

Guiding Principles

*for holding events on
Knutsford Heath*



Introduction

The three areas known as Knutsford Heaths (as delineated in red on the appended plan) are central to the Tatton Estate and the local community. Throughout this document we refer to 'the heath' as a singular. The Heath is privately owned by the Tatton Estate but designated as 'common land' and the Estate's long term custodianship centres around maintaining and enhancing the Heath for the benefit of the whole community and the Estate itself.

Whilst management decisions for the Heath are legally a matter for the owners the Tatton Estate has worked with the local community to enhance the area for decades and has entered into this voluntary agreement with Knutsford Town Council and Friends of the Heath to ensure that the Heaths are sustainably managed for the benefit of the Heath itself as well as local residents, visitors, businesses, nature and the Estate.

The parties respect that the Heath must be financially viable to enable investment in maintenance and improvements and that the hosting of suitable events is a key mechanism to deliver this investment.

This agreement is intended to document the principles and commitments which will evolve over time. It will be formally reviewed biennially in January when each party shall signify their intent for the agreement to continue. Any party can withdraw from the agreement at any time, giving written notice to the other parties at which point the whole agreement shall be void.

Kayne Burgon
for Tatton Estate

Cllr Colin Banks
for Knutsford Town Council

Nick Johnson
for Friends of the Heath

Background

About the Heath

The Heath is a much-loved open space in the centre of Knutsford, providing an amenity area enjoyed by people for recreation, events, important local heritage and ecological value.

The Heath is a large, mainly open area whose character is greatly determined by the old sand quarry and varying heathland habitats. The area hatched in red on the appended plan, represents the nature reserve, which is managed by Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

The Heath is surrounded by avenues of mature trees and a concrete post steel pole fence. The Heath must continue to be managed sustainably to provide existing and new benefits to the community and improved viability to secure ongoing maintenance and improvement.

Designations

Common Land

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 200 and other statutory premises, where rights covered by common land provisions have been registered, the public have rights of access, by foot, over the land, in addition to any rights which the tenement owners may have.

Local Wildlife Site

The Heath has been designated a Local Wildlife Site by the Local Authority in 1986 due to its high ecological value. This is a non-statutory designation.

Events on the Heath

Since its ceased use as Knutsford Racecourse, the Heath has long been used as the venue for the crowning of the May Queen in the town's famous Knutsford Royal May Day and the accompanying funfair which is one of the largest in the UK. The Heath also hosts an annual circus, Scouts car boot sale and the Knutsford Lion's community fair. These kinds of event are well suited to the Heath as they fit with the local community and are open to all. They are welcomed for contributing to Knutsford's vibrant social life, the local economy but do not sustain the required levels of investment in the Heath.

Large events can cause temporary damage to the Heath through a combination of vehicles, heavy equipment and the thousands of people coming together. Over time, if not managed correctly, this can become long-term damage due to soil compaction and rutting. To date, there has been no permanent or severe damage caused by events.

In the past limited income on the Heath has prevented investments in trees, fencing, paths and gateways, ecological investments, drainage etc and this document seeks to help address that by supporting sustainable investment and social events that improve rather than damage the long-term environment.

For new events, careful consideration must be given to:

- The wishes of Tatton Estate as owners of the Heath
- The views of the wider local community, including neighbours, residents, businesses and other stakeholders
- The balance of benefits and inconveniences to users of the Heath
- Any material long-term impacts on the Heath
- The community's long-term aspirations for improvements to the Heath and continued support for key charity and community events
- The impact on the costs of managing the Heath such as the maintenance of the protected trees, security and bailiff costs, mowing and fencing repairs and much more

Commitments under this Agreement

It is respected that this is a voluntary agreement by the three organisations within Knutsford which have the greatest interest in the long-term success of the Heath. Tatton Estate as its owner, Knutsford Town Council as the elected body representing the interests of the local community and Friends of the Heath as the voluntary organisation with a sole focus of preserving and enhancing the Heath for wildlife and all users.

Whilst this agreement is focused on the guiding principles for delivering events on the Heath, it also forms the basis of a tripartite commitment from these organisations to working together on matters concerning the Heath.

In approving this document, the parties make the following commitments:

1. All parties will respect these commitments and the guiding principles and will ensure their organisations work together in a collaborative, positive and polite manner.
2. Tatton Estate, Knutsford Town Council and Friends of the Heath will ensure that where a member acts against this agreement, they make it clear they do so in a personal capacity and must not purport to speak on behalf of the organisation.
3. Tatton Estate will share annual budgets and accounts for the Heath with the other parties. Knutsford Town Council and Friends of the Heath respect the Estate's intention that the Heath should financially break even (after supporting any charity/community activities) and aspiration for it to deliver a surplus for reinvestment into improvements to the Heath.
4. Tatton Estate commits to using reasonable endeavours to consult the other parties on planning and licensing matters and to apply to Knutsford Town Council where a market license is required.
5. For any matter which does not meet the Objectives and Guiding Principles, all parties reserve their rights as a consultee to make representations to any relevant regulator (for example to Cheshire East Council with respect planning and licensing matters) and Knutsford Town Council's position as the licensing authority for markets is not fettered
6. All parties will respond efficiently to communications and requests for comment on proposed events. This should normally include confirming receipt within two working days and providing comments on small events within one calendar week and major events within two calendar weeks. All parties shall ensure there are mechanisms to delegate authority to enable this happen from the date of signing this agreement.
7. All parties will proactively communicate with each other on matters related to the Heath and before making any material decisions which affect the Heath.

The Guiding Principles

These principles are designed to guide the parties in determining whether a proposed event is appropriate for the Big Heath. By adopting clear principles for the sustainable management and a proactive partnership approach on The Heaths we can protect it and enhance them to maximise their social, economic, and environmental benefits and ensure they remain a jewel for Knutsford and the Tatton Estate.

General Principles

1. Events which deliver significant net benefits to the wider community will be welcomed. Benefits include (but are not limited to) education, health improvement, social interaction, visitor interaction, income generation for the town, businesses The Heath and local charities.
2. Event size and duration should be carefully considered so as not to unreasonably deprive people of their right to use the Heath.
3. The largest event is the fair and the accompanying Knutsford Royal May Day event which occupies approximately 70% of the Big Heath for around 10 days plus build and derig time. This is welcomed because of its historical significance, social and economic importance to the Town.
4. Events must comply with all relevant laws/bylaws. It is the responsibility of the Estate (or its occupiers) to ensure all necessary consents are obtained.
5. Major events have the potential to cause the most damage/disruption and must therefore careful consideration must be given to restrictions such as the frequency, location, timing and duration.

Minor Events

A one/two-day event comprising a gathering of up to 500 people at any one time.

Minor events may involve some vehicles and exhibitors stands on site (e.g. up to 50).

Examples: Scouts car boot sale, Lion's Community Fair

Major Events

Any event which comprises a gathering of over 500 people at any one time, or those which run for more than two days, or those which are accompanied by heavy equipment, temporary accommodation, power generation, fuel storage etc.

Examples: John Collins Funfair, Gandy's Circus

1. Income generated from events held on the Heath will usually be prioritised as follows:

- a. to repair any damage caused to the Heath
- b. to contribute towards the running costs of the Heath (including maintenance, preservation work and subsidising charitable/community events)
- c. improvements to the Heath (including physical enhancement and improvements to the grassland, trees and ecology)

2. Measures should be taken to minimise the damage caused and to restore the site to its previous state. Such measures should include consideration of:

- a. avoiding winter months
- b. Laying temporary protective mesh on the ground to reduce vehicle damage
- c. Laying temporary matting to prevent ground pollution by spillage
- d. Removing litter from the whole site, not just the immediate site, as it can be distributed more widely by people and wind
- e. Removing all litter immediately as, when left, it gets entangled in the vegetation, becomes an unsightly and is hazardous to wildlife. Plastic fragments from firework displays are particularly hazardous – using best endeavours to require bio-alternatives to plastic where possible
- f. Removing or treating all polluting substances, wherever on the Heath they have been deposited – as far as is practical
- g. Remediating ruts, holes and other unevenness caused by the event at the earliest opportunity

3. The flora and fauna on the Heath should be treated with care

- a. Trees on The Heath are subject to Tree Preservation Orders so must not be damaged
- b. The area to the western end of the Heath (see Appendix 2) is particularly important and care must be taken to ensure they are not contaminated or damaged.

4. Regular surveys should be undertaken to monitor the state of the grassland and the impact of its use.

Principles for the holding of Major Events

1. The planning of major events will include consultation with the signatory stakeholders. The Town Council and Friends of the Heath will use reasonable endeavours to engage positively and constructively with residents and businesses and where events are consistent with the Guiding Principles, explain they support the letter and spirit of them as part of a wider collaboration
2. The area of higher ecological value should be avoided (as hatched red on the appended plan)
3. Remedial work should be planned, budgeted and undertaken in a proactive manner to restore the land to its previous state or better.
4. Each area of grassland used for heavy machinery or footfall should be given sufficient time to recover after an event. The Tatton Estate will determine whether a sufficient period has been left, taking into account ground conditions, observations and seasonable factors. Together with representations from the parties and from professional advice.
5. The principle of recovery time allows different areas of the Heath to be used for different events – for example the Large Heath and Little Heath are two independent areas, and the Large Heath may accommodate events in different areas with careful management.

Managing the Heath – Appendix 1

The parties agree that where surplus funding, or residual funds from donations or fundraising allow – there will be investment of these funds into the Heath.

Priority areas for aesthetic improvement have been identified:

1. Make the railings safe and tidy
2. Tree management to include the active management of Lime trees around the heath boundaries, successional planting, removal of damaged/poor specimens, crown reduction/lifting to improve access and road safety.
3. Encourage people to install benches under the Town Council's Bench Sponsorship Policy.

Priority areas for ecological improvement have been identified (subject to approval by ecologist):

1. Grassland - add more plant species and adopt an ecologically-aware mowing regime.
2. Woodland - thinning the trees and adding other species, especially under-story trees with fruits to feed the birds (e.g. hazel, hawthorn, rowan). Wildflowers could be planted in woodland glades.
3. Invasive Species - work is needed to eradicate non-native invasive species when they appear.
4. Ornithology - nest boxes for important species should be provided and maintained. Boxes could be sponsored or made by townspeople.
5. Rare Lowland Heath - active management is needed to reduce woodland encroachment.

Communication and stakeholder engagement

1. The Parties will work together to explain to the community that the Heath is privately owned and is protected by designations such as TPO's, and therefore people should not take things from, or do things to the Heath without the Owners written consent
2. The Parties will communicate to the community that the Estate has subsidised the Heath for many decades.

Map of the Heath with its constituent parts – Appendix 2

