

Spirit of Tenterden festival to fill void left by Tentertainment

by Rachael Woods

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A summer festival is to return to the recreation ground this July - but organisers say it's more about beer than bands.

The Spirit of Tenterden festival will "fill a void" left by the collapse of Tentertainment and is being led by the landlords of This Ancient Boro supported by a group of volunteers.

Ray Pratt and Sarah Cleaton, who run the hostelry in East Cross, have just been granted a alcohol licence by Ashford Borough Council for the real ale and gin celebration.

Justin Nelson, Matt Freeman and Sue Ferguson, who are town councillors, are promoting the festival that runs from July 4-7, as individuals and Mrs Ferguson insists it is not a replacement for Tentertainment.

The vicar of St Mildred's Church, Rev Canon Lindsay Hammond, is also lending his support with the church opening its doors for families to camp overnight.

The acrimonious collapse of Tentertainment in 2018 happened amid accusations from organisers that the town council had failed to support the music festival that drew in 10,000-strong crowds.

Volunteers behind Tentertainment were hit with last-minute restrictions at the 11th festival in July 2017 when the council asked for the main recreation ground stage to be relocated to reduce noise nuisance to nearby homes, while the volume of music was capped and festivities had to finish before 10pm.

It led to a showdown at a town council meeting afterwards when Tentertainment supporters flooded the town hall in protest.

A later meeting between the two sides when the town council reaffirmed its support for the music event ended without agreement, as festival volunteers said they had lost trust in the authority.

Mrs Ferguson said that while the Spirit of Tenterden would "fill a void" left by Tentertainment, it was not intended to replace it.

"It's a completely different event and is predominantly a real ale festival," she said. "There will only be two small music stages to encourage people to stay a little longer and enjoy themselves."

Ray said the idea had first come up in discussions round the bar at The Ancient Boro, which opened last July.

He said: "With Tentertainment gone we wanted a festival

to champion Tenterden and want as many people to get involved as possible.

"The music will be to a lesser degree than Tentertainment with just a couple of music tents, there will be food and craft stores, plenty of real ales and around 30 varieties of gin."

Sponsors are being sought for the inaugural Spirit of Tenterden festival, as well as stall holders.

Mrs Ferguson added: "We are looking for good quality local food producers, arts and crafts, antiques and collectable sellers.

"We've had a good response so far but would love to hear from more people."

A Tentertainment spokesman said: "We know how much money, planning and work goes into a successful event, so we wish them [The Spirit of Tenterden] the very best of luck."

Stallholders and sponsors are asked to visit the Spirit of Tenterden page on Facebook, or its website www.spiritoftenterden.co.uk/