

Appleby Horse Fair 2021 Public Meeting
22 July 2021

Councillor Andy Connell, chair of the meeting, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Opening statements were made by members of the Multi-Agency Strategic Co-ordinating Group for Appleby Horse Fair, followed by a question and answer session with members of the public.

Councillor Andy Connell, Cumbria County Council Elected Member for Appleby

Appleby Fair is not an organised event, with owners. The term describes the annual convergence on Appleby of people - most of them identifying as Gypsy/Romani/Traveller - to meet, mingle and trade horses.

Unless - as in 2001 (foot and mouth) and 2020 (Covid) -there is temporary legislation preventing movement or mingling, people are as free to come to Appleby when they choose as they would be to go to e.g., Blackpool.

The traditional dating of the 'New Fair' close to the second Wednesday in June is not set out in any legal document; it has been customary since it began in 1775, but it is not a rule. Fair began as a three day livestock sale located on Gallows/Fair Hill which had multiple owners who in 1911 gave it to the Corporation. The Hill was thereafter locked at the time of the Fair, but Fairgoers continued to come to Appleby camping, trading and mingling on roadside verges. Nobody could claim ownership. Although Fair Hill re-opened at Fair time after 1965, it is now, along with other fields with various owners a camping location.

The Multi-Agency Strategic Co-ordinating Group was established in 2008 to produce a more concerted response to the impact of the temporary presence of large numbers of people and horses in and around Appleby, but it does not and cannot 'run' the Fair.

Les Clark, Chairman of the Multi-Agency Strategic Co-ordinating Group for Appleby Horse Fair

I thought it best that I tackle the big question head on - Why are MASCG supporting the Fair going ahead this year?

After the roadmap for lifting COVID restrictions was announced by the Government back in February, it became clear to MASCG, that once restrictions were lifted many of the people who would normally come to the Fair in June would gather in and around Appleby when that happened.

MASCG therefore had a choice. Either to accept people to gather on an ad hoc basis and be unplanned and unsupported, or try and encourage people to gather on specific dates when co-ordinated support and management could be put in place as usually happens. There was a lot of debate about this, including different dates, there were strong concerns raised by the representatives of the local communities about if the Fair should happen. In the end all of the agencies that assist with the Fair such as the local authorities, police and the RSPCA agreed that they would support the Fair going ahead from 12-15 August.

I believe that this is the best decision we could make having listened to the different points of view and trying to balance them with the concerns that were raised. The Fair did not go ahead last year because there were laws in place that would not allow it, and this was respected by the majority of people. Now these laws have been lifted. I need to make it clear that MASCG as a group or any of the agencies represented on MASCG do not have the power to stop people gathering. All our normal powers remain in place. Superintendent Matthew Kennerley will further explain the plans that have been co-ordinated to support the Fair this year.

The main responsibility of MASCG is to ensure that the Fair is safe. The key issue around safety this year, and source of many concerns is around COVID. Colin Cox, Director of Public Health for Cumbria, joined the MASCG this year to advise COVID specific safety guidance. Colin will provide an update this evening on the COVID situation in the area and what measures we'll be putting in place to help people be COVID safe.

We are here to hopefully reassure you as much as we can. As well as the panel we also have a number other people from the MASCG here and online who can help answer your questions after the presenters have finished.

Superintendent Matt Kennerley, Appleby Horse Fair Gold Command

I am Superintendent Matt Kennerley and my day job is Superintendent with responsibility for uniform policing in North Cumbria.

I have 20 years experience as a police officer in Cumbria including having worked the Fair over a number of years from Bronze roles on fair hill to regularly working as Silver. I Chaired the Community Advisory Group (CAG) meeting for a number of years.

Appleby Horse Fair has a full command structure, including specialist resources, and remains the biggest policing commitment for Cumbria each year. We have very detailed plans in relation to policing of the fair.

Overall we work with partners to facilitate a safe, lawful, peaceful and enjoyable fair.

We always try to balance the needs of the local community with those of the visiting communities, which is often not easy.

I set high expectations for policing with officers clear about engaging with people, whether they are the settled community or visitors, and intervening to prevent situations escalating.

What you can expect to see for AHF 2021:

- The same numbers and broad deployment of police officers you would have seen at the 2019 fair - where we had significantly uplifted officers deployed to the event.
- Dedicated verge patrols – this has started already in South Cumbria and will grow each week.
- Increased officers deployed to outlying areas (this event isn't just Appleby that sees officers deployed)
- Dedicated phone line (via 101) for the fair (and we have made some recent changes to significantly reduce waiting times)
- You are likely to see officers still wearing masks in crowded environments - internally we will have to do some things differently to minimise any potential spread and the impact this may

could on police resource - every officer will be testing daily. We have a range of contingencies if we need them to ensure our resourcing stays where it needs to be.

- We do a lot of policing now on smartphones - including intelligence briefing, recording crime, and looking at incidents so you will see officers on their 'phones' don't think they are checking out their eBay.

We have been working closely with partners:

- Roadworks on the A66 will be removed for duration of the fair.
- We have heard from the RSPCA, they will also provide the same resources as 2019.
- We work closely with the licensing team and licensed premises.

Please take the opportunity to speak with officers and let them know if you have seen issues or how they are doing.

If we don't know about something we can't do anything about it. We have online reporting, webchat, 101 and lots of officers in attendance so please let us know.

The police at the event work very hard, are on their feet (hopefully in weather not quite as warm as today) and for long shifts.

The Neighbourhood team have been here for the build up and will be after the event. Appleby isn't an event that we come and police and walk away from. It is community focussed and the local team are critical to this.

There will be the opportunity to feed-back post event. I Look forward to seeing you there.

Colin Cox, Director of Public Health for Cumbria

The public health team doesn't normally get all that much involved in the planning for the Fair, but this year of course Covid has made things considerably more complicated – so we were brought in to the MASCG and have been working with that group for the last few months. So I'm going to say a bit now about the current situation and the risks, and then cover what we've been doing so far and will do at the Fair itself to help to control and reduce those risks.

First, it's important to remember that Covid is already here. Cumbria's rate of new infections is higher than the England average, at about 700 new cases per 100,000 population per week, compared to about 500 in England as a whole. Eden is a bit lower, at about 300, but that still translates into about 160-170 cases every week in Eden. So this is not just an issue of people bringing the virus in during the Fair – it's here already.

But clearly any gathering of people, particularly people who don't regularly get together, increases the risk of transmission. So I'm certainly not going to pretend that there's no risk associated with the Fair. Crowds and lots of mixing of people are clearly risk factors. Actually there are two main possible risks – the first is of course the risk of transmission of Covid to or within the settled population of Appleby – and in many ways that's the one I'm most concerned about. But there's also a risk of transmission to or within the Gypsy and Traveller community, with the potential for that then to seed lots of outbreaks elsewhere in the country, when everyone leaves Appleby and goes wherever they're going next. And we have to try to keep transmission down for both those reasons.

That increased risk because of people gathering is reduced somewhat by two main factors. The first is that the Fair is happening as late as it is – this means that there has been enough time to roll out the vaccination programme to the whole population, and indeed that was the major factor driving my advice that I'd prefer to see the Fair happening in August than in July. And that's been successful – it looks as if around 90% of the eligible population of Appleby and the surrounding area have had at least one dose, and over 75% have had two. That's a very high rate of vaccination and will substantially reduce the risk to people here. The second main risk reduction factor is the fact that so much of the Fair takes place outdoors. The virus spreads best in crowded, enclosed, poorly ventilated spaces – nightclubs are in many ways the major concern here. So while crowds increase the risk, when they're outdoors the risk is much reduced.

However risks do remain, so we need to think about what control measures can be put in place to reduce these. Given the changes to the national regulations this week we actually have limited options at the moment. Really there are four.

The first is vaccination. That's the key control measure – to get as many people vaccinated as possible. I've already covered vaccination for Appleby residents. We also want to make sure as many people as possible who're visiting are vaccinated.

So a couple of months ago we started pushing out messaging to the Gypsy and Traveller community promoting vaccination uptake, and we're working with public health colleagues particularly in Northumberland and County Durham to get them to promote vaccination at the campsites that people use when they're making their way here. While we don't have reliable statistics, the good news is that anecdotal feedback suggests that take-up of the vaccine among Gypsies and Travellers is every bit as high as it is in the rest of the population.

The second control measure is testing. Starting tomorrow we're going to be distributing test kits around the various campsites that are used on the way to the Fair – and again we're working with colleagues in neighbouring authorities on this as well – to encourage a "test before you travel" message. And at the Fair itself we will be present and again distributing test kits and other information about Covid. In part we hope that people will take the opportunity to test and self-isolate if they're positive, but of course we know that might be limited – but at least the opportunity will be there and it will keep the risk of Covid visible for people and keep it in their minds while they're at the Fair.

The third control measure is contact tracing. I'm under no illusions about how successful this is likely to be, as things like checking in with the App or leaving contact details are no longer legally enforceable, and I guess that most people won't. However we will be continuing to encourage this both in the fields and the pubs and other venues, and we've done things like fund public WiFi around the field area to make it easier for people to check in with the App. But again in all honesty I know that this will be really challenging and we probably won't get good take-up of this.

And finally, while none of the control measures like mask wearing and checking in are enforceable now, we're funding additional staff for the pubs in the town and surrounding area essentially to act as Covid marshals to help the pubs to manage the crowds as best they can and to try to help keep those areas as safe as possible.

Question and Answer Session with members of the public:

Q: Over the Fair, Jubilee Bridge is a very popular area. During the 2019 Fair, a number of caravans parked in the area and stayed there all week. Will there be any police presence in the area to prevent this happening again?

A, Matt Kennerley (Police): It would make sense to look at mitigation, if this is not possible we should be able to enforce the caravans to move.

Q: Is there any feeling on the ground on numbers that are expected to attend this years Fair?

A, Les Clark (MASC): There is no absolute evidence on numbers. The indications are that this will be a busy fair, so MASC are planning and preparing for that.

Q: What information do you have on Gypsy/Traveller vaccination take up?

A, Billy Welch (G&T Rep): earlier in the year our community were very sceptical about Covid and the vaccine. We were hit really badly by Covid over Christmas, and because of this many are now vaccinated.

Q: Was it wise to make a decision on the new Fair date when we didn't know at the time what the situation would be. This has been a very difficult year and there was no consultation with the people of Appleby, why?

A, Les Clark (MASC): MASC representative from a number of different organisations had a very hard debate when choosing this date. Regardless of the Public Health situation, there is now no legal position to stop the Fair.

MASC committed to reviewing the legal and Public Health position and decided to have the new date as late as possible to allow more people to get vaccinated.

It is better to have a date that MASC are prepared for and can plan for as usual and put in precautions.

A, Colin Cox (Public Health): The plan was to hold off as long as possible to allow for most people to get the vaccine.

The vaccine gives individuals:

- 70% less chance of catching Covid.
- 80% less chance of becoming ill or developing symptoms.
- 90% less chance of hospitalisation.

Q: Why has the licence for Market Hill been given again? This will increase numbers attending and is not a traditional part of the Fair.

A, Emma Brass (EDC): The field is licenced as a camp site. There is a permit scheme for food stalls but the market itself is not licenced.

Q: The resurfacing work on the Appleby Bypass is worrying people, how will this impact access?

A, Billy Welch (G&T Rep): We are aware of the roadworks and are advising people to avoid the A66 with horse drawn vehicles.

A, Matt Kennerley (Police): Highways England communicate with MASCG around the fair arrangements, for the main part of the fair we have been advised that the road works will be taken down.

Q: What would trigger something being bad enough to force local Covid restrictions?

A, Colin Cox (Public Health): Some parts of the country have restrictions in place as Government have decided it is necessary, these are known as Enhanced Support Areas. It is not clear what powers would come with being put into an Enhanced Support Area.

A trigger would be rapidly rising, high rates of Covid cases. As Eden's cases are relatively low I don't think Government would consider an Enhanced Support Area decision.

Q: We've been told that policing will be the same as it was in 2019. If officers get Covid, what happens post Fair?

A, Matt Kennerley (Police): Most of our officers have had both vaccines. We are looking at the possibility of a 'test to release' system and are keeping an eye on the 'pingdemic' and how it would impact us.

Measures are in place internally to ensure reduced risk of transmission between officers and into the community. Every officer will be tested daily.

Q: The Fair is usually busy from Friday and becomes quiet on Sunday. Are we expecting the same to happen this year or will people stay longer?

A, Billy Welch (G&T Rep): It is expected to be the same, the Fair becoming quiet and people leaving on Sunday. But it is hard to say.

A, Les Clark (MASCG): We are encouraging people not to come early, or stay longer.

Q: The roads and traffic need policing properly over the Fair.

A, Matt Kennerley (Police): I can assure you they will be.

Q: The clean up operations after the Fair are fantastic.

A, Les Clark (MASCG): Thank you, I will feed that back.

Q: Will information from this meeting be shared online, due to the restrictions on numbers?

A, Les Clark (MASC): Questions and answers are being noted and will be distributed to those who have attended. We will look at the possibility of posting them on the Appleby Fair website.

Q: Will the CAG meetings be taking place again this year?

A, Matt Kennerley (Police): Yes, there will also be a dial in option. The meetings will not be held at the police station as usual but they will still be happening.

Q: Next years Fair falls on the Queens Jubilee. Would it possible to move the Fair again so that the people of Appleby can celebrate?

A, Billy Welch (G&T Rep): We would like to celebrate too. This will be something to talk about with MASC after this years Fair.

Q: Views from the public were put forward to MASC by elected members, we seem to have not been listened to. Can we be assured that we will be listened to in future?

A, Phil Dew (Elected Member, Kirkby Stephen): Public concerns were expressed by elected members at MASC. We live in a democracy. MASC took a corporate decision and I support that decision. We have a really good team here, working together on the Fair.

A, Karen Greenwood (Elected Member, Appleby): As elected members, we put all views across to MASC. This was a very difficult decision.

Members were listened to. The discussions were long and hard, and went on for weeks. Everyone listened and concerns were taken seriously. MASC took legal, public health and operational perspectives.

It was a very difficult decision and I respect officers for their hard work.