

WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL – UPPER MEON VALLEY WARD

Parish update for October 2023

Boomtown update

We, the SDNP planning committee and the SDNPA Chair went along to Boomtown for a tour and meeting with the management team on the Friday afternoon of the event.

It's fair to say that we were all very impressed with the organisation and considerable effort that goes into managing an event of this magnitude.

There was one particular element of the event we questioned them on in a great deal of detail and it will be no surprise to know that that was the sound level monitoring and controls. We were given a presentation by F1 Acoustics, an expert independent company, which very much left us with the view that the arrangements for noise monitoring of the festival at the various offsite locations was continuous at all the locations. After further discussions post the event, in particular with Cllr Pain of Cheriton parish council, doubt began to creep in regarding the continuous nature of the monitoring and clarification was sought from officers in the environment department at WCC, who are responsible for the monitoring overall. As a result of this an email, extract below, was sent out to all present to clarify the true position and we felt this was worth sharing with the parishes to draw a line under any further misunderstanding.

“Boomtown’s acoustic consultants...F1 Acoustics employed 2 teams to drive around and monitor the 9 locations surrounding the festival site throughout the periods of regulated entertainment, so each location is not monitored ‘continuously’ but F1 do continuously monitor.

F1 Acoustics do however, continuously monitor noise levels for the main stages. They have monitors at the ‘front of house’ mixing desks for each of the main stages, which did continuously relay live data to their porta cabin on site. This is monitored by Rob (and colleagues) of F1 Acoustics and where the noise levels at these locations were found to be above expected levels, on site staff would be deployed to liaise with the venue’s sound engineer.

In addition to the above there was one continuous noise monitor was deployed by F1 Acoustics in Itchen Abbas.

WCC have a team of two officers to monitor sound levels at each of the 9 noise monitoring locations for each of the nights to provide additional rigour to audit levels against the Licence conditions. All noise levels taken by the WCC team were reported back to the onsite WCC team leader and where levels were found to be either close to, at or above the licence noise levels, together with the monitoring location, are immediately reported to Event Control and the F1 team, when F1 would take action to drop on site levels.

Of course, with 2 personnel and 9 locations, neither F1 nor WCC can be omnipresent at each location, but they would visit each of these locations and proactively triage their focus according to climatic conditions i.e. wind direction or in response to complaints received. After a compliant reading, they would move onto the next monitoring location,

but if there was a high reading or even a breach, this would be reported to site and immediate action taken. This has been the approach for many years.

Whilst the ideal of having 9 monitors in fixed locations sounds like a good idea in principle, there are technical issues with the 4G coverage required and they would have to be located in accessible, secure places and we do sometimes come across other sources of noise which you can only detect in person e.g. a local wedding / pub noise etc. Staff also regularly go to other locations to assess the noise where complaints are received, in order to make a judgement as to whether the locations are representative and should be monitored in future years.

Boomtown are required to submit a noise report of the event, which will include all of their off-site readings and necessary actions taken. This will include all the data from the one continuously monitored site in Itchen Abbas.”

At a post-Festival “wash-up” meeting for local residents held in Cheriton on 18 Sep, the F1 rep present confirmed that interpretation as accurate, but assured attendees that their monitoring showed that there had been no breach of their license conditions. It was nonetheless clear that some residents’ lived experience through the Festival weekend was of sufficient volume and acoustic range to cause significant disturbance.

Consequently, the chair of the Winchester Licensing Committee has been requested to arrange a ‘teach-in’ for members of that committee to ensure they have a good working knowledge of the noise limits in terms of their real effect at distance from Matterley Bowl. We will also ask for wider circulation of the monitoring results from this year.

Concern has also been raised that the Festival’s Traffic Management Plan had little flexibility when faced with multiple incidents on the the M3 and A34 as the site emptied on the Monday. This resulted in gridlock across the City, with little use being made of alternative egress routes to the east.

There also appears to be a lack of confidence that the environmental mitigation measures applied across the Matterley Estate have sufficient positive impact to outweigh the potential damage caused by the event. A particular example was given of the count of some endangered bird species.

These concerns have also been discussed with the Chair of the SDNPA who agrees with the need to secure greater transparency across each of these aspects of the Festival’s activities before any future planning case is determined. But it also turns out that, contrary to popular belief, the South Downs is not the only national park to host a Festival: Kendal Calling, on the Lowther Estate in the Lake District National Park, and the Y Not Festival at Pikehall in the Peak District National Park have both been held annually for some years.

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