RENDLESHAM FIREWORKS

The decision to cancel the Fireworks was taken at an informal meeting of the Council held at 3.00pm on Friday 1st November. Because councillors had only been made aware of the seriousness of these issues at a late stage of planning for the event, there had been no opportunity to advertise and arrange a formal council meeting.

The Council’ reviewed the event pack and were assured by documents produced that the Fireworks company, the fairground and all vendors had provided copies of their own public liability insurance and risk assessment covering their own activities.

However, as this is a Parish Council event, on parish council land, financed and insured by the Parish Council all arrangements need to be signed off by the Council who should be undertaking a full review of the risks involved following current laws and guidelines.

The new Clerk, who has been in post for just a few weeks, briefly reviewed the documentation and advised the Council that she is not a Health and Safety or risk assessment specialist but a cursory look had raised concerns about potential shortfalls in the paperwork.

Lack of staff resources and an oversight by the Council meant that there has been no adequate overview or scrutiny by RPC on Events Planning over the past 2 years and the Council’s paperwork, risk assessments and review of control measures before, during and after the event has fallen short of the standards required by the Health and Safety Executive for large events of this kind. This is a control measure that should have been implemented by the Council.

Key concerns were:

Not adhering to the recommended ratio of stewards/guests. (Too few volunteers)

Volunteers being unaware of their roles/duties on the day including what to do in the event of an emergency.

No contingency arrangements to cover key staff

No adequate breaks for staff.

Queries over communication in the event of an emergency (high reliance on mobile phones)

Arrangements for emergency evacuation/crowd control not understood by helpers.

No RAG risk assessments or control measures taking into account all activities before, during and after the event.

Knowing the shortfalls, could safety at the event be assured?

If there was litigation would the current insurance be valid if checks and paperwork were not in place?

What are the implications legally (and potentially personally) for the event organiser and individual councillors should a catastrophic event occur given all parties are now aware of the shortfalls?

A villager who is a qualified Health and Safety officer offered to review the paperwork on the basis that they wished to remain anonymous. With no time to formally appoint a company to review this, their opinion was that we were not able to go ahead. They advised of actions that would need to be taken before 2pm on Sunday to enable the event to take place – the key thing being to ensure RAG risk assessments and control measures are clearly documented and a Health and Safety manager be appointed to manage Health and Safety on the day and to sign off on all controls before allowing the public to enter the site.

Councillors considered that with the event scheduled to happen in 2 days’ time and being late on a Friday afternoon there was no time to organise this and regrettably there was no option other than to cancel.

It was agreed that the Council would need to review their handling of Event Planning for the future to ensure nothing like this ever happens again.