

Heritage Culture & Leisure Committee

1 September 2015

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

No

River Festival review

Final Decision-Maker	Heritage, Culture & Leisure
Lead Head of Service	Head of Commercial & Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Dawn Hudd
Classification	Public
Wards affected	N/A

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. The Committee note the contents of the report and uses it to inform their discussions on the potential reinstatement of a Maidstone River Festival Committee.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough
 - Ensuring that there are good leisure and cultural attractions
 - Enhancing the appeal of the town centre for everyone

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Heritage Culture and Leisure Committee	1 st September 2015

River Festival Review

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee has requested a paper on the history of the Maidstone River Festival together with information on other events that the Council currently funds, and or organises, in order to consider whether the River Festival should be reintroduced.
 - 1.2 This report sets out the history of the River Festival from a Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) perspective, other events that MBC currently supports and references to the Council's newly adopted Destination Management Plan. It should be noted that this has never been a MBC event and has always had an independent organising committee.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Maidstone River Festival first took place in 1980 and was organised by the Medway River Users Association, MBC and Maidstone Lions Club. The festival has developed over the years but has remained a free, non-profit event organised by volunteers and funded by sponsorship and donations from local businesses until 2008. The event has generally taken place over one day, but on occasion was a two day event.
- 2.2 The Maidstone River Festival Committee (MRFC) exists to provide planning and event management for the river festival. The committee varied in size but usually consisted of around six permanent members with varying levels of involvement.
- 2.3 With the introduction of Police charging for events MBC agreed funding in addition to that raised by the MRFC for a 3 year period 2009-2012. MBC agreed to provide a grant to MRFC of £8,500 and a 50% contribution towards the clean-up costs of approximately £3,000 = £1,500 each, so effectively the grant became £10,000. Anecdotal information puts the cost of staging the river festival until 2007, when police charging was introduced, at around £25,000.
- 2.4 To 2007
 - Up to and including 2007 the MRFC organised all aspects of the event from programming to marshalling. The MBC Tourism Manager (TM) liaised with the committee, attending meetings, and organised concurrent additional events such as a continental market in the High Street and Bank Street.
 - The TM also co-ordinated the paperwork for the use of the council's entertainment license for those areas of the town covered by it.
 - TM also sent out letter to residents around College Road area advising them of festival and funfair at Lockmeadow and providing event contact details.

- The Chairman of MRFC was David Knight who liaised with the police over the event. There were no Security Industry Authority (SIA) stewards.
- The event plan was very basic, for the use of the committee only.
- MBC had costs that were not recovered from MRFC such as barriers provided for road closures, managing barriered access to river, clean up and installation of taps at toilets for River users, additional cleaning all provided by Environmental Services.
- No MBC staff time was charged and all Environmental Services' costs were absorbed into departmental budgets.

2.5 2008

- 2008 saw the introduction of Police charging. The MRFC chairman agreed a fee direct with the Police. A condition of this was the introduction of SIA stewards for security and safety and to reduce police presence. The committee were advised as to the level of SIA stewards required. Unfortunately the use of Lockmeadow SIA stewards (who were employed there and could not leave the area) meant that the level of stewarding was too low and not within the agreed number.
- A low key Friday night event in 2008 had no SIA Stewards as this was 'omitted' from event plan.
- Funding from MBC required adequate safety and security, hence introduction of SIA stewards to comply with Police requirements.

2.6 2009

- The introduction of the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) required a more robust event management plan which had to be signed off by SAG. This only happened in last week before the festival. The contract for the use of MBC's entertainment license was on condition of SAG's approval of the event plan. There were also issues over MRFC not being a legal entity which made it difficult for them to obtain public liability insurance directly. This was ultimately taken out by Chairman's company.
- Again there were issues over adequate SIA stewarding. Not as many were contracted as stated on Event Plan, which also did not clarify that 5 were Lockmeadow stewards not paid for, nor able to leave their area of employment.
- The cost of Policing increased, and again was agreed directly with the Chairman.
- MBC Environmental Services again provided additional support, staff, cleaning, clearing of pathways etc.

2.7 2010

- Martin Cox became the new MRFC Chairman.
- MBC took over safety and security, employing the security company, providing SIA stewards directly and creating the stewarding plan. Funding no longer paid directly to MRFC but paid to suppliers directly. 50% of Police charge (£6,000) paid by MBC plus all the security costs. MBC also produced the event plan and traffic management plan.
- Expenditure exceeded £10k budget at £12,551 and did not include the significant amount of staff time taken up by the event as the Council was now directly involved.

- The Funfair organiser submitted a separate event plan and provided their own stewarding.
- MBC met with Kent Police to get police costs limited to £8,000. (We were advised charges could be £25,000 in the future).
- Event Plan & Traffic Management Plan co-authored by MBC with event information provided by the Chairman.
- The issue of public liability insurance took to very end to resolve and contract for use of MBC licence in jeopardy until last minute.
- Issues arose regarding stalls holders paying trading licence fees.
- A Visitor survey was conducted to gauge the economic benefit to the businesses in the town centre. Surveys were carried out by 8 Surveyors between 2 pm and 5.30pm and 6pm and 9.30 pm on Saturday 31st July. The 2 teams were located in the town centre and 2 along the river. 687 surveys were filled out. The Police estimate that during the day approximately 20,000 people visited the event. This document is attached at Appendix I. It should be noted that anecdotal information from the businesses in the town centre disputes the value of the economic impact of the event with many of the retailers seeing a downturn in trade as shoppers avoided coming into the town.

2.8 2011

- Event now managed by team of people from MBC and MRFC with a formal chain of command.
- MBC Associate Director was overall Event Manager with MRFC Chairman as the Production Manager. This was because the safety of the event was dependent on licence requirements that any major incident that would be co-ordinated by MBC.
- MBC team set up event control and were on the ground during the event.
- Police costs of £8,000 agreed in meeting between Police and MBC. It was heavily suggested by the Police that this would be the last year at this level of charge before the full community rate would apply: circa £25,000.
- Direct cost to MBC £13,214 this again did not include any staff costs apart from Borough Services which were included in total event cost (absorbed by individual MBC budgets). Actual staff costs were much higher than previous years, covering a longer period and with the addition of event control staff on day. Real cost to MBC estimated at over £20,000 plus time impact on MBC staff and their ability to do other work.

2.9 2012

The event did not take place as this was Olympic year and many other events were held in the Borough.

2.10 2013

- MBC were not able to sustain the level of officer time to deliver event.
- Event Management company was employed by MBC.
- Costs: £10,100 for event company, MBC also paid Security Company but not police, MBS costs approximately £3,500. Total cost to MBC £25,972 not including staff time.

2.11 2014 & 2015

The MRFC disbanded and there have been no formal managed events. Approximately 50-60 boats turned up both years and congregated on the river in the normal area, there were no officially organised events or activities.

Financial Implications

- 2.12 The extent to which the Committee can afford to contribute towards the cost of the River Festival in future years is constrained by the level of resources available. Greater detail on the 2015/16 budget position and the early stage plans for the 2016/17 Medium Term Financial Strategy are set out elsewhere on this agenda.
- 2.13 Within the assumptions currently built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy, already approved by Policy and Resources Committee, is a need for an immediate saving of £1.6m across all council services and throughout the five years from 2016/17 to 2020/21 there is a need to identify savings of £3.7m.
- 2.14 Within the current resources provided to this Committee's service managers by Council there are services that cannot currently manage the expected level of service provision within the budget allocated. This is causing an immediate pressure on budgets. Good financial management would suggest that resolving these issues must be the Committee's primary focus.
- 2.15 Before consideration of plans that incorporate new expenditure, such as support for the River Festival, the Committee must be aware of the need for financial savings and as set out and the need to balance the budgetary pressures in the Parks and Open Spaces and the Museum Services.

3. FESTIVALS AND EVENTS STRATEGY AND EVENTS CURRENTLY FUNDED BY MBC

- 3.1 MBC's Festivals and Events Strategy has a vision to:

"To develop a festivals and events programme that creates a lively and vibrant place to live, work and visit, whilst ensuring the sustainable use of the Borough's venues and;

That by 2017 Maidstone borough is recognised as a destination that hosts and develops high quality sustainable festivals and events; and cultivates community creativity for maximum economic benefit and social enjoyment."

- 3.2 MBC currently funds two festivals each year; these are The Mela which takes place in September and Proms in the Park which is held on the Saturday of the May bank holiday weekend. Both of these remain free to attendees.
- 3.3 Proms in the Park is delivered on our behalf by Parkwood Leisure Ltd as part of their contract to manage the Hazlitt Theatre. The budget for this was reduced in 2015 to £14,000 from £19,400 per annum.

- 3.4 The Mela has until this year been delivered in Partnership with Cohesion Plus. This year we have a specialist events consultant managing and delivering the event on our behalf with collaboration from Cohesion Plus, with the intention of commissioning the festival out from 2016. The net budget for this event is £15,500.
- 3.5 Income from other festivals and events organised by outside bodies, such as Ramblin' Man, is already accounted for in existing income targets in Parks and Open Spaces and Maidstone Culture & Leisure budgets.
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4. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

- 4.1 The Council's newly adopted Destination Management Plan (DMP), recognises that events have many positive impacts on local economies and communities. The DMP is focusing on ways to improve the impact of business and leisure events on the visitor economy – which in turn will support jobs and services for local people.
- 4.2 The DMP's actions will support the development of events with wider reach (actual or potential) – i.e. events that will draw visitors from further afield (from beyond Kent), and/or enhance the image of the area further afield as a vibrant place to visit.
- 4.3 The Shared Story says Maidstone is "Kent's capital for big events ... with tens of thousands at a time coming here for the South East's biggest pop concerts, classical extravaganzas, and business shows." This is a USP for Maidstone, so maintaining and strengthening the "capital for big events" status is a priority. It also means that there is significant events expertise in the Borough – in the big event venues as well as in the public agencies. The DMP should aim to tap into and make the most of this professional expertise.
- 4.4 Broadly, over the next three years, the aim is to achieve:
- **More partnership working** – between the big event venues themselves, between venues and the public agencies, and between venues and the tourism sector (especially accommodation providers)
 - **An "events-welcome" environment** – streamlining processes and provide toolkit to assist with traffic management and signing,
 - **Better event development** – a strategic, proactive approach to event development that supports the visitor economy, including attracting new events, nurturing/growing existing events, and clustering events for greater impact, in line with the Council's Festivals & Events Policy.
- 4.5 *The DMP action plan sets out six actions relating to events.*
- a) Create an Events Experts Group
 - b) Carry out an Audit & Gap Analysis
 - c) Develop an Events Organiser's Toolkit
 - d) Set up a 'No clash Diary)
 - e) Develop themed seasons/festivals inspired by the Shared Story and by major events
 - f) Develop a consumer facing 'Events for visitors Calendar'.

- 4.6 Under the County Town Theme of the DMP the river is recognised as an important asset.

Major investment plans have been identified for the river in the past. Realising some of these investments is critical to unlocking the full potential of the river for the visitor economy. Some of these investments are long term and unlikely to be completed within the lifetime of this plan but actions to move them forward need to begin now. The priorities are to make the river an attraction in its own right – a "must see" for visitors to Maidstone. To achieve that requires improving access, investing in visitor hubs along the river and enabling visitors to use the riverside as a pedestrian/ cycling green corridor to explore more of Maidstone and its countryside. This needs to be supported by events on the river and by marketing activity that profiles the river more strongly to target markets. One of the biggest challenges for improving the river is the very large number of single-interest groups. It is important to bring together all the interests and broker solutions to shared issues.

- 4.7 The DMP action plan sets out five actions relating to the river under the 'Improving the County Town's appeal to visitors' strand.
- a) Programme of enhancements and improvements to make the river more accessible and appealing to visitors.
 - b) Focus on strengthening visitor hubs on the river.
 - c) Create river-based events and activities.
 - d) Building up marketing activity over time linking to the countryside theme.
 - e) Prioritise river management.

5. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 5.1 If the Committee is minded to seek to re-establish the MRFC then consideration should be given to:

- How the organisation and management of the event will be resourced as the Council does not have any events officers and staff in the Maidstone Culture & Leisure Marketing & Sales Team are already fully committed delivering their service plan and achieving significant income targets.
- How the festival will be funded as this cannot be met from existing budgets. Officers' estimate for a new improved River Festival put the cost at £70 - £100k as many of the costs that were previously held internally will have to be outsourced for the reason set out above
- The pressure already evident on the committees budgeted resources from the services currently provided. MBC has already outsourced Proms in the Park and will be commissioning out The Mela from 2016 as we do not have the resources in-house to deliver these events.

6. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 In accordance with the aims and action plans from the new DMP the officer recommendation is that any proposal and decision to re-establish a MRFC should be taken to the DMP Steering Group which will now oversee the delivery of the DMP Action Plans. Any plan to deliver a new River Festival would require wide partner and stakeholder buy-in and engagement if a new River Festival were to become a reality.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 Committee to decide on the potential to reinstate a MRFC; the appropriate vehicle to do this; membership of such a committee; funding sources for a River Festival and MBC member and potential staff involvement.

8. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Festivals and events are a clear contributor to the Council's Strategic Plan Priorities 1 & 2 and the adopted Festivals & Events Strategy.	Dawn Hudd, Head of Commercial & Economic Development 14 Aug 15
Risk Management	None at this stage	
Financial	The financial implications are set out in paragraphs 2.12 to 2.15.	Paul Riley, Head of Finance 21 Aug 15
Staffing	Staffing implications will arise if the Committee is minded to reinstate the MRFC. Either budget will be required for additional staff or existing staff time will have to be diverted from other projects which will impact on delivery or existing service plan actions.	Dawn Hudd, Head of Commercial & Economic Development 14 Aug 15
Legal	It is imperative that the Borough Council's involvement in any festivals and events is appropriately documented so that risks, rewards and responsibilities are clearly allocated between the respective parties involved.	John Scarborough Head of Legal Partnership 21 Aug 2015
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	None at this stage	
Environmental/Sustainable Development	None	
Community Safety	None at this stage	

Human Rights Act	None	
Procurement	None at this stage	
Asset Management	None	

9. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: River Festival Survey 2010

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Destination Management Plan 2015
Festivals and Events Policy 2014