

Heritage, Culture & Leisure

3 November 15

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

Yes

The Social Festival Review

Final Decision-Maker	Heritage, Culture & Leisure Committee
Lead Head of Service	Head of Commercial & Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	MCL Marketing and Sales Manager Laura Dickson
Classification	Public
Wards affected	N/a

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. The evaluation and the lessons learned from this year's Social Festival set out in this report be noted.
2. Taking account of this evaluation and the additional measures proposed to address all of the issues raised, consideration be given to granting permission for the Social Festival to be held in Mote Park in 2016 subject to the organisers being granted an appropriate licence for the event.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all -
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough -
 - Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Corporate Leadership Team	20 October 2015
Committee – Heritage Culture & Leisure	3 November 2015

The Social Festival Review

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Social Festival has taken place in Mote Park for the past three years – 2013, 2014 and 2015. In view of the rising number and significant nature of the complaints received following the event this year officers have carried out a full evaluation of the Social Festival and this report presents the findings of this review for Committee to consider before deciding whether to support the event in 2016.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Social Festival is run by local events promoter Luke Bendall and has its own website <http://www.thesocialfestival.com/>
- 2.2 For the past three years Mr Bendall has hired Mote Park to hold the event in mid-September. Although a comprehensive event plan was submitted and all the necessary licences obtained, the last two years have seen an increase in the number of complaints received from residents. The event was considered by the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) which confirmed that a number of operational issues were not adequately addressed in the management of the event and its impact on the surrounding area. These on-going issues present a reputational risk to the authority.
- 2.3 Maidstone Borough Council has received a fee from the organisers each year for hire of the park for the event plus a share of ticket sales. A deposit has also been taken to cover the cost of any park reinstatement works and clear up. This year a sum of £1,176.41 has been withheld by the Council to recover costs associated with clean up after the event. It is important to both take the complaints seriously and evaluate this event in the round.
- 2.4 Well organised festivals and events are recognised for their ability to produce benefits for the local economy, bring life to an area, create interest in the area and reflect the place.
- 2.5 With its focus on younger audiences the Social Festival does make a distinctive contribution to the Council's Festivals and Events Strategy which looks

"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"

- 2.6 The value of festival and events to Maidstone visitor economy is highlighted in newly adopted Destination Management Plan (DMP) action strand – 'Improving the impact of events on the visitor economy' and the DMP shared story which 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'.

2.7 Over 10,000 people attended the Social Festival this year and this made a positive contribution to the local economy. Using industry standard measures, it is estimated that close to £1m of additional income was achieved through expenditure in bars, restaurants and hotels. This equates to around £100 for each of the 10,000+ visitors.

3.0 COMPLAINTS AND ISSUES RAISED

3.1 In total, 53 written and phoned complaints were received from residents, compared with 19 written and phoned complaints last year. Complaints were also received from local ward members. The issues raised by complainants were also recognised in the formal review of the event by the Safety Advisory Group. These complaints covered noise, traffic management, anti-social behaviour and litter.

3.2 Noise

Noise complaints (15 in total) came from areas around Mote Park and Bearsted. As a result of the complaints about noise last year the event was moved further into the park (and therefore further away from housing) and noise monitoring equipment was installed. Although noise conditions were not breached the SAG review noted that the 'spillage' from the base sound may have been a particular cause for concern.

3.3 Traffic Management

Despite the existence of a traffic management plan and the creation of a dedicated parking and taxi area at the Leisure Centre, there was a significant increase in the numbers of vehicles seeking to park or drop off in residential streets close to the park. The haphazard nature of this parking with complaints of double parking and the blocking of driveways and parking on green spaces were reported by residents and local members.

3.4 Anti-Social Behaviour

Several complainants raised issues about anti-social behaviour in the residential streets close to the park. These complainants cited evidence of abusive behaviour, defecating in the streets, and garden trespass. The inadequate provision of temporary toilets at park entrances has been accepted by the organisers as a shortcoming in their management plans and the absence of stewards at the entrances a contributor to these problems.

3.5 Litter

Most complainants reported extensive litter around the streets near Mote Park. The volume of litter increased substantially when the attendees departed, arising in part from the selling of legal highs by vendors which resulting in mini canisters being dropped on the ground, and flyers handed out by other event promoters. MBC staff spent three hours on Sunday morning clearing the waste from Mote Avenue, Lower Road and Upper Road Estates.

- 3.6 In conclusion, it is accepted by the organiser of the Social Festival and by SAG that whilst the event was regarded as well organised within the park it did create a series of serious problems for residents in the surrounding streets. These issues, particularly those involving anti-social behaviour and cars being parked across driveways and blocking streets are unacceptable and should have been mitigated by better planning and control.
- 3.7 It is therefore recognised that whilst the organisation of the event within the park rests with the organiser, it is Maidstone Borough Council's responsibility, with its SAG partners, and the organiser, to ensure the event is well managed within the borough and achieves the positive aims set out in our Festivals and Events Strategy and avoids reputational risk.
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4.0 AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 4.1 Do not allow The Social Festival to be held in Mote Park in the future.
- 4.2 Do not allow The Social Festival to be held in Mote Park in the future but work with the event organiser to find an alternative venue in the Borough.
- 4.3 Allow The Social Festival to be held in Mote Park in the future but only within an agreed event management plan which addresses all the issues raised in this report, set out in the contract with the organisers and coordinated by a dedicated event manager supported by MBC.
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5.0 PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 There are few options within the borough for an outdoor music event for an audience of 10,000 plus people. Detling Showground can accommodate such an event but is not well served by public transport and in all probability would see more people arriving by car causing local congestion and problems. Mote Park plays an important role in a more sustainable location for major events and has a successful track record with events such as the Rambling Man and the Mela. For these reasons it is suggested that if Committee chooses to allow the Social Festival to be held again it should be held in Mote Park.
- 5.2 The Social Festival attracts (mainly) young people to a music event which social media reporting shows enjoys considerable popularity. Over 10,000 people visited the event in 2015, 40% of whom came from the Maidstone and wider Kent area. It brings economic benefits to the borough and supports the evening economy of the town centre.

- 5.3 A well organised Social Festival which follows a rigorously applied management plan placing specific obligations on the organisers for the events impact, inside and outside Mote Park, and operating under the guidance and control of a dedicated MBC event manager, would address the lessons learnt in this evaluation.
- 5.4 This approach places considerable responsibilities on the organiser which will add to their costs in running the event. In preparing this report, officers have met with the organisers to discuss this and they have indicated that if Committee choose to support the event in 2016 they will meet these obligations and the costs attributed to them. These obligations would be set out in a new formal contract.
- 5.5 It is therefore proposed that if Committee supports the event for 2016 an event management plan will be prepared with the organisers, MBC and SAG to cover all issues raised in this report. This will direct the effective organisation of the event within and outside the park in order to deliver a successful, safe and enjoyable festival. All costs associated with the event management plan will be met by the organisers. These would include:
- a) Additional stewarding at event entry and exit points, before, during and after the event.
 - b) A traffic management plan which provides adequate signed and controlled off and on-site parking for cars, coaches and taxis, including drop off arrangements and stewarding to ensure full implementation of this plan including enforcement during the event.
 - c) If required by SAG, policing at the event and in surrounding streets before, during and after the event.
 - d) a comprehensive clean-up programme and litter removal agreed in advance for the park and surrounding area.
 - e) All communications before, during and after the event with local ward councillors, local residents.
- 5.6 In addition to the above a dedicated event expert will be appointed by and responsible to MBC for ensuring the management plan is comprehensive and rigorously applied before, during and after the event. This person will be the Council's lead contact liaising with ward councillors, officers and SAG members throughout the event. All costs associated with this role will be reflected in the fee charged to the event organiser. The management plan will also ensure that steps are taken in the planning and direction of the stages to insulate sound better and reduce external noise levels.
- 5.7 In conclusion, if Committee choose to support the event under these terms in 2016, the Head of Commercial and Economic Development service will take the steps necessary to ensure that preparations are progressed as outlined above.
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6.0 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	This is a valuable event in the Maidstone live music calendar which aims to appeal to a diverse range of audiences and therefore to objectives to 'securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough'.	Head of Commercial and Economic Development 14/10/2015
Risk Management	As with any major event a comprehensive risk assessment will be provided by the event organiser as part of the event application and contained in the event management plan regulated via the SAG.	Head of Commercial and Economic Development 14/10/2015
Financial	This event makes an important contribution to the existing Parks & Leisure income target and this income would need to be replaced if the event did not take place in future.	Head of Commercial and Economic Development 14/10/2015
Staffing	The additional contract measures will require additional staff input from MBC, this will be charged to the organiser and included in the fee for the event.	Head of Commercial and Economic Development 14/10/2015
Legal	A new contract with additional clauses will need to be written with clearer responsibilities for the organiser as set out in this report.	Head of MKLS
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	N/A	
Environmental/ Sustainable Development	N/A	
Community Safety	This will be covered by the contract and the additional measures proposed with SAG.	Head of Commercial and Economic Development 14/10/2015
Human Rights Act	N/A	
Procurement	N/A	
Asset Management	N/A	

7.0 REPORT APPENDICES

None

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None