



**Cabinet**

**Tuesday, 9 March 2021**

**Use of Fireworks at Borough Council Events**

## **Report of the Executive Manager – Communities**

**Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Community and the Environment,  
Councillor A Brennan**

### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Cabinet with information to be able to consider the future use of fireworks at Council events.
- 1.2 The report follows a Council resolution, 5 March 2020, regarding the adverse effects that loud noise from fireworks can have on the welfare of vulnerable people and animals. The Council resolved to launch a public campaign to raise awareness of these impacts in the Borough, encourage advance advertising of planned firework events and promote alternative forms of activity such as quiet fireworks or other light displays. It also resolved to look at how fireworks are used at Council events with a view to move away from loud fireworks.
- 1.3 On 27 August 2020, the Communities Scrutiny Group was asked to consider the following proposals:
  - Option a) Discontinue the use of loud fireworks at Council events (partial ban);
  - Option b) Discontinue the use of all fireworks at Council events (full ban);
  - Option c) No change to current events arrangements (no change).

Communities Scrutiny Group recommends to Cabinet that the Council pursues Option A, the discontinuation of loud fireworks at Council events.

- 1.4 With only one Borough Council event which has fireworks as part of its programme, it was recognised that an additional recommendation demonstrating the local authority's stance as a community influencer, through positive communications, would have a key role to play in encouraging local councils, community groups and individual residents adopting similar stances in the future.

## **2. Recommendation**

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:

- a) approves the discontinuation of use of loud fireworks at Council events; and
- b) supports the launch of a public communications campaign to encourage external event operators and residents to adopt the Council's approach to the use of fireworks.

## **3. Reasons for Recommendation**

There is a growing body of evidence regarding the health impacts of firework noise, both upon vulnerable people and animals. By increasing the Council's controls on the use of loud fireworks at Rushcliffe Borough Council (RBC) events, the Council would be demonstrating community leadership and promoting the delivery of more inclusive and considerate events. The recommendation to restrict to the Council's use of fireworks to low / zero noise would replicate a similar policy decision made by a neighbouring district council.

## **4. Supporting Information**

4.1 The Council has been using fireworks as part of its events for over 15 years.

4.1.1 There are no records of any formal noise complaints having been made regarding this use, however in the period 2008-2019, the Council received 12 complaints regarding fireworks at other locations and events across the Borough.

4.1.2 The key line of enquiry as identified and discussed in the scrutiny matrix at Corporate Overview Group in July 2020 follows motion at Council on 5 March 2020.

Key Lines of Enquiry

4.2 Audit of events run by the Council in past three years where fireworks were used.

4.2.1 In the last three years, the Council has used firework displays on three occasions, all within the delivery of the West Bridgford Christmas Lights Switch-On event. This is an annual event promoted in West Bridgford town centre to launch the Christmas retail trading period. The event attracts thousands of visitors each year, including over 1000 people who gather for the lights switch-on countdown and finale firework display which occurs at 5pm.

4.2.2 The table summarises the fireworks used at Council run events in the past three years.

Date	Venue	Duration of display	Cost	Incidents/ Health & Safety reports	Public Feedback Received
23 Nov 2019	Bridgford Park, West Bridgford	4 minutes	£2000	Market stallholder reported a lost dog at the end of the display which was located by the event team after a short search	Positive comments on RBC social media
24 Nov 2018	Bridgford Park, West Bridgford	4 minutes	£1200	None recorded	24 Nov 2018 – complaint received from resident noted that the display was “disappointingly short” and “didn’t include enough fireworks”
2 Dec 2017	Bridgford Park, West Bridgford	4 minutes	£1200	None recorded	None recorded

4.2.3 The display providers contracted by RBC typically use a variety of Category 2 and Category 3 fireworks in their productions; typically items such Chrysanthemums, Crackles, Falling Leaves, Coconuts, Snow Flakes and Comets.

4.2.4 Decibel levels of the displays presented in 2017, 2018 and 2019 were not recorded; however, in the UK, all shows using Category 2 and Category 3 pyrotechnic materials are limited by law to a maximum volume of 120dB at a noise monitoring distance of 150m. This is a condition of the display contract with RBC. 120dB is similar to the level of sound from the siren on an emergency service vehicle or a dog barking in a person’s ear. In the case of fireworks, the sound of each individual firework is relatively short in duration, but the impact felt can be intense depending upon the distance from the firing site and personal sensitivity to noise.

4.3 Review of research and campaigns on the impact of fireworks on the health and wellbeing of children and adults with a range of conditions.

4.3.1 For many people fireworks are considered a fun and enjoyable way of marking significant occasions. However, it is recognised that the sounds of fireworks can be a concern for some people with certain health conditions, in particular:

- i. Children and adults with sensory processing disorders or who are on the autistic spectrum can have hyper sensitivities to sound, light, touch, taste, smell and pain which stimulate anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed or confused. These feelings are also common for people with conditions that affect the brain or nervous system such as Dementia.

- ii. People with hearing conditions such as Hyperacusis which can cause a difficulty in tolerance and volume of sounds that would not be considered loud by individuals with normal hearing.
- iii. People with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) may have difficulties with loud sounds such as an exaggerated startle response, fear of sound (Phonophobia) or aversion to specific sounds (Misophonia), which may trigger flashbacks or panic attacks.
- iv. People with respiratory conditions such as Asthma, COPD and Lung Disease may also experience adverse impacts of the air pollutants and particulate matter expelled by fireworks, though air quality degradation is short-term.

#### 4.4 Review of research and campaigns on the impact of fireworks on pets, farm animals, horses and wildlife.

4.4.1 In 2019, the RCPA launched the “Bang out of Order” campaign to highlight the impact of fireworks upon animal welfare outlining how aversive stimuli, such as loud noises that are unpredictable and out of an animal’s control, are extremely stressful. Being intermittent and relatively infrequent makes it unlikely that animals will acclimatise to fireworks noise. The RSPCA campaign calls for the following actions:

- i. Greater restrictions on the public sale and use of fireworks.
- ii. Reduction of the maximum noise level of fireworks (down from 120db to 90db) and greater clarity of labelling to allow consumers to make informed decisions.
- iii. Compulsory licensing of all public fireworks displays by local authority Licensing Services, including a process for residents to appeal against the granting of a licence.
- iv. Activities to raise awareness of firework phobias amongst pet owners included treatment and prevention options, plus education about the impact of fireworks on animals to encourage firework users to be more considerate of animal welfare
- v. Further research into the impact of fireworks noise on animals, including the contribution of factors such as loudness and audio spectrum frequencies produced.

4.4.2 Petitions are regularly submitted to Parliament requesting greater regulation and restriction of firework use on animal welfare grounds. A petition currently active on Change.org led by the FAB Firework Campaign UK currently has over 600,000 signatures. Its campaign priorities mirror those of the RSPCA:

- i. Restricting private use (not just purchase) of fireworks to traditional dates such as 5 November, New Year's Eve, Chinese New Year and Diwali.
- ii. Reducing the maximum permitted decibels for private use fireworks from 120, to 97.
- iii. Requiring all public fireworks displays to be licensed.
- iv. Requiring fireworks packaging to be labelled indicating the noise level, to allow consumer choice.

4.4.3 Fireworks, especially when used at unpredictable times of year, have the possibility to frighten livestock, which can lead to lower production and even stock loss. Poultry especially are at risk of a "smother," where birds huddle together which can result in some birds dying. In addition, fireworks can pose a fire risk if hot embers land on barns or in fields of standing crops. This is particularly an issue during the summer when crops are more likely to be dry. While the National Farmers Union does not have a formal position on when it is appropriate for fireworks to be let off, they have called upon fireworks users to consider the safety and wellbeing of their neighbours and neighbours' animals as well as mitigate the impact with advance warning so that precautions can be taken protect animals.

4.5 Research into the availability of quieter/silent fireworks.

4.5.1 Low/reduced noise fireworks are now commonly available on the UK domestic sales market with Asda, Tesco, Morrisons and Aldi all stocking low noise varieties. In 2019, Sainsbury's took the decision to ban firework sales entirely.

4.5.2 Most commercial display companies offer low/reduced noise fireworks as a customisable option on professional displays. There is no significant price premium for reduced noise options. Low noise fireworks, i.e. those under 90dB are not completely silent but are restricted to a comfortable level that are below the level of any accompanying soundtrack.

4.6 Research into alternatives such as laser shows and light shows, and how these options could work at Rushcliffe venues.

4.6.1 Due to their reliance upon expensive technical equipment, laser shows are typically more expensive to procure than a firework show; however, there are potential cost savings to be made by substituting fireworks, in terms of reduced need for enhanced fire protection measures and safety stewarding requirements.

4.6.2 In order to be visible, lasers need a surface off which to project i.e. a body of water or a building. They can also be projected on to mist, such as from a jet or fountain. In West Bridgford there is a shortage of surfaces

on which to project but a good standard of show could be made possible with a combination of approaches and installation of additional SPX lighting equipment such as search lights and cold pyros. It will only be possible to test the visual effect of design in a live event scenario.

4.6.3 A quotation of £3,500 has been obtained for a laser/lights show substitute for fireworks the next West Bridgford Christmas Lights Switch On, comparable to a quotation of £2,000 for a firework display with either traditional or low/reduced noise pyrotechnics.

4.7 Conduct a survey or otherwise gauge public opinion on moving away from louder fireworks to other options.

4.7.1 Due to COVID-19 pressures on local residents and communities, it was considered that public consultation regarding fireworks would not be particularly gainful at this time and may indeed have a negative reputational impact.

4.7.2 Noise controls on firework displays announced by Broxtowe Borough Council in July 2020, and Nottingham City Council in January 2021, were received positively by residents and there is no reason to assume a similar policy would be different in Rushcliffe.

4.7.3 In the period 2008-2019, RBC's Environmental Health service received 12 noise complaints related to fireworks. Of these complaints, eight were logged outside of the normal fireworks season i.e. November to January.

4.8 Work up some options for future events, to consider positive and negative impacts, risk analysis and costs and recommend one of the options.

The below table summarises options for future events

<b>Options</b>	<b>Positive Impacts</b>	<b>Negative Impacts</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Stop using fireworks at RBC events	Removes potential for noise impact and responds to public concerns	<p>May be considered as excessive action by some residents and cause criticism/ reputational damage without full consultation</p> <p>May be misinterpreted as a council cost-cutting exercise, confusing the message of the action</p>	In theory a cost saving, but replacement activity cost needs to be considered

Restrict use of fireworks to low/ reduced noise only at RBC events	Removes potential for noise impact and responds to public concerns  Council retains a popular element of its event programme which receives positive media attention/ photographic interest	Option only controls RBC events, issues remain for wider area and need to be communicated clearly	No change
Substitute fireworks for alternative activity e.g. laser/ light show	Removes noise impact  Reduces event staffing need as activity does not require enhanced fire protection support or stewarding	Small number of contractors operating in laser market and high value of equipment provided mean costs of shows are higher than fireworks.	Likely increased cost to RBC though some cost savings could be made through reduced safety staffing.

## 5. Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection

- 5.1. Option B – Discontinue all use of fireworks at Council events (full ban). Option rejected as it was not deemed to be proportionate to issues reported. Key concerns logged were around noise issues from fireworks rather than use of fireworks as a general practice.
- 5.2. Option C – No change to current practice. This was rejected on the basis that it did not address accessibility issues raised by the use of noisy fireworks, primarily upon vulnerable residents who may experience negative impacts to their health and wellbeing.

## 6. Risks and Uncertainties

- 6.1. There is limited evidence as to any potential environmental benefits from either a full or partial restriction of the use of fireworks at Council events, particularly in relation to Carbon Management.
- 6.2. The recommendation to introduce a restriction on the use of loud fireworks at Council events would not be an outright ban on the use of fireworks on RBC land and open spaces without further discussion and agreement (noting though, that the use of fireworks is already a restricted activity within the Facilities Booking Conditions and would require authorisation of the Facilities Manager).

## 7. Implications

### 7.1. Financial Implications

In 2019, Council expenditure on fireworks was £2,000. There is no additional cost implication of the recommendation at this stage, as expenditure would be contained within existing event budgets.

**7.2. Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications.

**7.3. Equalities Implications**

The partial ban or full ban of fireworks at RBC events would support the Council to deliver more inclusive events by addressing inequalities experienced by vulnerable people as identified in paragraph 4.3 of the report.

**7.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications**

There are no crime and disorder implications

**8. Link to Corporate Priorities**

Quality of Life	The control of loud fireworks at Borough Council organised events supports the Council to deliver more inclusive events by addressing inequalities experienced by vulnerable people.
Efficient Services	The continuous review of the Borough Council operated events and adoption new technologies support the delivery of efficient services to our residents.
Sustainable Growth	
The Environment	

**9. Recommendation**

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:

- a) approves the discontinuation of use of loud fireworks at Council events; and
- b) supports the launch of a public communications campaign to encourage external event operators and residents to adopt the Council's approach to the use of fireworks.



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<b>Background papers available for Inspection:</b>	Communities Scrutiny Group paper 27 August 2020  Full Council resolution made on 5 March 2020
<b>List of appendices:</b>	None