

**TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL  
SEPTEMBER 2021**

**GOOSE FAIR 2021**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Council will be aware, both from other reports (which this report should be read alongside), and the widespread impact, locally and throughout the country, of Coronavirus on public events and activities. The recent designation of Devon as an 'enhanced response area' has additionally highlighted the view of the public health authorities locally that:  
*'Devon's health and social care system is under extreme pressure due to high demand for services and the number of staff and patients affected by COVID-19'.*
- 1.2 The Council therefore finds itself in the position of ascertaining the extent to which a return to 'business as normal' – such as running Goose Fair on the large, or returning to meeting in the Council Chamber on the small scale, are (or are not) yet safely/appropriately deliverable in all the circumstances.
- 1.3 Goose Fair itself is a major undertaking, both by the Council and a range of partners. In the exceptional circumstances pertaining this year this report reflects:
  - a) That in all the circumstances your officers are, with regret, unable to recommend proceeding with Goose Fair in 2021 on safety grounds in the round;
  - b) However, if it were to be the settled view of the Council that the event should proceed then the General Manager has identified a range of measures to try and mitigate some of those safety issues in part, where possible.
- 1.4 This approach is unusual and reflects the intractability of the situation and the significance of the event. In general the facts constitute common ground – pandemic, capacity to deliver, public health position etc. However, other factors such as appetite for risk, assessments of the extent to which mitigations can meaningfully address risk etc, are necessarily subjective.

- 1.5 This report is therefore intended to provide the basis upon which Council may consider the issue in the round, how best it wishes to proceed and (in either event), provide certainty to stakeholders.

## **2. THE CURRENT POSITION**

- 2.1 In any given year the delivery of Goose Fair is a major challenge for an organisation of the modest size of the Town Council. It is additionally substantially dependent upon the contributions of a range of partners – from Raynet (communications) to the AA (signage), landlords (park and ride sites) to the Borough Council (fairground) and a range of other providers in arenas such as health and safety, public transport, health, voluntary organisations, service providers etc. There are also the showmen and traders who populate and sit at the heart of the event itself together with the emergency services. Providing a safe, sustainable and enjoyable experience for all – stakeholders, residents and visitors alike sits at the heart of the event. In 2020 it was necessary to cancel due to the Covid 19 pandemic.
- 2.2 Looking ahead, insofar as delivering the event in 2021 is concerned, there are two primary areas of challenge:-
  - a) Coronavirus - the effect of the pandemic/endemic, its impact on public health, health services, the normal operation of civil society and the extent to which a safe and secure environment can be provided;
  - b) Linking to the above, the impact of the much diminished capacity of the Town Council following the unprecedented measures of savings necessitated over the past 18 months by Coronavirus (and the accompanying decision of Government not to extend to local Councils the income replacement schemes available to principal authorities).

Turning to each of these challenges in turn:

### **CORONAVIRUS**

- 2.3 Looking to experiences elsewhere there have been some clear reported relationships between certain large scale events and virus transmission. Most recently evidenced by the spike in cases attributed to "Boardmasters" at Newquay. There is also the unprecedented advice from visitcornwall asking visitors to avoid the county unless they have pre-booked and those who do visit to test regularly.
- 2.4 Other local open air events – such as the July Plymouth Music Festival and Nottingham Goose Fair (second Wednesday in

October) have been cancelled by the respective Councils. The latter citing the need to secure residents health and public safety in view of large numbers of people attending and mingling outside in a restricted area. Looking further ahead at other outdoor/tented events the Padstow Christmas Festival was cancelled, organisers citing the likelihood of autumn placing more pressure on the NHS, a resurgence of flu and other respiratory diseases as well as Covid infections. This also ties in with the recent 'enhanced response area' designation for the peninsula (para 1.1 refers).

- 2.5 As at the latter part of August Government figures indicated that, on a national basis, in the UK only Northern Ireland was shown as having a higher rating for number of cases of Coronavirus per 100,000 population than Devon, Cornwall and Somerset which with Glasgow are a national 'hot spot' <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/interactive-map/cases> According to the Office for National Statistics in the week commencing 23rd August, 2021 UK Covid 19 deaths rose for the ninth consecutive week (6.7% increase on the previous week). It would therefore appear to be a reasonable assumption that, with the move toward autumn and those factors previously outlined, the best that could be hoped for is no change in the public health situation between now and October. A perhaps more likely position being a deterioration, not least given the recent reluctance of Government Ministers to rule out another lockdown in 2021.
- 2.6 Accordingly, and being 6 weeks away, the position with regard to Coronavirus in October when Goose Fair would be held remains uncertain and, at the least, of continuing concern. This is also the time when incidence of the disease can reasonably be expected to increase as schools (September) and universities (October) return and weather conditions come to favour the virus more. It is also evident that a group most at risk of transmission at the time of writing are children and young people who make up a significant cohort of event attendees. Autumn is also typically the beginning of the "flu season" when (even in a "normal year") demands on health services increase and it is expected to coincide with the commencement of need for a vaccine 'booster' programme for the population.
- 2.7 There is consequently a judgement call to be made as to the extent to which a safety led event can be delivered in the context of Coronavirus. This is particularly complicated because, whilst many mitigations can potentially be

introduced, the primary mitigation for outdoor events – control of overall numbers (and hence visitor density/proximity on-site) is not achievable on the Goose Fair template. This reflects the nature of the event and constrained site layout (principally one road without refuge facility) in an area which cannot be closed to (or have restricted) pedestrian movements.

- 2.8 This gives rise to an underlying variable ie annual attendance is generally estimated, subject to weather and other factors, to be anywhere between 10,000 and 20,000 accompanied by both surges and troughs in numbers over the course of the day. Put another way, the most significant factor in site Covid safety will be the one aspect the Council cannot control. It can seek to provide secondary measures - reduce stall width/numbers, signage, hygiene measures, try and encourage movement via stewards etc but it cannot prevent or regulate entry to a site where the public have legal rights of access.
- 2.9 Consequently, there will unavoidably be an element whereby this aspect of event safety will be dependent on factors outside Council control - how many people attend and when (but which will remain the operating responsibility/liability of the Council as organiser). The judgement for Council, insofar as this specific factor is concerned, is therefore necessarily how confident it can be that visitor numbers will, throughout the day and at different times of the day, be below any level which could give rise to health concerns.
- 2.10 This is understood to be a reason why street events such as the Nottingham Goose Fair (cancelled) have been disproportionately affected in 2021, whereas ticketed/managed access events such as Devon County Show (or events with testing in place) or large and unconstrained footprints have proceeded, with precautions, reflecting amongst other factors the ability to regulate attendee number related risk. It also reflects that, according to the Department for Health and Social Care, whilst extensive research and modelling has been done around outdoor ticketed events (football, tennis, concerts (outdoor and in) etc) there is no comparable data for outdoor events that are open to general access by the public in constrained areas - such as Goose Fair.
- 2.11 In the alternative, it is recognised that the Borough Council component of the event is considered viable by WD/South

Hams (notwithstanding it has a much larger staffing resource to draw on). More significantly, it adopts an alternative arrangement which, to large extent, 'outsources' risk/liability for the fairground areas away from the Council (ie it is not the site operator). This is something the Town Council cannot do this year for the areas under its control (where it is the site operator and therefore responsible/liable). Accordingly WDBC takes the view for the Bedford and Bus Station Car Parks that:

*We are intending to go ahead with the West Devon car park rides/fun fairs and will be providing the operator with safety advice regarding covid as per the Government advice. This is particularly important following the Enhanced Response Area designation. The Enhanced Response Area designation does not require Councils to not go ahead with events, or provide Councils with the powers to stop events going ahead. It does however re-emphasise some key public health advice for residents and visitors. <https://www.devon.gov.uk/coronavirus-advice-in-devon/enhanced-response-area/>*

*Our advice for organisers of large scale events is to follow the guidance that has been produced to ensure that the event is as safe as possible for staff and visitors.*

*Here is a link to that guidance <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-covid-19/events-and-attractions>*

- 2.12 Council will note that the crowd management measures recommended <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-covid-19/events-and-attractions#customers-4> present particular challenges to the Town Council – matters such as ticketing, staggered check in processes, queue management, controlling access in higher risk areas, Covid passes etc are not achievable. Others such as QR codes, enhanced hygiene measures etc can be looked at. Linking to the next item a request has been made to West Devon Borough Council as to the potential availability of staffing resource to assist the Town Council, and any response will be reported to the Meeting.

#### ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

- 2.13 The second area of concern is Town Council (and to some extent partner) organisational capacity to deliver. This reflects the unprecedented pressures placed on the Council by Covid including (and previously reported in more detail) but not limited to:
- difficulties encountered in recruitment and retention of staff;
  - linking to the above continuing operation on/from a skeleton staffing establishment;
  - both the immediate and accumulated impact upon remaining staff welfare and health – physical and mental,

- of operating for extended periods of time (covering multiple jobs, activities and responsibilities);
- as applicable, the capacity, rigour and vulnerabilities of prospective partner organisations.

- 2.14 This also follows on from aspects of event management identified in 2019 (when staffing levels were almost full) in connection with a potentially serious safety (reckless drink driving) incident and recommended extra future safety measures being addressed through the revised Event Management Plan.
- 2.15 Normally the core delivery team for Goose Fair in the lead up to the event comprises up to approximately 5 full time equivalent (fte) staff. This year, depending on method of calculation, and timing, it is diminished to between 1.5fte and 2.5fte for reasons previously reported.
- 2.16 On this factor alone the Council therefore finds itself currently in the position where it has fewer staff than at any time in the past ten years, fewer staff with experience of delivering the Goose Fair and higher exposure to the risk that either it – or one or more of its key partners could find itself unable to support the event (with or without the complications posed by Covid). There is also some risk of loss of staff at or around the event as not all have received vaccinations.
- 2.17 That does not mean staff numbers cannot, on the day, to a degree be mitigated by varied working arrangements, longer hours, more volunteers etc. But neither experience then, nor resource in planning and preparation, can be materially improved.
- 2.18 There is also, as referred to above, the possibility that delivery of the event might place additional pressure upon an already reduced and stressed staffing establishment - both in the run up to, and following the event, alongside potential consequential impacts on ability to deliver public safety on the day itself.
- 2.19 There are some other uncertainties in the current year. These include the extent to which there is, or is not, appetite amongst the community for the event during a pandemic. Local social media, though anecdotal, suggests there is no clear consensus either way. Council will also be aware it no longer has access to the park and ride site formerly at Harford Bridge. It has been unable to replace this and the only current

operating contingency would involve the redirection of traffic approaching from the east to the "football pitch" on Whitchurch Down (or provide no 'eastern' car park).

- 2.20 Whilst this is possible, in principle, it represents a less than satisfactory solution insofar as it involves bringing traffic through the town thereby increasing traffic flows at a time road closures are in situ, will require substantial additional signage, potentially encourage more sporadic parking elsewhere on the Down (to avoid payment) and/or also increase pedestrian footfall into the event. The Tamar Lions, have, as the Council will be aware, been obliged to withdraw from delivering the Yelverton Park and Ride (due to capacity/health issues) and that service will now be taken on by the Tavistock Lions.
- 2.21 Turning to the views of the event co-ordinator - the General Manager indicates, 'should it be the will of Council to proceed with the event, there has been review, monitoring and incorporation of the latest government guidance, while assessing other comparable best practice approaches and learning from current comparable case studies (e.g. Boardmasters/Devon County Show) within the event planning process with the primary aim of reducing risk and implementing appropriate mitigating measures, where reasonably practicable, specific to the pandemic and other aspects arising from the drink driving incident in 2019 and fire service feedback.
- 2.22 The General Manager continues that, with the above in mind, if Council decided to go ahead, there is an approach that could be taken regarding risk mitigations for areas of concern which are foreseeable. These measures take into account such considerations as congested areas, free movement of people, crowd density, energetic activity and staff and public welfare. Such prospective mitigating measures for Goose Fair delivery include:
- 1. It has been identified that there are key areas within the event where crowd density restricts free movement of people, and therefore almost certainly prevents the ability of visitors to safely socially distance. Areas identified include the auction at the entrance to Bedford Hotel, access routes in front of Bedford Square and on Abbey Bridge. An alternative location has been identified for the auction opposite Chapel Street and stalls have either been reduced, removed or modified on*

*Abbey Bridge and in front of Bedford Square to increase the width of public walkways and to provide additional break out areas. In addition to this, to support social distancing, the depth of stalls on Plymouth Road would be reduced by at least 10ft to provide a wider public space throughout its length, and significant changes to the orientation/layout of Alexander Centre and Guildhall car-park have been agreed to assist with free movement/crowd density. Russell Street set up and stewarding arrangements would be modified and enhanced specific to dealing with lessons arising from an historic drink driving incident. For key areas of concern where crowd displacement intervention is foreseeable, SIA qualified staff would be hired for the event. The above mitigations will also address concerns identified by the fire service around access due to crowd density.*

- 2. Specific to energetic activity, (which will increase the likelihood of risk of airborne transmission), e.g. showmen's activities (Bedford Square/Guildhall car-park), the layout has been modified, which will provide safer access/egress and queuing arrangements, and the ability to zone off the areas if deemed necessary as assessed by the event organisers and external health and safety consultant.*
- 3. Event messaging would include signage throughout, specific to social distancing, hygiene and encouraging the use of face masks where appropriate. This would include sanitiser stations and signage at the main event entrance points, public toilets and within Russell Street. In addition, the frequency and regime for cleaning the public toilets and waste management arrangements would be modified and increased specific to covid-19. All exhibitors would be advised around their expectations, with a zero tolerance approach regarding non-compliance, on such aspects as hygiene arrangements, control of customers and ventilation of trading space. The primary pre event media promotion would focus on covid-19 safety and alterations to the park and ride arrangements, rather than promoting from an aspect of increasing attendee numbers, as a crowd density mitigation.*
- 4. Members will be aware of recent media coverage specific to the imminent implementation of NHS COVID Passports. If government states the COVID passports are mandatory, e.g. for crowds of 20,000, then Goose Fair 2021 would not be feasible (ie it would be*

- cancelled) due to such aspects as residential, user rights of way, access, layout of the event and if such an intervention were to be controlled at a few entrance/exit points this would be contrary to good practice of using for entrance/exit points to reduce the risk of congestion.*
- 5. Specific to staff welfare, on the main point, e.g. of entrance as identified above, and on key areas along Plymouth Road, marquees will be erected comparable to the control centre in Russell Street. This will provide for prolonged periods of the event - separation/screening of the stewards from visitors, while aiding with regards to such aspects as covid-19 safety messaging/mitigations (signage/sanitisation) and lost children.*
  - 6. Discussions have been held with all key stakeholders/partner organisations around event requirements and contingencies e.g. isolation of key workers/stakeholders. All contracted providers have reported effective contingencies to ensure that service delivery is believed to be achievable for 2021 and some have outlined modified arrangements, e.g. the external health and safety consultant has actioned a 'buddy arrangement'. It is worth noting, changes to previous operating practices for 2021 will require an increase in expenditure, with the inevitable reduction in income due to such aspects as identified in 1. The prospective operating attendance period for both SWAST and St Johns Ambulance has also been increased in recognition of the re-evaluation of the event risks. Park and ride providers, Stagecoach have modified their arrangements, specific to increasing pick-up/drop off frequency in recognition of the reduction in seating capacity.*
  - 7. Two previously reported concerns relate to the loss of the Harford Bridge park and ride site and staffing capacity to deliver the event. Re: the park and ride facility, a new location has been assessed (football pitch on Whitchurch Down) and is deemed fit for purpose. It is recognised that this will increase traffic within the one way TTRO infrastructure but this is off-set by the challenges of signposting visitors from Okehampton route to the Gulworthy and Yelverton park and ride facilities which would be problematic. Specific to capacity, the arrangements for the preparation of the event have been reviewed to attempt to make sure the processes are as streamlined as is possible in this condensed period for delivery, and key partners and Councillors have been approached around volunteering*

*for the preparation arrangement and stewarding on the day to provide additional contingency around capacity. Due to the foreseeable additional pressure on staff, park and ride collection arrangements have been modified for 2021 and the Goose Fair reception would be cancelled.'*

### **3. CONCLUSION**

- 3.1 The foregoing section sets out the dilemma facing the Council and the potential extent, and limitations, of prospective mitigations if Council decides it wishes to proceed. As stated previously your officers are unable to recommend proceeding with the event, but acknowledge that is not the same as stating that the event is undeliverable. Rather that the risks of proceeding are uncharacteristically high for the Town Council which is not able to 'outsource' risk in the way that the Borough Council can. The report therefore endeavours to reflect the extent and limitations of the two main options available to the Council, in order that it can make an informed risk based choice.
- 3.2 It is recognised some of the risks could be mitigated in part, but that there will understandably be differing views in the assessment of the sufficiency of those mitigating provisions and risk tolerances. That reflects that the risks and challenges to safe delivery of Goose Fair in this exceptional year (and by no means solely in relation to Covid) for the public, staff and partners are dynamic, subsist at multiple levels both within the wider environment and the organisation and in many cases are outside of Council control.
- 3.3 However, as October approaches it is acknowledged that (in the absence of something so significant as a National Lockdown which takes a decision out of local hands) there comes a point where, to be fair to all stakeholders, the Council needs to make a firm commitment to either:-
- a) Deliver the event in all circumstances (excepting Government intervention); or
  - b) On balance decide not to deliver the event for 2021.
- 3.4 It is submitted that realistically the time to do that cannot be later than the September Meeting of Council.
- 3.5 To come to an agreed recommendation on the way forward is the dilemma your officers have grappled with. In the opinion of your Clerk, there is a real risk that either:
- a) Such mitigations as could be engaged, though they would improve the situation, would be insufficient to achieve an adequate level of assurance - ie in all the circumstances (not least the inability to lawfully manage numbers on-site should there be a good level of attendance), delivering the

event carries an uncharacteristically high level of risk (after mitigation), including in relation to public health and event safety;

- b) The pressure placed upon the organisation and its staff (most especially in light of the current staffing situation), or partners - either in the run up to, or in the aftermath of the event, may be such as to be unacceptably detrimental to Town and organisational wellbeing, effectiveness and reputation.

3.6 However, both your Officers acknowledge that, whilst not recommending the event proceed, subject to the measures as set out at para 2.22 it could potentially be delivered if that were the will of Council.

3.7 Your Officers fully recognise it is impossible to know whether either (or neither) approach is likely to be correct - too much depends on circumstances that cannot be predicted with assurance and lie outwith the control of the Council.

3.8 This report is therefore brought to Council in order that it may apply its own assessment of, and appetite for, risk in determining how the Council should proceed in the best interests of the community and the Town. In so doing your officers would invite Council, inter alia, to take into account the current and anticipated position in relation to the pandemic, the extent to which delivery (and the post-delivery phase) are sustainable within the staffing resource available given recent and current impacts within the delivery team, key worker risk, the mental/physical health and well-being of Council staff/others and the reputational implications associated with either course of action.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.1 That Tavistock Town Council either

- i) Cancel Goose Fair, 2021 with regret, having regard to:
  - a) the need to ensure residents/visitors health and public safety in situations where large numbers of people attend and mingle at outside events in a restricted area;
  - b) the adverse and deteriorating incidence of Covid 19 in Devon as assessed by the public health authorities - *'Devon's health and social care system is under extreme pressure due to high demand for services and the number of staff and patients affected by COVID-19'*; together with the expectation Autumn will place more pressure on the NHS, including the seasonal resurgence of flu and other respiratory diseases as well as Covid infections;

c) with due regard to the foregoing, the capacity of the Town Council and its partners to deliver the event with an acceptable level of assurance.

Or

- ii) Proceed with Goose Fair 2021
  - on the basis of the measures proposed by the General Manager in order to seek to mitigate the associated risks insofar as it is possible to do so in all the circumstances; and
  - strictly subject to detailed review and approval of the Event Management Plan, associated documentation and all proposed mitigating measures by the West Devon Safety Advisory Group (SAG) by not later than two weeks prior to the event taking place; and
  - make available a sum of up to a further £10,000 to enable the additional costs associated with mitigating measures to be met (and confirm that, in addition to the foregoing regarding increased costs, it will also underwrite any reduction of projected income arising in the designated budget head).
- iii) In either event the Council confirm its commitment to the future delivery of the Tavistock Goose Fair.

4.2 The instructions of Council are sought.

NOTE Health and Safety Executive Guidance states that a SAG be convened in accordance with

*The guiding principle is that events presenting a significant public safety risk (whether in terms of numbers and profile of people attending, or the nature of the event activity and/or the challenge of the environment) should be considered.*

**CARL HEARN  
TOWN CLERK  
SEPTEMBER 2021**