

Cockenzie festival organisers have to apologise for “misinformation”

Organisers of a music festival which had to be halted because it did not have the right licence have been asked to apologise for ‘misinformation’ shared on social media.

Cockenzie House and Gardens applied for a change to its current Public Entertainment Licence after it was revealed it did not cover its outdoor space where the EH32 Music Festival was due to take place.

The summer festival, due to start last month, had been held since 2021 but the lack of a licence was only discovered this year, leading the organisers to cancel weekend concerts until the change could be made.

At a special meeting of East Lothian Council’s licensing sub-committee today the changes were approved – but the number of events at the festival, which had been due to hold events every weekend over three months, have been reduced by half.

Organisers were asked to apologise after it was claimed on social media the council had pulled the plug because of “a small number of complaints and the class of use of the gardens”.

Acting chair of the sub committee Councillor Tom Trotter said:

“There has been some silly stuff put up on social media which is totally out of order and I would suggest that going forward there be some kind of apology put up on that because it has been misleading in regards to the council’s actions and quite disappointing to be perfectly honest.”

Fellow councillor Cher Cassini also raised concerns about the social media comments.

She said: “I wanted to voice my concern and disappointment, there was a lot of social media and misinformation going out to people and it would be good to know that would be corrected so people know the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”

The meeting, which was called during council’s summer recess as the festival wanted to reinstate dates this month and next, was told the Public Entertainment Licence held by Cockenzie House and Gardens only covers event in the building and is due to expire in October.

Alistair Macdonald, representing the company which operates the facility, said that when it became aware the music events were not covered the decision had been taken not to hold any until it could be addressed.

Concerns had been raised by the council’s environmental services at the number of events which are held, every Saturday and Sunday over the summer, and impact on neighbouring homes.

Mr Macdonald urged committee members to allow the festival to resume events as planned and look at the number of events involved when the licence came back for renewal in October.

However Colin Clark from environmental services said the number of events “seems excessive”.

He said: “There are other festivals like Fringe by the Sea and the Edinburgh Festival which take place but are over a far

shorter period for two weeks or four weeks.

“To me it seems extreme to have an event like EH32 which goes on for three months.”

Councillor Donna Collins, who has worked as an entertainer for decades appearing under the name Gladys Chucklebutty, said: “I don’t want to be a killjoy, I am an entertainer and know what it is like trying to get work.

“I think holding it over every weekend is excessive, either do it every Sunday and miss a Saturday, or every Saturday and miss the Sunday to give the neighbours a bit of a break.

“It allows us to see how it goes and if the organisers are going to run it responsibly making sure the sound is acceptable and events run in an acceptable manner.”

Cllr Trotter agreed saying: “We are not here to stop public entertainment and Cockenzie House does play an important part in the area.

“I am swayed by the every Saturday argument and no Sunday activity. Sunday is traditionally a rest day.”

And fellow committee member Councillor Andrew Forrest added: “If we were in a field I would be more than happy with what has been put forward and they could have every event put up.”

The committee unanimously agreed to grant the change to the public entertainment licence with a restriction on the EH32 events to be held on Saturdays only.

By Marie Sharp *Local Democracy Reporter*.

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