



DOWNTON PARISH COUNCIL

HERITAGE AND LICENSING POLICY FOR DOWNTON'S COMMUNITY EVENTS

Downton Parish Council recognises the historic importance of traditional community events associated with the parish of Downton.

The purpose of this Policy is to support the continued preservation of these historic community events by establishing a fair, transparent, and consistent framework for considering applications to organise and stage an event on Council-owned or Council-controlled land, having due regard to the protection and appropriate use of that land, as well as the benefit provided to the local community.

Signed: Melanie Camilleri
(Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer)

Signed: Cllr Jane Brentor (Chair)

Date: 12 October 2026

1. Purpose of Policy

Downton Parish Council ("the Council") wishes to record its recognition of the historic importance of community gatherings associated with the parish of Downton.

Where these community events take place on Council-owned or Council-controlled land, the Council wishes to:

- Ensure their historic significance is preserved
- Safeguard their continuation for the benefit of the local community
- Establish its role as steward
- Provide a fair, transparent, and consistent framework for considering applications to stage an event, and
- Ensure that decisions concerning the use of public land are made in accordance with the Council's statutory responsibilities and the public interest.

2. Heritage

Community events in Downton are recorded as early as 1249, with a three-day Fair associated with St Laurence recorded in 1289.

The Council also recognises that The Borough Greens have a particular significance as the historic setting for Downton's community gatherings. In particular:

- In 1676, by a Charter of King Charles II, the right to hold two annual fairs in Downton was granted to Giles Eyre, to be held on 12 April and 21 September. These were animal fairs, associated principally with the sale of livestock, and were held on the western part of The Borough, Downton. The Royal Charter is expressly referred to in the Indenture dated 21 April 1913, relating to the Lease of The Borough Greens between Longford Estate and the Council.
- Through long-established local custom and usage, one community event held on The Borough Greens came to be known as "The Downton Cuckoo Fair". The precise date on which the name "Cuckoo Fair" first became associated with this event is uncertain, although longstanding tradition associates the name with the arrival of the cuckoo and the coming of Spring. The modern-day Downton Cuckoo Fair was revived in May 1979, following a break since the First World War, and is held on The Borough Greens and in the Memorial Gardens. The Memorial Gardens, set back from The Borough, is Council-owned land.
- In December 2008, a festive community gathering named "The Partridge Fair" was established and held on the section of the Borough Greens known locally as Maypole Green. The Partridge Fair was established after the closure of the Tannery, which previously put up a Christmas tree outside its main building.

This festive event brought the community together with a parade, the lighting of the village Christmas tree, carol singing, seasonal refreshments, and an opportunity for children to visit Father Christmas in his grotto.

In 2021 and 2022, whilst The Partridge Fair did not take place, a village Christmas tree was put up on Maypole Green.

In 2023, the Council was informed that The Partridge Fair would not take place nor a village Christmas tree organised. The Council therefore stepped in to bring the community together for a free festive event involving the lighting of the village Christmas tree, carol singing, and complimentary seasonal refreshments for adults and children.

Following the success and popularity of the 2023 event, the Council has continued to stage this festive community gathering annually on Maypole Green. In 2026, the event was named "O Christmas Tree".

- Although "The Downton Cuckoo Fair" and "O Christmas Tree" differ in character from the historic livestock fairs, together they reflect the continuing tradition of community gatherings on The Borough. The Council recognises that the heritage significance of that tradition lies not solely in a particular name, date, organiser, or form of trading, but in the enduring relationship between the community, its traditional gatherings, and The Borough Greens.

3. Stewardship

Where community gatherings take place on Council-owned or Council-controlled land, the Council recognises its stewardship role in protecting their historic significance and, where appropriate, facilitating their continuation for the benefit of the community and future generations.

The Council provides a fair, transparent, and consistent framework for considering applications for and granting a Licence to stage a community event, regardless of which suitable body is responsible for organising it.

4. Permission to Stage a Community Event

Permission to stage a community event on Council-owned or Council-controlled land by an organisation other than the Council shall only be granted by way of a Licence to Occupy, or such other agreement as the Council considers appropriate.

The grant of a Licence to Occupy:

- creates no proprietary rights
- creates no legitimate expectation of renewal
- confers no automatic entitlement to future Licences.

Each application shall be considered on its own merits.

The Council does not recognise that incorporation of an organisation for the purpose of organising a community event or previous involvement in organising an event creates any exclusive right.

Responsibility for planning, organising, and delivering of a community event shall rest with the organisation granted permission by way of a Licence to Occupy. The Council's stewardship role does not mean that the Council will itself be involved in organising or delivering the event.

In relation to Council-controlled land (the Borough Greens), nothing in this Policy requires the freeholder to participate in planning, organising, or managing an event.

Where the Council itself organises an event, a Licence to Occupy is not required. The Council will nevertheless have regard, so far as applicable, to the principles relating to community benefit, safety, land protection, and stewardship set out in this Policy.

5. Applications to Stage a Community Event

Applications to stage a community event may be made by any organisation capable of demonstrating appropriate governance arrangements, relevant experience, and sufficient financial and organisational capacity.

Applicants may include:

- charitable organisations
- companies limited by guarantee
- community interest companies
- voluntary or community organisations, or
- any other body which, in the Council's opinion, can demonstrate that it is capable of safely and responsibly delivering the event.

Applications shall be assessed fairly, transparently, and consistently.

The Council may require an applicant to submit an Event Proposal containing such information as the Council considers necessary to assess the application, which may include:

- event footprint and use of land
- number and nature of traders, attractions, and other participants
- arrangements to promote and preserve community participation and benefit
- anticipated attendance and event capacity
- event management:
 - compliance with all applicable legislation, licences, permits, and regulatory requirements
 - traffic and crowd management
 - safety arrangements including accident, incident, and near-miss reporting
 - emergency, first aid, and medical provision
 - arrangements for temporary structures and equipment
 - safeguarding arrangements
 - environmental and land-protection measures
 - insurance arrangements
 - financial and governance arrangements
 - post-event reporting and review arrangements.

6. Assessment Criteria

In determining whether to grant a Licence to Occupy, and the terms upon which any Licence may be granted, the Council will consider the Event Proposal against any matter it considers relevant, including the following:

Public and Community Benefit

The extent to which the proposed event delivers identifiable social, cultural, and economic benefit to the residents and community of Downton.

Heritage and Continuity

The extent to which the proposed event respects and supports the historic and cultural significance of community gatherings on The Borough Greens, including their continuing role as occasions which bring the wider Downton community together.

Character

The Council recognises that commercial traders and attractions may form an appropriate part of a successful community event. However, the Council will consider the overall balance between proposed commercial activity and community participation.

Size and Scale

Whether the proposed event footprint, anticipated attendance, number and nature of traders and attractions, and associated infrastructure are appropriate to the location.

The fact that an event has previously operated at a particular size and scale does not create an expectation that a future event will be permitted to operate on that same basis.

Protection of the Land

The adequacy of arrangements to protect Council-owned or Council-controlled land, including measures relating to vehicle movements, temporary structures, ground conditions, waste, reinstatement and remediation of any damage caused by the event.

Governance

The applicant's constitutional arrangements, governance framework, decision-making processes, and accountability.

Event Management

As set out in the Event Proposal.

Previous Performance

Where the applicant has previously organised a community event, the Council may take account of:

- compliance with conditions and contractual obligations set out under the Licence to Occupy
- cooperation with the Council, statutory authorities, and other relevant bodies
- responsiveness to the Council's reasonable requests for information
- previous health and safety performance, including the management, investigation, and reporting of significant accidents, incidents, and near misses
- evidence that lessons identified from previous events have been incorporated into subsequent event planning and risk management, and
- any other matter reasonably relevant to the applicant's ability to organise and deliver the proposed event safely, responsibly, and in the public interest.

Competing applications

Where more than one application is received for substantially the same event, date, or use of land, the Council shall consider each application against the criteria set out in this Policy and may select the proposal which it considers best satisfies the purposes of the Policy and the interests of the local community.

7. Partnership Working

The Council expects any organisation granted a Licence to Occupy to work collaboratively with the Council throughout the planning, delivery, and post-event review of the event.

The Licensee may be required to:

- attend planning and review meetings convened by the Council
- nominate authorised representatives with responsibility for liaison with the Council
- provide progress reports and information reasonably required by the Council
- share appropriate operational and safety information
- engage constructively with the Council, statutory agencies, and other parties where required by the nature or location of the event
- promptly report significant changes to the proposed event which may affect safety, land use, traffic management, regulatory compliance, or other matters relevant to the Licence
- promptly notify the Council of significant accidents or incidents arising in connection with the event
- participate in a formal post-event review, and
- cooperate with reasonable requests made by the Council in connection with its responsibilities as landowner or occupier and as Licensor.

8. Council Discretion

Nothing in this Policy shall fetter the Council's statutory powers, responsibilities, or contractual discretion.

The Council may also decide that no Licence should be granted for a particular year where it is not satisfied that a proposed event can be delivered safely, responsibly, lawfully, and consistently with the purposes of this Policy.