergency services) those organisations have been consulted via the Event Safety Advisory Group (RVSAG).
- 2.7 In terms of the Castle Grounds in recent years, this has only involved the annual Bonfire, but previously has included other large one-off events, such as music, and other, festivals.

3 CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 As members will be aware, there have been a range of issues relating to the 2012 Bonfire, that were unable to be rectified, resulting in the cancellation of the year's event.
- 3.2 Many of the issues related to the previous year's bonfire, when the event saw a significant increase in attendances, particularly from outside the Borough.

3.3 As a result of the arguments generated by this topic, the Council has reviewed both the role and the operation of ESAG, and the conclusions of that review has been reported to Policy & Finance Committee, and the new structure has been implemented.

4 ISSUES

4.1 The key issue for this committee, from a landowner's perspective, is that, as part of contractual arrangements with the hirer, in this case Rotary/Round Table, the Council did not specify a maximum capacity for the Castle, unlike with other event organisers in the past.

4.2 It is unusual for a venue, indoor or outdoor, not to specify a maximum occupancy, as this, along with other factors contained within the event plan, determines whether the proposed event can be delivered in a safe and effective manner.

4.3 In terms of Castle Field, an assessment has been carried out to determine the number of people who can safely be present at an event/activity. The calculation is based on two factors:

- **The occupant density of the facility** – this refers to the number of people that can safely fit into a defined space (Castle Field, in this case);
- **The exit capacity of the site** – this refers to the number of people that can safely access or egress the site under normal circumstances, or during an evacuation, should this become necessary.

Using this formula, it is recommended that the maximum capacity for Castle Field is 5,000 people. This is the figure that has been used for many years, even for daytime events.

4.4 In terms of the Bandstand, and using the same principles as above, the recommended maximum capacity is as follows:

- **Tiered area** within fenced perimeter:
 - 500 people
- **Grassed area**, including lower path and up to upper path;
 - 1,500 people

= maximum capacity of 2,000

4.5 Both of these capacity figures have been used for a number of years without problems, although the calculation relating to the capacity of the Castle Field was one of the points of contention during debates arising from the cancellation of the 2012 bonfire.

4.6 This calculation was carried out by a Council employee, who holds the necessary qualification to carry out such a function.

4.7 The issue of capacity was discussed at a recent meeting of RVSAG, where the police suggested that the site capacity of 5,000 would be acceptable, but this could be increased to 6,000 with the adoption of an acceptable Traffic Management Plan, to enable a safe exit from Eshton Terrace and the Trinity access.

4.8 The Bonfire Committee argued last year that the figure is too low, and that the only way to advance the issue is for an independent assessment to be carried out.

5 RISK ASSESSMENT

The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- **Resources** – there are no direct resource issues, although the setting of occupancy limits will slightly reduce the level of staff resources involved, compared with if each event capacity were to be individually negotiated.
- **Technical / Legal** – criminal and civil law will apply, in varying circumstances, to landowners, operators and organisers of events in the form of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, the Occupiers Liability Act 1957, and the Regulatory Reform Order 2005 (Fire Safety). In simplistic terms, the Council – acting through this Committee – has a duty of care not to permit its land to be used for public events that it is not convinced are safe.
- **Political** – the Council should, as landowner and custodian of the site, ensure that it is taking a responsible attitude towards people attending events/activities taking place on its premises, whether they are organised by the Council or a third party, whilst making every effort to facilitate the use of the site by the community for public events.
- **Reputation** – as the proposed occupancy levels have been challenged, members should be aware that, as landowner, the safe use of all premises must take precedence over all other issues. We must, however, show clear evidence as to how we have arrived at maximum occupancy levels.

6 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

6.1 Notes the contents of the report;

6.2 Considers whether to accept the current calculation of 5,000, with the addition of a further 1,000, subject to a satisfactory Traffic Management Plan,

OR

6.3 Agrees that an independent assessment be carried out.

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