

Information/Discussion Paper

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 3 June 2019

Jazz Festival 2019

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

1. Why has this come to scrutiny?

- 1.1 This paper has been prepared following complaints received relating to the set-up of the 2019 Jazz Festival in respect of the fencing off of parts of the park normally reserved for public recreation. It has been brought to Overview and Scrutiny at the request of the Chair of this committee.

2. Summary of the Issue

- 2.1 The Jazz Festival takes place in Montpellier Gardens over the first May bank holiday each year. It occupies the gardens for 20 days, which includes setting up and taking down. Under the 2013 planning consent, a total of 70 days are permitted for the erection of temporary structures in connection with special events in Montpellier Gardens; the same applies to Imperial Gardens. Following the granting of the planning consent, the Council set up the “Gardens’ Forum”, membership of which is made up from local ward members, residents groups, event operators, and council officers. The purpose of the forum is to monitor the use of the gardens by special event organisers, in line with planning conditions and related land use agreements with the Council. It also makes recommendations on the way in which events should operate where appropriate.
- 2.2 This year, following feedback from the Gardens’ Forum, Cheltenham Festivals (CF) redesigned the Jazz village, largely to relocate the ‘free stage’ to a position that would reduce its impact noise on local residents, improve the visitor experience and introduce opportunities to increase revenue by creating spaces for food and drink concessions.
- 2.3 In constructing the jazz festival, parts of the main Broad Walk and the entire arboretum on the western Montpellier Walk side of the garden, were fenced off by the CF production team. In previous years, these areas remained unfenced so that the public had access to them for recreation and to maintain access to the café and play area along the Broad Walk. Whilst the Council is willing to support low key festival activities which add to the ambience of the overall festival in this space, fencing them off to the public is contrary to the spirit of the 2013 planning consent and is not permitted under the terms of the land use agreement which CF signed with the Council.

3. Summary of evidence/information

- 3.1 When it was discovered that these areas had been fenced off as part of the

construction site, a request was immediately made of CF to reduce the fencing back to its usual boundary. However, construction activity was already underway and CF felt it would not be possible to change their construction plan within the time available, without impacting on their ability to complete it in a safe manner. The Council, therefore, reluctantly consented to the fencing remaining in place for the remainder of the construction period, subject to some alterations to the northernmost part of the arboretum, where the fencing was reduced. This was also on the understanding that the arboretum area would be returned to public use within two days of the end of the festival. Both of these actions were subsequently undertaken by CF.

3.2 It has also been pointed out that the festival construction commenced on a sunny Easter Monday. With the Jazz festival falling as it does on the first bank holiday Monday of May and with Easter being so late in April this year, this proved unusually challenging. However, with construction times already quite tight, it was unavoidable to not enable set up on this bank holiday.

3.3 Whilst it is frustrating that regard was not had to maintaining public access to Montpellier Gardens, officers are confident that appropriate mechanisms are put in place to minimise the risk of this occurring. Engagement has already taken place across relevant personnel at CF and they have agreed to formally meet with officers to undertake full lessons learnt exercise and will be attending future Gardens Forum meetings as appropriate.

4. Next Steps - possible next steps for the committee to consider eg potential witnesses, further report, site visit etc.

4.1 To formally review and address this matter, a meeting has been scheduled with CF on June 18th, to understand how the new Jazz layout has impacted on the construction plan, but more importantly, to re-emphasise the areas to be preserved for public recreation in relation to all future events. In reviewing this matter, both CF and the Council believe that communication between the parties could be improved where requests for change are concerned. This would include communicating these points to local people and park users, so that they understand what is going on and how their access will be protected in future.

4.2 In dealing with the complaints arising from the set up activities officers have been asked, "Why do the Cheltenham Festivals take place in Cheltenham's Park?" By focusing the core of the festivals in the town centre the organisers are able to create a festival village experience that not only adds to the cultural offering of Cheltenham, but also the economic prosperity of local businesses. Over recent years, supported by Cheltenham BID funding there has been an active programme of fringe jazz events and activities, taking place in bars and restaurants and other locations together with on-street entertainment; collectively these activities extend the atmosphere of the Jazz festival wider than just the festival village alone. The increased footfall has a positive benefit on the town centre economy by generating increased trade in the local hospitality and retail sectors.

4.3 By operating on Council owned land CF are able to generate income, not only from ticket sales, but also through the sale of food and drink from on-site concessions, which help to underpin the community work that CF undertake with local schools, and providing free entertainment on the festival site itself. This would not be the case if it were to operate at a private venue.

Background Papers	n/a
Contact Officer	Adam Reynolds, Green Spaces Manager, 01242 262626, adam.reynolds@cheltenham.gov.uk
Accountability	Councillor Coleman, Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment