

Community, Leisure & Recreation Committee

Date:	24 October 2017
Title:	Town Fairs
Contact Officer:	Graham Hunt, Town Clerk

Purpose of this Report

1. To provide a verbal / written update on the progress of negotiations for a renewed 4 year fair agreement with the Showmen's Guild. Most of what follows is already in the public domain through the various public reports and press releases.

Update

2. Negotiations with the Showman's Guild had taken place and an update was provided to the Council on 15 August 2017. An agreement had been prepared based on the previous 3 year agreement, with some minor modifications as requested by the Guild. A price increase of £979, the first for three years, was also proposed.
3. At the Council meeting on 15 August 2017, the Council resolved that The Town Council approves the Agreement for signing by the Town Mayor and the Town Clerk with no further negotiation.
4. A request was immediately made to the Showman's Guild to accept the offered agreement for 2017-2020, reminding them of a small increase in charge, the first for three years. The Guild was given until 23 August 2017 to confirm.
5. On 23 August 2017 the Guild informed the Town Council that they still had concerns on the price being charged and could make no decision until after a meeting with the tenants set for 8 September 2017.
6. Officers of the Town Council continued to make full arrangements for the September fair, incurring further costs, based on the likelihood that the Guild would sign the agreement. This included security, first aid and street cleaning arrangements, along with issuing of resident parking permits. Councillors were informed of the risks on 24 August 2017.
7. At the tenants' meeting on 8 September 2017, which appears to have been completely misinformed, the tenants resolved that the Guild should not sign the agreement, as the terms of the new agreement were not acceptable. They would sign a new agreement if it was the same as last time, and at last year's price.
8. None of the terms considered unacceptable had been changed from the previous agreement, which had already been signed twice by the Guild during its three year lifetime.
9. The Town Council's expectation to that point was that the Guild would simply pay the £979 extra and the fairs would go ahead. There had been no suggestion of any disagreement with any of the now disputed terms at any previous point in discussions.

10. As the Guild had refused to sign the new agreement, and therefore confirm their responsibilities, the Town Council had no option but to start the process of cancelling the September fair. A brief press release to that effect was issued as soon as practical on Friday 8 September 2017.
11. Not surprisingly, there was a social media storm. The Town Council made one last ditch attempt to save the fair on Monday 11 September 2017 by offering a one year agreement only, so that this year's fairs could go ahead. It appears that that offer was not communicated on within the Guild and the final opportunity for the Guild to save the fair was lost.
12. At that point the deadline for implementing the required road closures had passed and so the cancellation of the September fair was now a certainty.
13. A further more detailed press release was issued on Tuesday 12 September 2017, explaining the situation in detail.
14. Further social media misinformation was then circulated, and the Town Council issued an even more detailed explanation of the circumstances in a formal Briefing paper on Friday 15 September 2017.
15. There were threats from various tenants that they would show up anyway for the September fair. There was no Road Closure in place. Arrangements were put in place, at further cost, to ensure that there was no risk to the public during the period when the September fair was due to take place.
16. Attention then turned to ensuring effective arrangements for the October 2017 fair could be put in place, as well as the commencement of negotiations for the 2018-2020 fairs.
17. A meeting took place with representatives of the Showmen's Guild on Thursday 21 September 2017. The meeting started with an apology from the Guild for the unjustified criticism of the Town Council via social media and their miscommunication within their organisation, which had resulted in the cancellation of the September fair. This apology was publicly repeated on social media on the evening of Friday 22 September 2017.
18. The meeting with the Guild was constructive and a joint press release was issued later that day, confirming that the October 2017 fair would go ahead and that there were strong hopes that agreement for the 2018-2020 fairs could be reached in the not too distant future.
19. The October 2017 fair successfully went ahead as planned.
20. Negotiations continue with regard to a new three year agreement for 2018-2020 that is fair to both Thame and the Showmen's Guild.

Action Required

21. To note the report.