

Park events cause pain and mess for residents

Neighbours of a public park in West Lothian are demanding tighter rules for licensing circus events and fairs after facing years of trouble.

Residents around Livingston's Howden Park say they have suffered for years from noise and public disturbance from events in the park, as well as dog fouling, broken glass and even human waste tossed into their gardens. They say regular complaints to the council have fallen on deaf ears.

Now local councillor Maria MacAulay has won support for a motion which calls on the council to listen to local people before issuing licences for fairs.

Vice chair of the Howden Community Council, Anne Paton said: "The dates advertised for the fair are never the only days involved. Normally a week before we have the gates open then overnight huge lorries arrive.

"Then we have the noise of set up over however many days that takes. Then the fair starts. The noise is deafening and it's all day at weekends and every evening during the week- the relentless 'boom boom boom' of music

She added: "There are so many users of the park that cannot use it because of the disruption and the groups of youths that hang around the park at this time.

"Inevitably there is smashed glass and rubbish all over the park not to mention the damage that is done to the park itself. Then we wait for it to pass, putting up with this day and night. Then they go and we put up with the mess."

Mrs Paton added: "It used to be that we knew the fair was coming to the area because the notice boards appeared telling everyone about it – however given the complaints from the area in the last two years any adverts for events in the park have stopped and the only notice we receive is when the park gates are suddenly left open and the grass is spray painted blue to indicate where each ride is being placed.

"Council guidelines state that a council officer should be present at set up to ensure that larger and noisier rides are placed as far away from residents as possible. It's never ever happened."

Chair of the community council Colin Williamson said that, at its worst, neighbours of the park had human waste dumped in their gardens. Mrs Paton said a neighbour's dog had died after drinking outflow from a chemical toilet

Mr Williamson said the problem was that the council didn't have to consult the local people or community councils, and he said it was time local government laws were updated to give local people a bit more say in licensing of events.

"We're not against the shows or the circus, but can somewhere else not take a turn?"

Councillor MacAulay's motion was passed without comment at the last meeting of the full council.

It highlighted "the absence of adequate policies safeguarding neighbours during events such as circuses and fairs, which often result in excessive noise and antisocial behaviour." It called for clear guidelines "to protect the well-being and tranquility of residents in proximity to such events".

The motion urged the council to conduct a review of existing policies related to events generating noise and antisocial behaviour; collaborate with relevant stakeholders, including event organisers and local law enforcement, to establish effective guidelines for noise control and crowd management. It also called for more effective communication with neighbours.

The motion also called on the council to explore the

possibility of designated event zones or time restrictions to mitigate the impact on residential areas and to strengthen enforcement.

A West Lothian Council spokesperson said: "Representatives from the council's Operational Services have met with the local community council to discuss their concerns.

"Environmental Health needs to consider noise in terms of statutory noise nuisance legislation. Environmental health may also propose noise conditions as part of the licence application process to help ensure noise nuisance is mitigated and minimised.

"Given the transient and short-term nature of most events it is not always possible to pursue concerns using this route. It is not possible to monitor all events and concerns in real-time. The council's Safer Neighbourhood Team can assist with witnessing any noise concerns and advising Environmental Health, or the Licensing Team of potential breaches of licence conditions.

"Any data on noise complaints received would be considered in terms of responding to future event applications. There have been two individual complaints about noise at this site made directly to Environmental Health in 2019 and 2021. Anti-social behaviour concerns associated with events would be pursued by Police Scotland."

Persistent noise issues can be reported to the contact centre on 01506 280000 or the police on 101.

by Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter



The access to the park site after the shows leave. rubbish is also strewn around the park say neighbours. Copyright Anne Paton



Colin Williamson, chair of Howden Community Council at Howden Park. Photo Stuart Vance.