

# The Future of the Annual Fireworks Display and Proposals Thereon

## Statement by the appointed Working Party

### Background

1. There has been an annual fireworks display on the Recreation Ground for many years. The numbers of people attending the event grew substantially in 2016 and 2017 and were estimated to be up to about 4,000, and this led to concerns about the safety of the event. In particular, there is clear guidance from the Health and Safety Executive that such an event on the Recreation Ground would only be safe if there were 2 distinct and separated exits for use in an emergency.
2. The Firework Display ('Display') has taken place for over 40 years, and is considered a major village cultural event. It marks a significant event in British history, which many communities have celebrated in the past. It also brings residents' families together as well as business to local shops and pubs.
3. The issue was raised with the Rowlands Castle Parish Council (RCPC). Discussions then took place with the Safety Advisory Group, coordinated by East Hampshire District Council, and with the insurers of both the RCA and RCPC. There was insufficient time to develop plans and put in place a second exit in 2018, so RCPC and the RCA took advice and agreed special arrangements for the Display in 2018 only.
4. The plans for 2018 included making the Display a ticket-only event with a limit on numbers to 2,000. A considerable amount of work was carried out by RCA in staging the Display including the following:
  - Writing and rewriting several times the Event Management Plan, and the Risk assessments required by EHDC, and liaising with Mark Jewell from EHDC and the Fire officer in charge.
  - Ensuring that all stall owners adhered to all the regulations and provided the RCA with evidence of having done so.
  - Ensuring that the RCA had valid insurance with a written statement that the insurers accepted that there was only one exit to the Recreation Ground.
  - Finding that we could not get public liability insurance for the use of the garden exits, which was a major problem, just when we thought everything was sorted out. Fortunately both the chief fire officer at EHDC and our new insurance company were prepared to support the plans on this occasion without use of the garden exits
  - Organising security staff and volunteer stewards and giving them verbal and written instructions.
  - Trying to publicise sufficiently well that spectators must buy tickets in advance.
  - Organising tickets and monitoring ticket sales; this was particularly difficult and time consuming.
5. In the event there was an excellent Display last November which was fully sold out. A modest surplus was created for RCA funds.

6. A joint Working Group has been set up with 2 members each from the RCA and RCPC and 1 member from the Recreation Ground Management Committee. Its objective is to consider the feasibility of creating a 2<sup>nd</sup> exit from the Recreation Ground.
7. The Summary below sets out proposals for a 2<sup>nd</sup> exit in order to gain initial feedback from the Rowlands Castle Community. A wider consultation will be mounted shortly.

### **Summary of proposal**

8. In light of advice, the Working Group recommends that future fireworks displays can only take place on the Recreation Ground if a 2<sup>nd</sup> pedestrian exit is created for use in an emergency only.
9. The proposed 2<sup>nd</sup> entrance would be put in place between 2 existing oak trees approximately opposite the entrances to 8 and 10 The Fairway. The entrance would replace 4m (13 feet 4 inches) of chain-link fencing and hedging.
10. The proposed entry gates would form a 4m (13'4") wide gateway comprising a pair of timber five or six bar field gates 1.2m or 1.5m (4 or 5 ft) high, (similar to thousands of such gates on farms throughout the countryside).
11. It would provide a secondary pedestrian only exit which would be locked when not required.
12. With a second exit in place, the numbers attending the display would still be limited to 2,600.
13. The ground between the gate and the road would be reinforced with ACO GroundGuard (or similar) and seeded with grass to maintain permeability and not exacerbate surface water drainage. The same would be done from the gate into the Recreation Ground for approximately 2 metres. The road kerb would be lowered.
14. There will be a consequent loss of 4m of indifferent hedging. The existing hedge is patchy, and provides only partial screening. It is estimated to be around 70 years old, and is now in need of some rejuvenation as is normal with deciduous hedging.
15. No changes are proposed to any parking restrictions.
16. Emergency vehicles would use the existing entrance to the Recreation Ground.

### **Issues raised by some local residents**

17. The 2<sup>nd</sup> exit has been discussed at several RCPC meetings. Since the Working Group was set up in late 2018, a number of objections to the possibility of a 2<sup>nd</sup> exit have been received, in part resulting from a statement distributed by 2 residents to other properties in The Fairway and The Peak. Some discussions with residents have also taken place. The issues that have been raised are summarised in the appended document *with comments from the Working Group in italics*.

## **Annex to Statement by the appointed Working Party**

Collated below is a list of objections and concerns raised to date, with the Working Party's considered response *in italics*

### Visual impact of gates and loss of privacy

The proposed second exit would be opposite numbers 8 & 10 The Fairway. Because the gates would be less high than the existing fence, there would be a negative effect on those 2 houses.

*This would be offset by the fairly dense existing hedging at Number 8. The effect could be further offset by making the gate solid rather than 5-barred and ensuring that it is 5' high. Taller gates may be considered, but increasing the height would increase the visual impact.*

### Environmental impact

Environmental concerns have been raised in 2 areas: the impact of the removal of a section of hedging on existing plants and animals, and the environmental impact of firework displays including pollution and the impact on pets.

*Hedgerows are protected under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997. These provide that removal of a section of hedgerow would require the approval of EHDC. The environmental impact of the hedge removal would be considered by EHDC before granting a licence.*

*The environmental impact could also be reduced by planting trees or shrubs elsewhere on a little used space in the Recreation Ground. We understand that the creation of a wild flower area is already under consideration to provide encouragement for bees and other insects.*

*In terms of the immediate impact of our fireworks display, it is managed by a professional display operator who adheres closely to the regulations for such events. The display itself lasts c 20 minutes with minimal impact on a limited geographical basis. It is appreciated there is a wider geographical impact from those arriving to view the display in terms of parking etc, however this is also short-term and lasts a few hours.*

### Health and safety risks

Concern has been expressed that the creation of a second exit from the Recreation Ground for use in emergencies only would carry an increased risk of accidents through excessive congestion and crushing.

*Given that the numbers would continue to be limited and that there will be 2 exits rather than one for use in an emergency, it is thought that the risk of accidents through crowd surges would be reduced rather than increased by a 2<sup>nd</sup> exit.*

### Increased risk of flooding in The Fairway

There is already a problem of flooding in The Fairway at the area of the proposed 2<sup>nd</sup> exit at times of high rainfall. This is in part because of the lie of the land which may be exacerbated by inadequate drainage. It has been suggested that the existing playground contributes to the problem and that it would become worse through the creation of a 2<sup>nd</sup> exit at this point because of increased run-off from the Recreation Ground.

*The Recreation Ground has been in existence since 1924, before the properties on The Fairway were built. The Ground slopes downward slightly towards The Fairway. It is almost entirely covered in grass which allows the majority of surface water to permeate the surface except possibly in extreme rainfall. The playground equipment, including the aerial cableway, is anchored in a small amount of concrete but the vast majority of the surrounding surface area is (sometimes reinforced) grass and highly permeable.*

*The ground around the proposed 2<sup>nd</sup> entrance would be reinforced with ACO GroundGuard which is designed not to contribute to increased surface water run-off. The proposals may consider tall drainage of some sort across the entrance to divert water away into the hedging on either side thus reducing the potential for increasing the water flow to the road.*

#### Impact on parking and double yellow lines

*There are no proposals to change the parking and parking restrictions as they now stand.*

#### Concerns relating to access for emergency vehicles

*The proposed 2<sup>nd</sup> entrance would not be used for emergency vehicles; these would use the existing entrance to the Recreation Ground.*

#### The size of the crowds attending the fireworks display; the display is no longer a village event only.

Concerns have been expressed that the display should be an event for local residents only and that it should not be increased in size.

*There are c 2000 electors in Rowlands Castle village (excluding outlying areas eg Finchdean, Idsworth etc. The display is enjoyed by many, with residents sometimes using it as an opportunity to enjoy time with family and/or friends. It is proposed that with the creation of a 2<sup>nd</sup> exit, the numbers would be restricted to 2,600 using ticketing arrangements similar to those in place in 2018. This would represent a reduction on the numbers of people estimated to have been present in 2016 and 2017.*

#### The effect on the play area

Concerns were expressed over the potential impact of the proposed 2<sup>nd</sup> exit on the existing play area.

*There would be an effect on the play area in that perhaps the table tennis fixture and a bench might have to be moved. This is not thought to be a major problem.*

#### Inconvenience to local residents

Concern has been expressed over the inconvenience that would be caused to local residents as the gates for a 2<sup>nd</sup> exit were installed.

*This is thought to be of limited duration only and would be confined to normal working hours.*

#### The potential for large events in the future

Concerns have been expressed over the possibilities that further large events would be held on the Recreation Ground if the 2<sup>nd</sup> exit is put in place.

*There are no plans for other large events to be held at the Recreation Ground. Such events would also require the permission of RCPC and the Recreation Ground Management Committee. The discussions over the 2<sup>nd</sup> exit have been solely focussed on ways to ensure that the fireworks display can continue and be run safely.*

#### Financial issues

Concerns have been expressed over the cost of a 2<sup>nd</sup> exit and whether it constitutes value for money.

*The financial issues have been acknowledged and would be considered further if a final decision to proceed with the 2<sup>nd</sup> exit is made. Some provision has been made in RCPC's budget for 2019/20 and it is thought that funding sources may also be available to contribute to the cost. Ultimately, these proposals are being made in the interests of safety for those attending the fireworks displays.*

#### Other issues

A range of other issues were raised including parking in the village and the need to restrict the growth in the size of Rowlands Castle with the consequent impact on village life.

*These issues were felt to be outside the remit of the Working Group*