



Evaluation report - Blythe Hill Festival 2023

Summary

We held the Blythe Hill Festival on 2nd July 2023 from 12pm to 5pm. This festival followed the same structure as previous years, with the goal of raising funds to support park projects, including children's play equipment and the community garden.

This year we offered two stages, the main stage and the woodland stage, a diverse range of local traders offering food and crafts and representing a number of community groups. This year the festival piloted two new projects, including a Friends bar, with the aim of increasing income generation, and a host for children activities.

Sponsorship

We saw a slight decline in festival sponsorship this year due to cost of living and its effect on local business income. At the same time, we're delighted to continue our relationship with Hunters as headline sponsors, and this year we agreed a new sponsorship agreement for the next five years. We were pleased to welcome two new sponsors this year with Ball Coaching and Campervantastic, which helped to soften reductions in income and support the base running cost of the festival.

List of sponsors

Headline / main sponsor

Hunters of Catford and Forest Hill

Specialist sponsor for Woodland stage

Taylorred Lofts

Festival sponsors

Blythe Hill Tavern

Baller Sports Coaching

Brockley Supermarket

Campervantastic

Fundraising needs

Over the last year the Friends group has strengthened its planning and created a clear direction for park improvements. We have clear fundraising asks around the older children's trim trail and the community garden. Having clear, specific projects should improve public understanding of the value of supporting the Festival and the Friends more widely.

Volunteering

The festival is held for the benefit of community, and run and managed entirely by volunteers. This year we saw a reduction in overall volunteer commitment this year, particularly in more senior 'co-ordinating' positions, with a related loss of experience and understanding of the institutional knowledge of the needs of several areas.

The Friends hosted two social events to welcome new volunteers. This achieved strong engagement with new festival volunteers offering time both before and during the festival.

However, a shortage of people willing to take ownership of portfolio positions, meant we had challenges with making the most of the volunteers we had and matching people to tasks and roles. We lacked volunteers in key areas such as children's activities, waste management and clearing the site post festival. This resulted in an overall poor performance and engagement of volunteer experience.

On the positive side, we continued our partnership with police cadets, which provided valuable extra volunteer support, as well as developing a stronger volunteering offer with professionally printed T-shirts, a free meal voucher, a celebration wrap up with wider volunteers, as well as links with Lewisham Local so that every volunteer was eligible for a Lewisham Local card.

Volunteer feedback exercise

Likes

- Friends Bar
- I enjoyed the great community feeling as always
- I enjoyed doing something that made me feel part of the community that I've only recently joined
- I really enjoyed the community feel and camaraderie of putting the tents together on Saturday evening
- Great to be part of a community event with so many people enjoying themselves
- Lots of people told us it was the best part of their year, they value it
- New layout, felt easier to move around.

Challenges

- Card reader failure
- Payment by card was challenging
- Long queues for toilets
- More signage for children activities – challenge to keep them engaged to keep art competition – needing a quick interaction task.
- Lack of effective recycling, together with a shortage of Euro bins - possibly related to more people bringing in picnics this year.

Things to change

- Card readers for the kids' / children's tent
- Increase donation of cakes – Cake competition to bring the community engagement
- Linking the bar and BBQ together to save volunteer resources and communication delays – add more value to support veggie options, as well as non-alcoholic drinks
- Increase a drumbeat of community + volunteer through out the year
- Increase our social media impact.
- Create QR codes to donation or pay for the friends items in donation page to reduce cash payment.
- More bins and groups litter picking, as well as rethinking the layout of Euro bins on the site.

New pilots changes and impact

This year we introduced a new Friends of Blythe Hill fields Bar with support from Brockley Supermarket. There was a clear business case, as this offered the potential to increase the potential for income generation, rather than outsourcing a key source of income to licenced traders.

We had to make a stronger initial outlay in order to pilot and launch this new approach, but the Friends group took away a small increase of funds and some lessons learned, including the types of drinks that were popular, links with the BBQ and ensuring more robust payment systems. It's also possible that we may want to look at 'sale or return' options as a way of reducing risk.

We remain committed to ensuring that the Festival reflects the diversity of our local communities and, to support this, focused on wider range of the food traders and stage acts. Although we were initially short of volunteers to lead the children's tent this year, we were luckily approached by local university to support children's activities in the Chinese culture and this turned out to be a positive change with an additional cultural impact for the festival.

Finances

We had challenges with the Sum up/Cashless system in the festival , losing long period time within the cashless payment system. We had not considered this a threat in the planning stages; however it did have an impact on our ability to earn income at a key stage of the festival. We have some localised problem solving to continue the selling but we need to factor better financial infrastructure to support donations and QR codes.

Overall SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong brand with local trader, community for professional interaction and reach to general community• Strong experience and knowledge of local business, H&S checks and onboarding on traders from our volunteers.• Strong business local donation to the raffle – resulted in successful ticket sales• Very well known festival to the local community with attendance 3,500-4000 people.• Family focused event• Demonstrated a clear and organised event for the festival• Improved volunteer experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited high level volunteer capacity.• Need stronger volunteer resource management to ensure resources are allocated to the areas that need it most.• Lack of resource and management of waste and recycling on the festival site.• Lack of clear / robust roles and structures for lead / coordinator – lack of clarity and level of impact in planning details – increasing the level of accountability• Lack of the strong consistent digital marketing material to increase volunteers and community.• Clear sum up / cashless – prep planning with sum up – video training to support volunteers In the login to the system.• Second signature of access to bank accounts needed for both Head of Festival and the Chair.

Threats	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local business sponsorship – external environment and impact to local business creating unbalanced opportunity • Lack of the volunteer engagement to sustain the level of resource required for a festival of this size popularity • Balance of the park’s Biodiversity projects, including meadows, and ensuring sufficient space for festival needs. • Potential change of the location for festival storage. • Losing community focus to the festival. • We have been fortunate with the weather, but this could have an impact in future. • A high level of churn in the Head of Festival role. This may be due to local demographics, with many more working parents diminishing the pool of people available to commit significant time to a major role. Similarly, variable support at the coordinating level, means there is potential for burnout, with a lot of responsibility resting on the Head’s shoulders – the buck stops with them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refresh of Festival branding to focus on the create values and a fresh approach. • Growing opportunities for younger volunteers from secondary schools (16-18 year olds) • Looking at potential of wider engagement within volunteers for the fields / community space • Developing a culture to scale down and up based on available volunteer resource each year.

Recommendations for Festival development

- Specific roles and responsibilities for all volunteers within planning and on site activities, together with a stronger sense of ownership for people taking on each role.
- Refresh values and branding to the festival – reframing it as a community festival
- Creating more transparent access to clear budgets to coordinate the payment process or base cost of the festival – consider secondary access to payment
- Strengthening our management of the waste / recycling arrangement to encourage more community engagement, less of a ‘service’ mentality and less responsibility to rest on volunteers.