



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Regeneration and Sustainable Development Cabinet Board

1st June 2020

Report of the Head of Property and Regeneration S Brennan

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All

Outdoor and Town Centre Events During the Current Covid19 Crisis

Purpose of the Report:

To seek Members' approval for all major events either organised or facilitated by the Council to be cancelled until further notice and specifically, for the cancellation of Neath September Fair and the Neath Food and Drink festival that takes place in October.

Executive Summary:

To obtain approval for all major events either organised or facilitated by the Council, and specifically Neath September Fair and the Neath Food and Drink Festival, to be cancelled until further notice as a result of the implications of the Covid-19 virus.

Background:

The Council is responsible for organising and/or facilitating the delivery of a number of events across the County Borough throughout the year. Many of these events are held at the same time each year and have built up over time as the events mature and improve with traders travelling across the country from event to event. In normal circumstances these events are fully supported by the Council as they deliver positive economic and social benefits to our

communities. However we are currently operating in uncertain and challenging times following the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

These events require a lot of pre-planning and organisation with many having a lead in time of up to six months. As referred to above many are supported by traders who attend events across the country through pre-booked slots. As a consequence there is little room for manoeuvre in changing the date of an event as it is highly likely that traders will no longer be able to attend due to existing commitments elsewhere. Given the current emergency associated with COVID-19 and the measures that have been put in place nationally to control the spread of the virus, this report seeks a decision on whether planned events should be regrettably cancelled until further notice.

To aid consideration, details of two events regularly arranged by staff within the Property and Regeneration section are set out below. As stated above these are only two examples of events which are held across the County Borough annually, but will give Members a flavour of the general risks associated with the continuation of events at this moment in time.

Neath Fair

Neath Street Fair has been operating for over 700 years and runs concurrent with the Fun Fair on Milland Road Car Park operated by the Showman's Guild under a tenancy from the Council. The event commences on the second Tuesday of September each year. These are major events with the Street Fair in particular taking up significant officer time to plan and organise over many lead-in months to enable the event to run smoothly and wherever possible within budget.

Last year Neath Fair operated successfully with a surplus of circa £21,000. This excludes the significant cost of officer time, necessary to deliver successful and safe events, which if added would have resulted in us achieving a break even position.

Overall the process associated with organising the Street Fair starts in late March/early April when applications forms are sent to last year's traders with a deadline for those wanting to reserve pitches of late April/early May. In this respect we are therefore already several weeks behind. Rent invoices for the reserved pitches go out mid/late May with a deadline for payment of early July.

Officers then reconfigure the pitch layout plan and approach traders on the replacement list to let the remaining pitches wherever possible. The filling of the remaining pitches takes a considerable amount of staff time and effort.

This year due to the COVID-19 crisis there has been a delay in starting this process. Many of the Street Traders go from event to event around the country and need a significant lead in time to plan their calendar. Over the last few weeks there has been a high number of traders enquiring whether or not this year's event is going to go ahead and pressing for a decision which we have not yet been able to provide.

Each week that the process is delayed, affects the ability of officers to successfully organise/plan the event with real concern of fewer traders attending which could mean a significant financial loss for the Council. The knock on effect could be reduced visitor numbers and a smaller lower quality event which could also affect the financial viability for those Street and Fun Fair Traders attending.

Notwithstanding the fact that fewer traders and attractions will draw on fewer visitors, the likely health and safety concerns associated with attending events will also deter many visitors. For those that do attend, we would need to ensure that the event is properly managed to ensure social distancing is observed. This would be a difficult exercise within the town centre as the position of the stalls will restricts the width of the thoroughfare thereby forcing people into a smaller space.

The Showman's Guild has advised that they are prepared to attend the Fun Fair this year but only if government guidelines allow it and that it is safe for them and visitors to do so.

In view of the above, an early decision needs to be made as to whether or not to go ahead with this year's event as a prolonged delay will further impact upon the logistics of organising and planning the event in addition to its viability.

Neath Horse Fair

On the second Thursday in September of each year, coinciding with Neath Fair, the Council secure control over Neath Cattle Market for the annual Horse Fair. Council staff attend on site and endeavour to control horse movements on the day. This is not an organised event

as such but rather a historical one whereby horse traders just turn up on the day. To date the Agricultural Auctioneers who lease the site have not been contacted to see if they would be willing to make the site available for this year. In any event, this takes up valuable staff resources, does not generate income and is only attended by a small number of interested parties.

Whilst this event takes place annually, it has very little public interest and is only attended by a very small group of individuals. A further report will be brought forward in due course about cancelling this event permanently.

Current Crisis

It is clear that the events require significant staff time to plan and deliver but also require several other parties including the Police, St Johns Ambulance and Streetcare Services to be able to commit staff resources. All parties need to commit to enable the Council to operate the event safely for staff, traders and the general public.

As noted above, it is far from certain that even if the Fair and other similar events were to proceed that the Street Traders and Showman's Guild Members will want to take responsibility for the health and financial risk of attending the event. If they do take on board this responsibility, it is likely that they will be looking to secure a rent reduction/rebate.

The Showman's Guild and Street Traders already approached have advised many events throughout the Country have already been cancelled.

Please see below a list of the biggest named events that have been cancelled so far this year for reasons associated with COVID-19 (there are many smaller Charter street fairs that have been cancelled between April – August):-

- Royal Welsh Show Due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, the 2020 Royal Welsh Show event has been cancelled. The pinnacle event in the British agricultural calendar, the Royal Welsh Show, will be held on 19 – 22 July 2021 at the showground in Llanellwedd.
- Great Dorset Steam Fair's Thursday 27th – Monday 31st August 2020

- Salisbury City Council: All Street fair events cancelled due to Covid-19.
- The famous Appleby Horse Fair will not take place this year due to the coronavirus pandemic Scheduled to take place on 4-7 June, it dates back to the 12th century and sees the largest gathering of the Gypsy, Romany and Traveller community in Europe.
- The Hoppings Charter fair on Newcastle's Town Moor dates back to 1882 and usually attracts about 300,000 visitors over nine days. It was due to be held in June but organisers said it "simply cannot go ahead".

A number of the organisers of these cancelled events have done so regrettably but have indicated that it is a responsible course of action to take during these uncertain and challenging times. Reference has been made to protecting the safety and wellbeing of visitors, exhibitors, traders, staff and contractors, combined with the effect to the local area, towns, parishes and residents.

The impact upon other services has also been cited and the need to ensure that no undue pressure is placed on the scarce resources of our emergency services.

Financial Impacts:

Whilst the September Fair returned a surplus income of circa £21,000 in 2019, this does not take in to account the significant staff time involved that, in real terms, means it is effectively in a 'break even' position.

The Food and Drink Festival returned a small surplus income in 2019 but this included a £5,000 grant from Welsh Government, which is not available in 2020.

Integrated Impact Assessment

An integrated impact assessment is not required for this report.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

No implications.

Workforce Impacts:

No implications.

Legal Impacts:

No impacts. The holding of the Neath September Fair does stem from a historical charter which does stipulate that if the fair is to be held it shall be held in the September of each year.

Risk Management Impacts:

There are no risk management issues associated with this report.

Consultation:

There is no requirement for consultation in this instance.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that all major events either organised or facilitated by the Council, and specifically Neath September Fair and the Neath Food and Drink Festival, are cancelled until further notice and that delegated authority to be granted to the Director of Environment and Regeneration in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Property and Regeneration to determine when to rescind this order and allow the holding of events.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Due to the ongoing uncertainty surrounding Covid 19 there is a need to protect the safety and wellbeing of visitors, exhibitors, traders, staff and contractors, combined with the effect to the local area, towns, parishes and residents.

Also there is a need to protect the impact upon other services and to ensure that no undue pressure is placed on the scarce resources of emergency services.

Implementation of Decision:

The decision is proposed for immediate implementation and is to be dealt with under Urgency Action arrangements.

Appendices:

No appendices.

List of Background Papers:

None.

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