



Leisure, Events and Environment Committee - 4 January 2022

Agenda Item LEE1688/22

Annual Firework Display

Background

- It is current council practice that we hold an annual fireworks display, currently on New Year's Eve, and that it is open and free to all comers.
- Conventional fireworks, such as used by suppliers to the Council are environmentally harmful.
- In the face of the concern about climate change and pollution, it is arguable whether the running of a fireworks display is consistent with our strategic objective of protecting and sympathetically improving our natural environment.
- There may be a case for ceasing the annual display, for changing its nature or by substituting an alternative.

This paper proposes that we consult with the community whether, given the facts, they wish the event to continue, for an alternative to be substituted or for it to be cancelled

Discussion

The annual firework display attracts a significant number of attendees, not all of whom are likely to be Croxley Green residents. Anecdotally, we understand that visitors travel from the surrounding area to watch the display. It is uncertain exactly the kinds of people who attend the event but it may be surmised that families with young children may avoid it in view of the time and possible risk and possibly some of the elderly might not go due to time, season and ground conditions. This is a popular event that engenders good will toward the parish council and may be considered to enhance well being in attendees. (This latter may not be the case for owners of domestic animals of which Croxley Green has a fair share). The display may be one of the few free public events held to mark the New Year in the locality.

Conventional fireworks, such as are used by the suppliers to the Council, have well understood negative impacts on the environment and carry risks to public health. Fireworks emit carbon dioxide (CO₂) as a product of combustion); carbon monoxide, ozone and nitrogen from the explosives used to launch them; increase particulate emissions; leave debris on the ground (although we make strenuous efforts to clear up visible rubbish the following day); create noise pollution in the short term; and the colours disburse metal elements including lithium, sodium, copper, barium and calcium or strontium which are also damaging.

Fantastic Fireworks - our suppliers - acknowledge the production of carbon on their website, suggesting that an average display using 35kg of gunpowder, produces 17kg of CO₂. Our display, being public, is likely to be use a greater weight. The company is silent on the other pollutants.
<https://fantasticfireworks.co.uk/news/the-carbon-footprint-of-fireworks/>

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that fireworks are a *bad thing* for the environment. If **sustainable** means carrying out activities in the present that neither damage the environment nor compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs, fireworks, such as we use, are **not** sustainable.

The narrative above does not include the impact of producing and setting up the fireworks, of pollution caused by travel by visitors, or even of the cash cost of the show.

There remains the issue of whether, in the face of the evidence, we should be facilitating an event that is so obviously damaging to our environment. We should, in my opinion, at least debate our position.

There are options, including but not necessarily limited to:

- We continue to run the event without change
- We continue to hold a display but pay for carbon offset, which might include planting trees in Croxley, or make a significant donation to an environmental charity that works to reduce greenhouse gases, although this option doesn't end the environmental impact and might be considered to be 'green-washing'.
- We continue the display but specify the use of white (as opposed to coloured) fireworks as they do not contain the heavy metals. This would reduce the polluting impact but to a limited extent.
- We continue the display but specify the use of eco-fireworks. A study in China found that while 'better' than traditional fireworks reducing ambient particulate deposits by up to 50% (in the range of 15–65% with a “central” value of 35% considering uncertainties) they continue to pollute at high levels.(<https://phys.org/news/2021-03-green-environmentally-friendly-fireworks.html>)
- We present a substitute, for example: a laser and sound show, which offers some of the components of a traditional show without the direct environmental impact.
- We cease to run a fireworks display after the 2021 event.

It is recommended that we do not attempt to reach a consensus at this Committee or Council but rather that we consult directly in the community to gauge the level of support for the possible options. Such consultation would be conducted on the council website, on social media channels; through articles in the council's newsletter and local publications; with residents; other stakeholders, including business people and by engaging with students at the primary and secondary schools in Croxley Green.

Recommendation

This committee recommends to Full Council

- to begin a consultation with the community over the future of the annual firework display; and
- to complete the consultation by May 31st 2022; and
- pending the outcome of the consultation not to confirm the firework display for 2022

Cllr Nigel Cole
November 2021

Explanatory note for Councillors:

This paper was prepared while the Omicron variant of the Coronavirus was receiving significant news coverage and before any government instructions had been issued that might mitigate against community transmission of the virus in respect of social gatherings.