



Press Release

BALLOON FIESTA GROUNDED

The sight of massed hot air balloons over Tavistock during the August bank holiday weekend will be missing this year as the Lions Club of Tavistock and Tavistock Round Table have had to take the difficult decision not to hold the Westcountry Balloon Fiesta & Day at the Races until at least 2010.

The postponement is due to a crippling combination comprising lack of appropriate sponsorship, lack of venue, spiralling statutory costs and increasing legislation. For the past two years, have been covered by sponsorship from national companies with locally based operations. Changes in European legislation which caused the cancellation of the event in 2005 mean that static gas tanks have to be installed on site during the fiesta and the cost to bring these to site plus the gas used by the Fiesta now exceeds £5000.

Further changes in legislation also mean that the organisers have to hire in specialist personnel to co-ordinate the ballooning and associated safety aspects, functions that in the past had been carried out by other qualified balloonists who were already attending the Fiesta. There are also other significant fixed costs such as lighting, toilets, signage, advertising and marquees which in previous years have been covered prior to the event by sponsorship and income from programme advertisers, space rental from trade stands and side shows such as the giant inflatable slides as well as catering concessions.

Much time and effort has been expended in trying to locate a sponsor. Tavistock Town Council did offer a loan of £5000 to underwrite a proportion of the increased costs involved in putting on the event, a loan which would have to be repaid after the event from Fiesta profits, which would usually be donated to local organisations and charities. The Clubs were pleased that the Council offered their support, but reluctantly took the decision that the offer alone was insufficient to ensure that the event could proceed on a sound financial basis.

Unfortunately, at this late stage, a potential sponsor has just come forward but the organisers believe that the Fiesta could still not take place as many of the balloonists are now committed to flying at other events around the country, due in part to the uncertainty as to whether the Tavistock event would go ahead. In addition, many of the trade stands and side shows have now made alternative bookings for this prime bank holiday weekend.

Another important factor in making the decision was that Tavistock College, the usual venue for the event would no longer be available due to the new all-weather pitch and running track, work on which is due to be started during the summer. This would have necessitated a move back to



the smaller Crowndale site adjacent to Tavistock Football Club but as recently announced, money has now been made available for the redevelopment of the junior football pitches. This will also start later this year and it would mean that this area would not be available for use as a balloon launch area next year whilst the new pitches become established. The Fiesta organisers are delighted that Crowndale will at last be developed into the comprehensive football complex, for which so many people have worked so hard for so many years and to which some of the profits from previous Fiestas have been donated.

However the Lions and Round Table are both keen to see ballooning continue in some form in Tavistock and the event organising committee will be having discussions with the Lion's Carnival committee to see how some ballooning activity can be included in next year's Carnival. A proposal that the British Balloon and Airship Club (BBAC) is currently investigating is to have a Great British Ballooning Day when hot air balloons all over the country take to the skies so it may yet be possible that a small number of balloons will be seen in the West Devon area in late August or early September.

One of the other popular attractions over the Fiesta weekend has been the Day at the Races pantomime horse racing organised by the Round Table and it is hoped that this can be incorporated into Fun Day in the Meadows on the Sunday of the Lions organised Tavistock Carnival week.

The members of the Lions Club and Round Table are disappointed that one of the most popular events in the Tavistock calendar and which started 16 years ago, will not be happening for the foreseeable future as the Clubs have enjoyed working together to raise money for the local community. They are keen that this association continues and discussions will be taking place later this year in order to try to find an alternative fund raising event.

ENDS

24th April 2008