

## Bonfire Events

Date: July 2023

Report of: Chief Officer Climate, Energy and Green Spaces

Report to: Director of Communities, Housing and Environment

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

### Brief summary

A proposal to cancel council run community and city bonfire events was included in the budget for 2023/24 agreed by council in February, subject to consultation. This report therefore outlines the findings from a recent public consultation concerning the proposal to cancel council run community and city bonfire events held at Bramley Park, East End Park, Middleton Park, Roundhay Park (city event), Springhead Park and Woodhouse Moor. The events involve a bonfire and fireworks display with some sites having additional food and small funfair provision. In 2020 and 2021, the events were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic and in 2022 a decision was also taken to cancel in the light of in year financial position faced by the council. The discontinuation of bonfire displays could contribute a budget saving of £115k and alleviate a further pressure of £100k.

### Recommendations

- a) To cease bonfire and firework displays at Bramley Park, East End Park, Middleton Park, Roundhay Park, Springhead Park and Woodhouse Moor, in line with the budgetary savings proposals agreed by Full Council at their meeting on 22 February 2023 along with other environmental concerns raised.
- b) To note that a £30k budget is available from 2023/24 in Safer, Stronger Communities to support diversionary activities and help prevent anti-social behaviour.

## What is this report about?

- 1 This report concerns the bonfire and firework events at Bramley Park, East End Park, Middleton Park, Roundhay Park, Springhead Park and Woodhouse Moor usually held on or around 5 November each year. The displays did not take place in 2020 and 2021 due to issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, and in 2022 a decision was also taken to cancel in the light of the in-year financial position faced by the council.
- 2 A proposal to cancel council run community and city bonfire events was included in the budget for 2023/24 agreed by council in February. Following this a public consultation was conducted with the findings summarised as part of this report.

## What impact will this proposal have?

- 3 The Council budget position received at Executive Board in December 2022 identified an estimated gap of £65.7m for the 2023/24 financial year, with a further gap of £84.5m over the following two years. In 2022/23 the budget for all bonfire events was £115k with the significant spend being on infrastructure (stage, fencing, audio), and specialist services such as medical, security and traffic management.
- 4 The consultation analysis highlighted below demonstrates the concern regarding the impact that council large scale bonfire displays have on the environment, and in particular the effects that bonfires and fireworks have on air quality given that as the council has declared a climate emergency. Furthermore, complaints are regularly received from residents who are disturbed by the use of large-scale fireworks. It is worth noting that there were limited issues experienced by blue light services in 2022 when the events did not take place.
- 5 In 2022, Leeds City Council's Safer Stronger Communities Team worked closely with partners in areas across the city to mitigate any potential negative impact of fireworks and associated anti-social behaviour in the run up to and on Bonfire Night. A £30k budget is available in 2023/24 to continue to support diversionary activities and help prevent anti-social behaviour.
- 6 There is the possibility that members of the community would want to organise their own bonfire and firework display either on a site where an event has previously been held, or potentially a new park site. If this was the case, then an event application would need to be submitted for it to be considered. The event would need to be fully funded by the event organiser and the event proposal would be assessed by safety advisory group (SAG) which includes for example all the 'blue light' services. If the bonfire display was advertised as a public event, then it could attract people from outside the vicinity of the park and exceed the capacity for the site. In these circumstances it would be necessary to fence the site and introduce tickets to limit numbers attending which would add to the costs incurred. The event organiser would need to appoint a safety specialist, ensure appropriate medical provision, security and the firework display would need to be delivered by an approved pyrotechnics company.

## How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

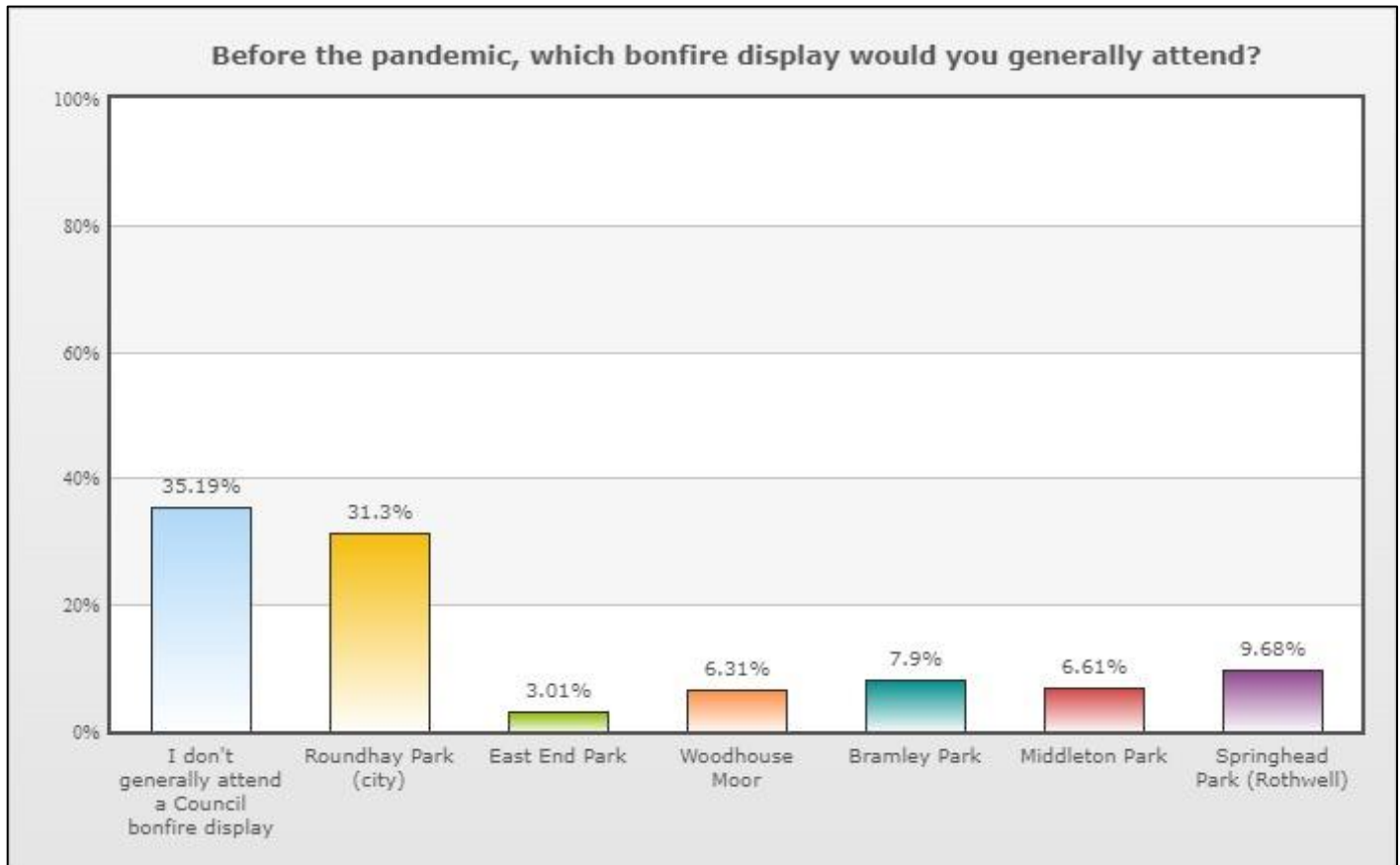
- 7 There is the potential to alleviate environmental concerns particularly around litter, wildlife habitats, domestic animals (including pets) and air quality associated with large public bonfire and firework displays.

## What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: Bramley and Stanningley, Burmantofts and Richmond Hill, Middleton Park, Roundhay, Rothwell, Headingley and Hyde Park and Little London and Woodhouse

Have ward members been consulted?  Yes  No

- 8 A public consultation in the form of an online questionnaire was carried out between 16 February and the 7 March 2023. There were 3,033 completed surveys with the majority (35.2%) not attending a council bonfire display and 31.3% stating they went to the city event at Roundhay Park. The remainder went to community bonfires as illustrated in the following graph.

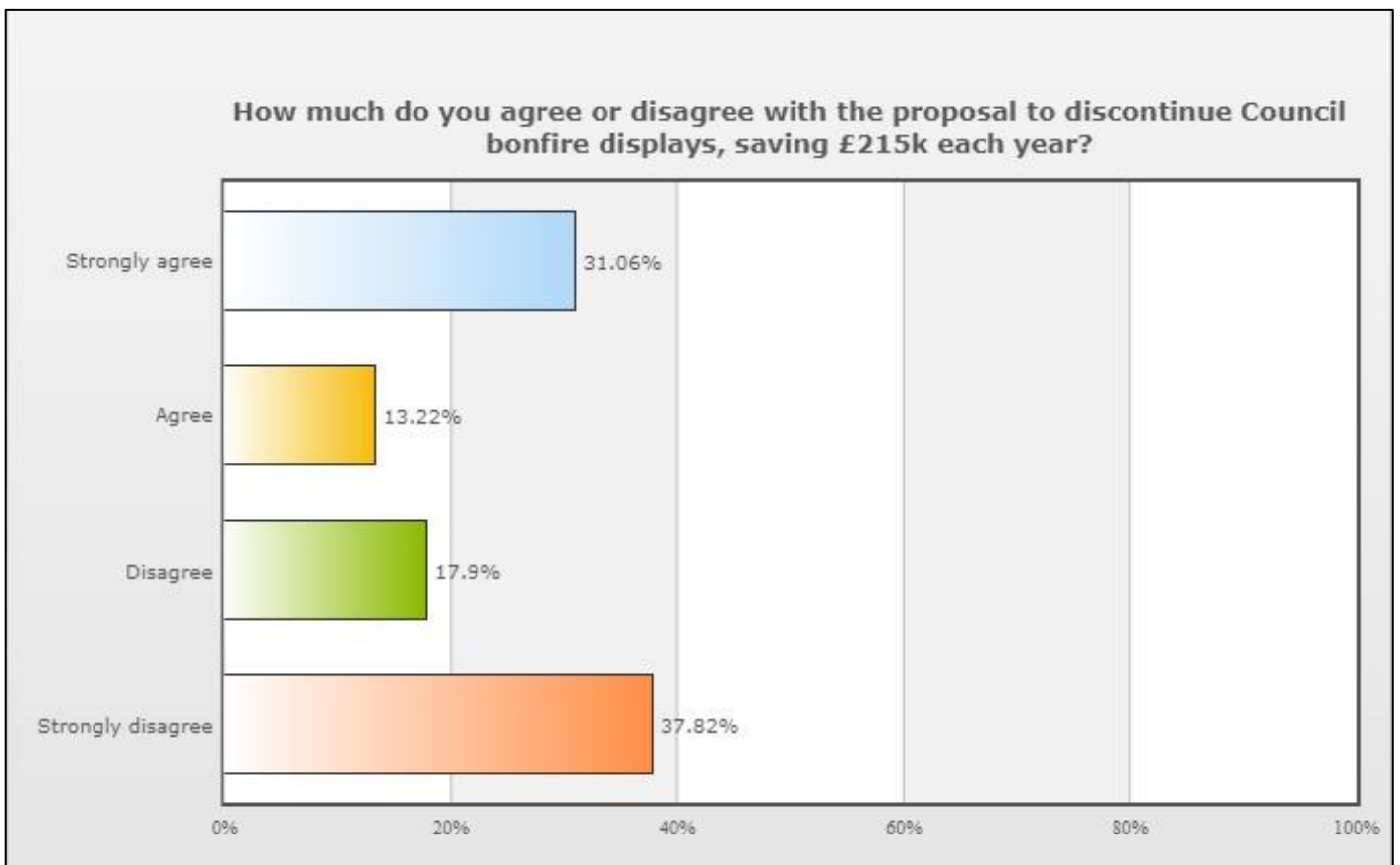


- 9 Participants were asked to indicate their level of concern regarding environmental impacts of holding the bonfire events as illustrated in the table below.

### How concerned are you about the following environmental impacts of holding council bonfire displays?

| Item                            | Somewhat or very concerned | Not at all concerned | Total responses |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Air Quality                     | 50.2%                      | 49.7%                | 3,010           |
| Noise                           | 45.1%                      | 54.9%                | 3,007           |
| Wildlife Habitats               | 69.5%                      | 30.5%                | 3,000           |
| Domestic animals including pets | 65.9%                      | 34.1%                | 3,008           |
| Traffic                         | 48.2%                      | 51.8%                | 2,992           |
| Litter                          | 69.8%                      | 30.2%                | 2,997           |
| Site Damage                     | 62.0%                      | 38.1%                | 2,975           |

- 10 Litter was the number one concern, followed by the impact on wildlife habitats and domestic animals. In every category, excluding noise and traffic, over half of participants were either somewhat or very concerned about various environmental impacts of holding these events.
- 11 Participants were also given the option to expand on their answers and offer further insight into their opinions on the environmental issues. The main themes from the written responses include environmental concerns around the extra emissions from an increase in traffic due to the event. Some participants expanded on the point of the events impact on air quality stating that the reduction around the time that these events take place has health implications for themselves or family members with respiratory issues such as asthma. As well as raising additional environmental concerns, some survey participants suggested alternatives such as low-noise fireworks and alternative display options such as laser or drone displays.
- 12 A frequent point raised by survey participants was the concern that members of the public having multiple unregulated home displays would be more detrimental for the environment than having large council run bonfires. Those participants who did not have environmental concerns and expanded upon this outlined that it was due to the event only happening once a year.
- 13 Participants were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal to discontinue council bonfire displays as illustrated below.



14 Those who strongly agreed or agreed were 44.3% of participants compared to 55.7% opting to disagree. Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal to discontinue council run bonfire events, were asked how they would suggest the cost of the provision could be met. The key points from these responses were as follows:

- Have one large city event instead of smaller community events
- Charge a small fee to attend bonfire events or implement a ticket-only entrance purchased in advance
- That the council should continue to fund these events

## **What are the resource implications?**

15 A budget for holding council bonfire events has not been allocated in 2023/24 and should a decision be taken to hold them in any form then a budget would need to be identified. It is worth noting that Safer, Stronger Communities have included a £30k budget for diversionary activities.

## **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

16 Unregulated bonfires held by members of the public due to the council run events being cancelled are a potential risk. Following bonfire night in 2022, conversations were had with West Yorkshire Fire Service who confirmed they had not seen an increase in call outs compared to other years when council run bonfires were held. Nevertheless, Leeds City Council's Safer Strong Communities Team would continue to work closely with partners in areas across the city to mitigate any potential negative impact of fireworks and associated anti-social behaviour in the run up to and on bonfire night.

## **What are the legal implications?**

17 This is considered a significant operational decision and as such will not be subject to call-in. An equality, diversity and inclusion screening has been completed.

## **Options, timescales and measuring success**

### **What other options were considered?**

18 Charging for community events is not considered an option as the additional infrastructure (in particular fencing and security) and ticketing costs would be prohibitive. Drone displays would cost significantly more than fireworks as well as not being suitable in adverse weather conditions. Laser displays are predominantly used where they can be projected against a structure to achieve a visual effect which would be difficult to achieve in an open setting aside from the cost associated with implementation. Both alternatives are therefore also not considered valid options.

19 In the light of the consultation feedback, the following options are considered potentially viable with each considered in turn.

- Hold bonfire events as occurred up until the coronavirus pandemic.
- Hold one city event at Roundhay park with no charge.
- Hold one city event at Roundhay park with an entry charge.

### **20 Option One: Hold bonfire events as occurred up until the coronavirus pandemic.**

- a) If this option was considered, then additional unbudgeted funding would be required to be identified in year (2023/24) as the budget agreed at council in February included a proposal to discontinue bonfire provision. In addition, it would be necessary to identify a budget to meet ongoing provision in future years.
- b) Legislation surrounding the management of events has changed in recent years, with the requirement for increased counter terrorism measures, infrastructure, medical provision, security, and formal traffic management arrangements which have all contributed to increased costs. The covid pandemic has also had a detrimental impact on the events industry, with many suppliers ceasing to trade. The result of this, is that the demand for services is greater than the supply, with infrastructure being procured 12 months in advance and payment required at the time of booking.

- c) The actual budget provision required is likely to be £215k to reflect a £100k pressure against the previous budget of £115k.
- d) In conclusion, it is felt that the overall cost and increasing pressure on the budget is not sustainable given the wider budget issues faced by the council and maintaining the status quo would not alleviate environmental concerns raised during consultation.

## **21 Option Two: Hold one city event at Roundhay park with no charge**

- a) One city-wide bonfire event at Roundhay Park could be held however there would be a need to put in place additional requirements to restrict the numbers that might attend. The culminative total of attendees across all six bonfire events could be as many as 115,000. Whilst it is unlikely that everyone who might attend a community event would go to a city-wide event, the risk of exceeding the 70,000 capacity is such that it would be necessary to plan for a maximum of 70,000. This would mean that the event would need to be ticket only, and whilst tickets would be free of charge there would be an administration cost for facilitating ticket sales.
- b) Given the need for a ticket only event there would be a cost associated with promoting this to everyone who might attend particularly given that most people normally just expect to turn up on the night. It is inevitable that despite best efforts there would be attendees who turn up without obtaining a ticket and would choose to remain outside of the fenced area. A greater security presence would therefore be necessary to ensure that there are no potential security threats, in line with counter terrorism recommendations.
- c) As the event would be looking to attract people from across the city, and further afield than would normally be the case, there would be the obligation to implement some car parking provision. This would require the procurement of additional infrastructure such as lighting, fencing and ground protection along with additional staff and the need to advertise public transport options.
- d) The current firework display time at Roundhay Park is 18 minutes. The current event plan assumes that everyone who wishes to attend must be in place before the firework display starts and no further people are admitted afterwards. Preparations must then immediately commence for people to be able to exit the event in a safe manner. Given the likelihood of more people attending it would be necessary to increase the firework display time to give additional time to prepare for mass exit once the display is completed. This would mean that the display time would need to increase as well as the associated cost of additional fireworks. It is likely that a Roundhay Park only event could be staged within the £115k budget which would alleviate a £100k budget pressure.
- e) In conclusion, there would be safety, as well as reputational risks to the council associated with people outside the event perimeter without tickets as well as additional costs in holding the event.

## **22 Option Three: Hold one city event at Roundhay park with an entry charge**

- a) Assuming that security arrangements, infrastructure and ticketing were put in place (as per option three), then a further option to introduce a charge could be considered to try and recover the cost of putting on the event. There is a risk that people would not be prepared to pay and as a result the number of people attending could decrease. The other significant risk is that despite best efforts to publicise the need to pre-purchase a ticket it is likely that many people will turn up as before anticipating a free event. The people outside the fence perimeter would also fall under the responsibility of the council as event organiser. The reason why tickets would need to be purchased in advance is to control the overall number of people attending. It would therefore not be practical to offer ticket sales when people

arrive as this would not be possible aside from the issues of people handling cash. Online purchases at the event site could not be guaranteed due to data access issues associated with large crowds and availability of tickets.

- b) The following table provides a model of what charge could be considered reasonable along with suitable concessions, and the break-even number of attendees required to meet the budgeted cost. It should be noted that the actual price paid would be subject to VAT so an adult would pay £6.60 to gain entry with child entry £3.30.

| Description             | Ticket Fee<br>£ | Booking<br>Fee<br>£ | Total Price<br>(Net of VAT)<br>£ | Number<br>of Paying<br>Attendees | Projected<br>Income<br>£ |
|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Adult                   | 5.00            | 0.50                | 5.50                             | 14,000                           | 77,000                   |
| Child 5 - 15            | 2.50            | 0.25                | 2.75                             | 8,000                            | 22,000                   |
| Under 5's               | Free            | 0.00                | 0.00                             | 0                                | 0                        |
| Leeds Card Holders      | 4.00            | 0.40                | 4.40                             | 2,000                            | 8,800                    |
| Breezecard Holders      | 2.50            | 0.25                | 2.75                             | 950                              | 2,613                    |
| Leeds Card 'Extra'      | 3.00            | 0.30                | 3.30                             | 5,000                            | 16,500                   |
| Max card (e.g., carers) | Free            | 0.00                | 0.00                             | 0                                | 0                        |
| <b>Totals</b>           |                 |                     |                                  | <b>29,950</b>                    | <b>126,913</b>           |

- c) The cost associated with a booking fee would add a further £11,538 which could be recovered from the 30,000 paying attendees paying the advertising price.
- d) In conclusion the issues associated with people turning up without tickets would create greater risks to safety and council reputation than option two. There is also a significant risk of costs not being covered due to the minimum number of paying attendees not being achieved.

## 23 Overall Conclusion

- a) There are increasing cost pressures associated with holding council bonfire and firework displays which are not sustainable given the financial position that the council faces. Significant environmental concerns were raised during consultation and these, coupled with the climate change ambitions of the council would not reflect well given the issues associated with holding large-scale public events of this nature. The alternatives present potential significant safety issues in addition to additional costs associated with introducing ticket arrangements which themselves could present reputational risks to the council. For these reasons that a recommendation to cease the bonfire and firework displays at Bramley Park, East End Park, Middleton Park, Roundhay Park, Springhead Park and Woodhouse Moor has been made.

### How will success be measured?

24 A budget saving of £115k in addition to alleviating a £100k potential pressure from 2023/24 onwards.

### What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

25 The organised displays will not go ahead from November 2023.

## Appendices

- None.

## Background papers

- None.