

Geoff Raw
Chief Executive
Brighton & Hove City Council

Dear Geoff,

In accordance with Standing Order 23.3 I submit the following letter for inclusion on the agenda of the forthcoming meeting of the Tourism, Development & Culture Committee.

The city's green parks are vital community spaces for thousands of people. Open to all, regardless of ethnic origin, age or gender, they help to bring communities together. Recent studies have also proven that access to a park or green space has a hugely positive impact on physical health, mental health and can contribute to longer life expectancy.

Every year the Council agrees a long list of events for our city's parks and green spaces. While there are important community and charity events, a significant number of these events are also solely 'for profit' commercial ventures.

In 2017 the Council conducted the Big Conversation, our biggest consultation ever, which informed the development of the Open Spaces Strategy. The study found the main reasons for visiting parks are for relaxation, contact with nature and play. The Open Spaces Strategy sets a clear vision for city parks, that expresses their importance in connecting people with nature which is the ultimate aim of our UNESCO designated Biosphere. This important aspiration however, seems in tension with the use of key parks to host large commercial events: which suggests a properly considered balance between the needs of park-users and the surrounding communities, and the desire for income generation from large events, should be struck.

Regular events pose an increasing problem for our city and residents. Events in our parks can cause a loss of park space, create environmental damage and waste, and frequently subject residents to noise and other disturbance. In many cases, the running of events will necessitate closing off or applying ticketed entry to certain parts of an otherwise open public space.

In my own ward of St Peters and North Laine, park users and neighbours are paying the price for a huge schedule of events held at The Level. There are 30,000 households within a 15 minute walk of the Level. For many residents, with no private outside space, the Level is their 'garden'. Last year, the Oktoberfest event led to complaints from residents disturbed by loud noise, with some residents detailing how "noise levels are unacceptably loud...we cannot find anywhere in our house to hide from the noise, particularly impacted are both our children."

Residents with legitimate concerns about anti-social behaviour have also been alarmed to hear that events such as Oktoberfest are welcomed by the Council. The Level is in a 'Special Stress Area', a designation that recognises concerns in terms

of crime, disorder and public nuisance. The Council raised millions to invest in this heritage park, and claw it back from decades of neglect to better serve a diversity of people in our community. A recent Council report detailed concerns about 'class A-drug dealing and street drinking.' However in 2018 alone it is anticipated that over 10,000 people could be welcomed once more to take part in an alcohol-centred event.

Recent analysis shows that councils around the country are beginning to over-use public spaces in return for cash. Dr Andrew Smith, an urban geographer from the University of Westminster, found that councils have become 'increasingly reliant' on parks as commercial assets, and that a "Proliferation of music festivals and other events across capital's green spaces means disruption and restrictions to access for residents". Between September and October alone, 3 events will take place at the Level each with a heavy footfall.

The current Outdoor Events Policy adopted in 2013 is thinly detailed document which is primarily concerned with defining events and listing management tools, and doesn't give great consideration to the context of open spaces and their other uses and needs. The policy certainly now requires updating in light of the Open Spaces Strategy and in doing so, I suggest, should also be developed to include specific sub-policies for each of our key parks that are heavily used as event spaces (including) The Level, Hove Lawns and Preston Park.

By developing sub-policies with residents and park users, they will then be aware that particular conditions are in place to regulate the number of events and usage of the their local green space. Conditions could include greater environmental protections, guarantees of enforcement and further engagement over the frequency and nature of events.

Yours sincerely,

Pete West

Councillor,
Green Party,
St Peter's & North Laine Ward