

Forbidden Forest 2023

Operational Review and Recommendations

Completed by Geoff Feavyour
24 November 2023

Biographical Information

The author is a former Assistant Chief Constable with Leicestershire Police, with key responsibilities including:

- Head of Operations including Firearms, Traffic and Event Policing.
- Head of Criminal Justice including responsibility for all licensing.
- Command of events at Leicester City Football Club and Donington Racetrack, including the Download Festival attended by up to 120,000 people a day.
- Director of the national College of Policing Public Order and Public Safety Gold Command Course.
- Associate and subject matter expert for the College of Policing Management of Disaster and Civil Disaster Course.
- Observation and review of events such as the Appleby Horse Fair, events at Wembley and the Millennium stadia and football matches including Rangers v Celtic.
- Delivery of public safety courses and lectures in Canada, Germany, Sweden and Somalia.

I hold a Master of Arts degree in Public Order awarded by the University of Leicester and have attended the Crowd Dynamics course at the Emergency Planning College, Easingwold.

I currently work for organisations including Live Nation and Festival Republic in the management of medium and large events such as the Wireless Festival and Creamfields.

In respect of Forbidden Forest 2023 I was retained across the duration of the event to provide professional oversight of the event and offer an independent narrative report, including recommendations, in respect of future events at this location.

Event Overview

For 2023 Forbidden Forest was a three-day House, Techno and D'n'B music festival from 2 June to 4 June with 50 artists over 5 stages spread across a significant footprint in a wooded area with large open spaces. A single camping village was established near to the main entrance. Overall capacity for the event in 2023 was for 14999, split between 8500 camping tickets and 6499 additional day tickets for each day of the event.

Observations

Potential Changes to the Event Including Additional Day and Increased Capacity

I am aware that it is proposed for Forbidden Forest to run over four days, with campsite opening on Thursday and limited entertainment to be offered within the campsite and village footprint, also to increase the overall capacity of the event to 24,999 (campsite capacity to be increased to 18,000).

Subject to my specific comments below, I do not believe that these proposals offer any detriment to the licensing objectives:

- the prevention of crime and disorder.
- public safety.
- the prevention of public nuisance.
- the protection of children from harm.

Traffic Management

A large number of event goers attend the festival in private transport and it was noted that the majority of private vehicles had three or four passengers, minimising vehicle numbers.

The event has an established relationship with the Big Green Coach company, offering affordable travel from cities in the midlands and as far afield as London, Leeds and Liverpool.

The nearest railway station is Grantham, with a shuttle bus provided by the organisers.

Traffic arrangements appeared to work well, with only a small amount of congestion on local roads during peak arrival and departure times. Although local roads are relatively minor, car parks are reached through a network of internal paved roads on private land and this mitigated back-up onto public roads.

All pedestrian movement is completed without the need to cross public roads and this minimised pedestrian/vehicle conflict. Pedestrian movement from car parks was well-regulated and marshalled, with shared routes subject to good supervision and control.

There were two significant traffic related issues:

On 3 June there was a serious two-vehicle accident at the Belvoir Road/Long Lane Crossroads (approximately 1 ½ miles from the event) involving at least one event-going vehicle. The nature of the accident involved a road closure at a critical crossroads in the approach to the event but emergency services and highways authorities were able to establish alternative routes and there was relatively little inconvenience to road users.

Recommendation 1:

This incident occurred at a relatively well-known accident location where two very straight roads cross-over. It may be appropriate to work with Highways and the event traffic provider to consider additional signage and lighting at critical points on approach routes.

On the evening of 3 June shuttle bus movement was unable to service the numbers of day attendees seeking to get back to Grantham. Most people who were delayed sought their own transport and a large number of private hire cars and taxis filled the demand, but with some pickups spontaneously arranged for the roadway at the Woolsthorpe Road junction. This caused some congestion, noise and public safety issues. The issue was significantly resolved for the evening of 4 June.

Recommendation 2:

To review transport arrangements for the event. Specifically in respect of the potential for the unplanned use of the Woolsthorpe Road junction as an impromptu pick-up point, to consider contingency arrangements such as the availability of the Belvoir Castle Car park opposite the Engine Yard/Woolsthorpe Road junction as a stand-by pick-up point.

In addition to these two significant traffic issues, I am aware that the organisers and local authority have received some complaints from residents of local villages relating to vehicle noise and driver behaviour in surrounding villages.

Recommendation 3:

Whilst driver behaviour away from the event is the responsibility of the Police and Highways authorities, the organisers may wish to consider liaison with these key partners to improve visibility and enforcement at key locations and times.

Recommendation 4:

In respect of the potential to increase numbers at the event, the organisers may wish to consider the provision of additional bus/shuttle/park and ride schemes to minimise the volume of additional traffic.

Crowd Movement and Event Safety

Forbidden Forest is an established event with a significant proportion of repeat customers. Both the campsite and entertainment areas are well set out, spacious and well signed, with specific security teams for each area delivering the crowd management model of Design, Information, Management.

The nature of continuous and overlapping entertainment across the 5 stages (plus ancillary entertainment provided by vendors and a full fairground) mitigates sudden crowd movement or congestion. A professional assessment of acts likely to draw bigger crowds or challenging crowd behaviour ensured the deployment of additional staffing and management to ensure safety.

I undertook a significant degree of observation across the site and saw no issues of concern. There were no significant injuries or medical issues for the duration of the event.

There was one significant issue in the fairground where the Big Wheel became stuck in position for a period of time at the end of the Saturday night, with customers in carriages for up to an hour. I observed that this was well managed by Security, maintaining communication with customers and giving reassurance whilst moving passing event goers past the area. Event Health and Safety advisors were deployed immediately to work closely with fairground staff.

Drugs and Criminal Activity

Given the event demographic and the prevalence of controlled substances (including Nitrous Oxide, NOS) in society there is inevitably an attractive market for criminality at all festivals, with a significant risk from organised groups.

In 2022 it was apparent that organised groups, mainly NOS sellers, were able to access the event in numbers significant enough numbers to provide a challenge to security.

Standard measures, repeated from previous events, included a physical (rummage) search of baggage entering the campsite on a selective/always busy approach, and physical searches of people entering the event on day tickets and campers transiting from campsite to entertainment area. The entrance search was supported by drugs detection dogs from Inquest Canine.

For 2023 additional measures were put in place including a 'Steel Shield' protective fence around the whole site perimeter and specialist security resources outside the fence mixing covert and overt patrols.

It is apparent that these additional measures almost completely frustrated any organised criminal activity on site. A number of intended fence-jumpers were detained and removed outside the site. Excellent communications meant that most of those who did enter were detained inside the site immediately. At no point did any criminal group establish itself sufficiently to confront or frustrate security.

Recommendation 5: In large part this success was borne from the establishment of a secure perimeter with effective security deployments. Whilst the footprint of all festivals changes over time, and necessarily with an increase in numbers, care should be taken to keeping the perimeter as short as possible and to ensure that additional staffing is in place for any extended patrol areas.

Recommendation 6: Security was delivered by two established providers, Compact Security and Inquest Canine. I have good experience of working with both companies at a number of high-profile events. It is clear that their familiarity with the event, the site and each other significantly enhanced the security provision at the event and the organisers should look towards continuity wherever possible.

Whilst it is clear that on-site security arrangements contributed to a far safer and more secure festival, I am aware of community feedback that our on-site success may have led to disruption outside the event from 'garden hopping' and drug sales/illicit activity in residential property nearby.

Although the police were significantly involved in planning for the event it is noted that there was no pre-arranged on-site police liaison. Following some non-specific police concerns about the footprint of the event the police were in attendance on the Saturday and Sunday.

Recommendation 7: Organisers should give consideration to working with the police to secure on-site liaison.

Recommendation 8: Organisers should liaise with the police to consider the collection of and response to off-site community concerns. This could include agreeing and advertising routes of communication for the local community (such as a dedicated help-line) and establishing appropriate resourcing to respond to concerns. In the case of a specific premises that may have been used for the supply of drugs there should be further liaison with the police to consider a specific response.

Finally, I can confirm that I have read the Executive Summary which is to be submitted with the application and consider it to be a suitable response to the recommendations I have made. I am confident that the event will promote the Licensing Objectives.

Geoff Feavour
Security Coordinator

