

East Lothian's 'smallest gala' fights to get drinks tent back

East Lothian's 'smallest gala' is fighting to get its drinks tent back amid claims a ban last summer saw uncontrolled drinking as people simply brought their own booze.

East Linton Gala was refused permission to serve alcohol in a tent last summer after East Lothian Licensing Board ruled it was a 'predominantly children's event'.

However organisers, who had argued the event was for all ages, say the ban led to fewer adults attending and those who did bringing their own alcohol.

The village green is exempt from local bylaws barring drinking alcohol in public on gala day meaning people were able to drink without any designated area provided.

Now the gala, which is a registered Scottish charity, has applied for a licence to operate a tent at this year's event with moves to link it to a hill race, which is for over 18s only, and takes place on the same day.

The marquee will be operated next to the Traprain Hill Race on the green and will operate after the children's parade and earlier events of the day have taken place.

Applying for the licence, the gala committee said the loss of the drinks tent last year had a negative impact on the

community event which raises funds for the village each year.

They said they received feedback from some in the village that they had chosen not to attend or left early because it had been 'perceived as a children's event' following the licensing board decision.

They added: "Since there is no bylaw preventing the personal consumption of alcohol many attendees chose to bring their own. Refusal of an occasional licence has no impact on alcohol consumption at the gala day.

"Instead of alcohol being primarily consumed in a separate, controlled area, there was widespread alcohol consumption throughout the day.

"We are thankful that 2024 saw no incidents however our view is that this runs counter to the stated concerns of the licensing board since there is now no means to manage consumption."

"Committee volunteers were also required to liaise more closely with the local Co-op where some staff expressed concerns they had become the de-facto bar for the event while volunteers had to deal with a large volume of littered drinks containers during and after the event."

The gala committee said it has taken steps such as ensuring hours of sale are after the main children's events and siting the tent near the hill race to ensure safety and hope the board will allow a licence for the event once again.

The gala, which is in June is attended by around 400 local residents and described by organisers as the county's 'smallest' one held in the village's War Memorial Park.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter