

Cabinet – 16 March 2022

Walsall Borough Bonfire Night – Future Proposals

Portfolio:	Councillor Butler – Clean and Green
Related portfolio:	Councillor Craddock – Health and Wellbeing Councillor Perry – Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities
Service:	Healthy Spaces
Wards:	All
Key decision:	No
Forward Plan:	Yes

1. Aim

- 1.1. Bonfire night is a centuries old tradition enjoyed by many. However, there are several associated issues, including health and safety, antisocial behaviour and animal welfare. Some of these issues can be mitigated through professionally organised public bonfire night events.

2. Summary

- 2.1. This report sets out options for how the council can provide bonfire events that are safe, accessible, enjoyable, affordable and sustainable.
- 2.2. The estimated net income generated by the preferred option is just over £8,000 (assuming 80% attendance). The maximum potential net income is £39,000.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That Cabinet approve traditional bonfire night events at Walsall Arboretum, King Georg V and Willenhall Memorial Park, and a further firework event to celebrate Diwali (Option D).

4. Report detail - Know

Background

- 4.1. Walsall Council has delivered bonfire and firework displays across the borough for several years. However, no events have taken place for 2 years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously events were held at four locations:
 - Walsall Arboretum.

- King George V (KG5), Bloxwich;
- Holland Park, Brownhills; and
- Willenhall Memorial Park (WMP).

4.2. Organised displays reduce the number of private events, which in turn reduces the negative issues associated with bonfire night, such as accidents, antisocial behaviour, neighbour disputes and animal welfare issues.

4.3. Attendance has varied over the years and is weather dependent, as shown in Table 1 below. The proximity of the date to 5 November also appears to be a factor in attendance numbers.

Table 1: Attendance and capacity at bonfire venues 2016 – 2019

Site & Capacity	2016	2017	2018	2019
KG5 Max 10,000	(22 Oct) 2,630	(28 Oct) 3,910	(5 Nov) 8,000	(5 Nov) 4536
Holland Park Max 3,000	(12 Nov) 2,598	(2 Nov) 2,312	(27 Oct) 1,350	(26 Oct) 493
WMP Max 4,500	(29 Oct) 2,129	(4 Nov) 4,618	(1 Nov) 3,000	(1 Nov) 1489
Walsall Arboretum Max 10,000	(17 Oct) 8,000	(5 Nov) 10,000	(3 Nov) 10,000	(2 Nov) 4066

4.4. In advance of 2019, the arboretum event was the only site that had electronic advance ticket sales. In 2019, all sites had electronic booking, with cash sales only available in advance from leisure facilities. This reduced risks on the night as there was no cash handling by staff. This is proposed to continue as electronic payments have become the norm during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.5. In 2019, the price of the events was increased. The charge at the arboretum was higher than other sites due to the entertainment provided, and although perceived to be expensive, comments were received stating that it offered good value for money. Table 2 details the 2019 prices.

Table 2: Ticket prices 2019

Ticket type	Walsall Arboretum	Holland Park	King George V	Willenhall Memorial Park
Adult (16+)	£10	£7.50	£7.50	£7.50
Child (3 – 15)	£5	£5	£5	£5
Family (2 Adult & 2 Child)	£25	£18	£18	£18
Free Concession (U3s)	Free for U3s	Free for U3s	Free for U3s	Free for U3s

- 4.6. In 2019 the weather forecast leading up to the events was very poor. Increased ticket prices and electronic booking may also have had an impact on attendance. The only site to consistently reach capacity has been the arboretum. This has taken place on the Saturday closest to bonfire night.
- 4.7. An evaluation of the 2019 bonfire events was reported to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 February 2020. Customer feedback was 94% positive in relation to the ticketing process. Members' queries included staff costs and the number of customers who were turned away due to cashless entry (only 2). Members also noted that many communities suffered with firework nuisance and recognised that the events provide more than just monetary value as they represent a chance to bring communities together.

Benchmarking Data

- 4.8. Walsall is the only Midlands authority to host multiple events across a number of sites over a two-week period. Table 3 provides details of other organised events taking place the region.

Table 3: Private Local Events

Area	Event Location
Walsall	Pelsall Cricket Club (5 November 2021)
	Aldridge Cricket Club (6 November 2021)
Wolverhampton	Racecourse
Sutton Coldfield	Rugby Football Club
	Four Oaks Saints
Birmingham	Edgbaston
	Botanical Gardens
	Four Oaks Cricket Club
Staffordshire	Alton Towers Theme Park
	Drayton Manor Park (Tamworth)
Cannock	Hednesford Hills Raceway
Warwick (Not LA)	Warwick Racecourse

Options

- 4.9. For the last two years the council has not provided any events to celebrate bonfire night due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If this was continued there would be a few small, organised displays (such as those at Pelsall and Aldridge Cricket Clubs) and private 'back garden' events to meet demand. An increase in the number of bonfire night related accidents is likely. Between 2014 and 2019, West Midlands Fire Service responded to 1,760 bonfire and fireworks-related incidents and recommend always attending organised bonfire events. A single accident can result in significant cost to the emergency services, the NHS and to the individual, family and communities affected. This option does not meet the aims set out above and is not recommended.
- 4.10. It is not possible to recover the costs associated with putting on large-scale events where site capacity is limited. It is proposed that Holland Park is no longer used as a venue and is not considered further.

4.11. The following options are evaluated below:

- **Option A**- A single event with entertainment but no bonfire at the arboretum on the Saturday closest bonfire night (5 November 2022)
- **Option B** - As A, but on two consecutive nights – Friday and Saturday closest to bonfire night (4 and 5 November 2022)
- **Option C**- Traditional events including bonfire, fireworks and fairground at 2 sites (arboretum and KG5). This year the KG5 event would be on Friday 4 November 2022 and the arboretum event would be on Saturday 5 November 2022. In addition, there would be fireworks and a fairground at the arboretum to celebrate Diwali (Monday 24 October 2022).
- **Option D**- Traditional events including bonfire, fireworks and fairground at three sites (arboretum, KG5 and WMP). This year the KG5 event would be on Friday 4 November 2022 KG5, the arboretum event would be on Saturday 5 November 2022 and the WMP event would be on Sunday 6 November 2022. In addition, there would be fireworks and a fairground at the arboretum to celebrate Diwali (Monday 24 October 2022), with the same fee ticket prices as the bonfire night events.

4.12. Option A has the lowest cost and lowest potential income. Traditionally, the arboretum has been the premier location with entertainment and has had the highest attendance levels.

4.13. Option B is only possible if there is no bonfire. This would allow the site to operate on 2 consecutive nights.

4.14. Options C and D provide traditional bonfire events with a bonfire, fireworks, concessions and fairground, but with no additional entertainment. In addition, a similar event is proposed on Monday 24 October 2022 to celebrate Diwali, in recognition of Walsall's diverse communities.

Table 4 – Options for Future Provision

	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
Locations	Arboretum	Arboretum	KG5 Arboretum	KG5 Arboretum WMP
Dates	Sat 5/11	Fri 4/11 & Sat 5/11	24/10 (Diwali) Fri 4/11 Sat 5/11	24/10 (Diwali) Fri 4/11 Sat 5/11 Sun 6/11
Expenditure	-£49,850	-£85,620	-£101,350	-£126,500
Income*	£55,060	£103,470	£117,370	£134,548
NET income (80% attendance)	£5,210	£17,850	£16,020	£8,048

Net income variation with attendance:

Attendance	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
40%	-£18,470	-£29,510	-£36,740	-£53,776
60%	-£6,630	-£5,830	-£10,860	-£22,864
80%	£5,210	£17,850	£16,020	£8,048
100%	£17,050	£41,530	£42,900	£38,960

Table 5: Suggested Ticket Prices:

Ticket type	Options A and B Walsall Arboretum with entertainment
Adult (16+)	£10
Child (3 – 15)	£5
Family - (2 Adult & 2 Child)	£25
Free Concession (U3s)	Free for U3s

Ticket type	Options C and D Traditional bonfire events and Diwali (no entertainment)	
	Early bird	Standard
Adult (16+)	£7.50	£8.50
Child (3 – 15)	£5	£5.50
Family - (2 Adult & 2 Child)	£18	£20
Free Concession (U3s)	Free for U3s	Free for U3s

Council Plan priorities

- 4.15. The overall aim of the corporate plan is to reduce inequalities and maximise potential, with a focus on economic growth, people, internal focus, children and communities. Bonfire night events help the council to meet its corporate aims as they enable communities to come together, helping people to feel a sense of belonging, reinforcing cohesion, and supports the aim of children growing up in connected communities and feeling safe. The addition of the Diwali event helps the council to raise cultural awareness, recognising and celebrating Walsall's diverse communities.

Risk management

- 4.16. Weather is a significant risk to the success of the events. High winds and rain could both have a significant impact. In 2019 the weather forecast leading up to the events predicted heavy rain, which affected advanced bookings. All events went ahead; however, the sites were only at about 40% capacity. On average there are 9 days of rainfall in November.
- 4.17. To mitigate the risk of low numbers, and people leaving the decision to attend to the last minute, it is proposed to offer an 'early bird' discount.
- 4.18. There is a risk to the council if matters relating to information governance and the GDPR legislation are not managed. Work has been undertaken to minimise the risk of a breach of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) from e-ticketing.

Financial implications

- 4.19. In 2019, the spend on bonfire events was £120,000. The allocated budget is £40,000, with an income target of £50,000 (£10,000 net income). This is not enough to deliver a single high-quality event safely, with the estimated cost of a single event at the arboretum being approximately £50,000. The event would require around 85% attendance to make the target income figure. Sponsorship

could be sought for the events. An initial sponsorship target of £2,000 has been included in all estimates.

4.20. Table 4 provides the financial forecasts for each option and the net income is provided against various attendance levels. Options B and C need the lowest percentage attendance to break even (approximately 65%).

4.21. Option A has the lowest risk financially with an outlay of £50,000. Although Option D provides the highest number of events, the lower capacity of the site in Willenhall (WMP), means the greater risk does not translate into a higher potential net income.

Legal implications

4.22. All appropriate legislation will be followed to ensure the safety and welfare of staff and visitors.

Procurement implications/social value

4.23. Fireworks, funfairs and entertainment would be provided by third parties. The option of contracting the entire events to a third party has been considered. The tendering process would take several months and the successful bidder would need time to organise logistics and promotion. This option is not recommended as the council would have a reduced level of control and a lower potential income.

4.24. All contracts will be let in line with the council's contract rules.

Property implications

4.25. None

Health and wellbeing implications

4.26. The health and wellbeing strategy sets out the following priorities for the borough:

- Increasing economic prosperity through increased growth;
- Maximising people's health, wellbeing and safety; and
- Creating healthy and sustainable places and communities.

4.27. The events detailed in this report support these priorities. Attending will support positive mental wellbeing and bringing communities together. By providing the events we hope to reduce the chance of bonfire night and Diwali related bonfire and firework accidents. By bringing people together in celebration of historic events and religious festivals, we are helping to create healthy communities.

Reducing Inequalities

4.28. An equality impact assessment has been carried out on the preferred option.

4.29. The bonfire events will be open to everyone. The cost of attending events can be a barrier for some people. The charge for attendance has been kept as low as reasonably possible. Larger families can purchase a family ticket that provides a discount against the standard prices. Additionally, people who are concerned about the price can purchase tickets during the 'early bird' offer period and get a

further discount.

- 4.30. Walsall Council has provided bonfire events in four locations across the borough in the past, but due to site capacity limits, some of these sites are not as viable as others. All options have events held at the arboretum. This central location has excellent transport links from across Walsall and beyond.
- 4.31. The addition of the Diwali event enables Walsall's diverse communities to come together to celebrate a religious festival, breaking down barriers, promoting inclusion and increasing feelings of belonging.

Staffing implications

- 4.32. None

Climate impact

- 4.33. Bonfires produce CO₂; however, they are a significant part of the traditional celebration. In the past the council has delivered four larger scale bonfires. These proposals reduce the number of bonfires. In addition, they will be smaller than previous years. This will result in 50% reduction in CO₂ emissions from bonfires.
- 4.34. Walsall Arboretum is the council's key site and has excellent transport links, thus enabling people to travel by public transport.

Consultation

- 4.35. None

5. Decide

- 5.1. Option C (events at the arboretum and KG5) offers the highest potential net income. However, there is little difference between options B, C and D, with all generating a maximum potential net income of around £40,000.
- 5.2. Option A (one event at the arboretum) has the lowest cost and the lowest risk. However, even though this is a central location with good transport links it has the lowest customer offer. Given that events at this location have sold out in the past it is likely that demand would exceed supply.
- 5.3. Option D provides similar traditional bonfire events at three locations, offering the most choice to customers. Although it does not have the highest potential net income, it is only about £4,000 less than the highest scoring option (Option C). Therefore, this is recommended as best overall option.

6. Respond

- 6.1. Subject to the recommendation being approved, the healthy spaces team will immediately start the preparations to deliver this year's events. An internal event organising group will be set up, including officers from clean & green and communications and finance.

7. Review

- 7.1. The organising officer group will undertake an evaluation of the 2022 bonfire events and this information will support the planning of future events.

Background papers

None

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Signatures



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7 March 2022

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7 March 2022