

KIRKBY STEPHEN TOWN COUNCIL

Mr Christian Barnes, M.A. | Clerk to the Council | Kirkby Stephen Town Council | Local Links
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The Editor, Cumberland and Westmorland Herald.
By email.

18 July 2022

Dear Sir,

PARISH MEETING, KIRKBY STEPHEN REGARDING APPLEBY HORSEFAIR.

On Tuesday 26th July I will convene a 'Parish Meeting' at 7.00pm at the Upper Eden Rugby Club. This meeting is for residents of Kirkby Stephen Parish Area to discuss their views on the impact of Appleby Horse Fair on Kirkby Stephen and to seek constructive ideas about how to reduce negative impacts on the town. All electors and parishioners in Kirkby Stephen are very welcome. Please come.

Kirkby Stephen's experience of the fair is different from Appleby's. For at least two weeks in advance of the fair we have early arrivals staying in the area who have been prevented from going to Appleby before the start of the fair and who sometimes decide not to move on to the fair when it starts. Although our experience of the fair is less concentrated than Appleby's, it lasts much longer and I believe the impact on the normal functioning of our town and on trade is more disruptive with residents staying away from town centre business' for longer and some licensed premises closing for an extended period. Some residents have spoken of crime and their feelings of insecurity at this time. They have raised worries about the way the area is policed in the lead up to the fair.

Although this does not apply to all fairgoers staying in the area, from some fairgoers there has been an increase in behaviour during these weeks that we should not have to tolerate.

The Town Council has already written to the Police and to MASCG to raise these concerns and to ask for reassurance that Local Government re-organisation will not disrupt the functioning of MASCG's co-ordination role because Eden District Council who chair it, will no longer be in existence in 2023. Hopefully the establishment of the new Westmorland and Furness Council is an opportunity to make some positive changes to what have become established practices enabling the growth of the fair without suitable organisation.

Town Councillors supported the calling of a Parish Meeting after hearing from residents including some who have written to the council using a template letter provided by the administrators of an Appleby based Facebook page. This template calls for a 'Referendum' on Appleby Horse Fair. To be clear a 'Poll' (showing electors' opinions) and not a 'Referendum' (making a decision) may be demanded at this type of meeting. If a poll is demanded at the threshold required by legislation at the meeting, I will fulfil my duty to write to the Returning Officer and ask them to commission a poll on behalf of the meeting. They will then decide whether to accept the yes/no questions agreed at the meeting and carry out the poll.

The Returning Officer has written to the Town Council asking that the meeting 'be mindful that the question [on the poll card] fell within the definition of 'a parish matter' to ensure that it meets the requirements of lawful spending.' They say that - "This is likely to vary from parish to parish so the question would have to be relevant to adhere to that requirement. It would be worth considering what the practical application of the outcome of the poll could be?" and "It is also important to note that each parish would be liable for the costs of undertaking the poll and additionally that the outcome of the poll is advisory and not legally binding".

I hope Kirkby Stephen's electors will come to the meeting with an open mind and constructive ideas. As Chairman of Kirkby Stephen Town Council, I am keen to find ways to improve matters for the benefit of all. However, I am not convinced that an opinion poll regarding unachievable outcomes with the same questions asked in eight different parishes at a cost to each parish in the order of £1,000 + will help anyone.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Richardson, Chairman Kirkby Stephen, Town Council.