

Notice of Motion submitted pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No. 5.27

To consider the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor A Cope, seconded by Cllr S Pilgrim on behalf of the Green Group:

Motion to Waive the Loss of Earnings Fee for the Use of the Cannon Lawn for Tonbridge Pride

Tonbridge Pride has established itself as one of the most significant free annual events in the area, attracting over 5,000 attendees each year and 7000 for the event in summer 2024. It celebrates the LGBTQIA+ community, promotes understanding and inclusion, and brings together residents and visitors for a day of celebration and education. As one of the few entirely free community events in Tonbridge, it has become a source of pride for the town and a key part of our community calendar. Tonbridge Pride not only contributes to the cultural fabric of the town but also delivers economic and reputational benefits. Local businesses thrive on the increased footfall, charities benefit from vital outreach opportunities, and Tonbridge gains recognition as an inclusive and welcoming town.

However, the organisers of Tonbridge Pride, a non-profit group relying on donations, sponsorships, and volunteer efforts, have been informed they will be required to pay a £360 “loss of earnings” fee for using the Cannon Lawn in 2025. This fee risks undermining the financial sustainability of the event and is in direct conflict with its mission to support small businesses and charities.

The Financial Impact

Paying the £360 loss of earnings fee would affect Tonbridge Pride financially in two key ways:

1. Increased Stall Pitch Fees:

To absorb the cost, the organisers would likely have to increase stall pitch fees. This could outprice small, local businesses and prevent them from participating, reducing the event’s accessibility and diversity.

2. Reduced Free Charity Pitches:

The organisers may be forced to reduce the number of free stalls offered to charities and community organisations, limiting their ability to connect with attendees and provide much-needed outreach services.

This fee is not an isolated cost. If it had been applied since Tonbridge Pride’s inception, the event would already have faced an additional £1,080 in costs. By 2027, this would amount to £2,160 – nearly 10% of the event’s annual £22,000 budget. For a small, non-profit organisation that budgets every penny carefully, this is a substantial burden that could jeopardise the event’s future.

The Wider Impact on the Community

Tonbridge Pride is more than just a celebration – it provides essential support, education, and outreach to the LGBTQIA+ community and beyond. Testimonials from attendees demonstrate the profound impact of the event:

- “I had a panic attack, and the organisers and first aiders on-site were top-notch! I cannot give my thanks and gratitude enough for what they did for me and others!”
- “Proud of Tonbridge to host this. It made me quite emotional watching the parade. I hate some of the comments I’ve seen on social media, but it just highlights further the importance and need for it.”
- “It was a superb day for me, and many others said how fabulous it had been. It’s great to see everyone so relaxed, happy, and friendly!”
- “Thank you for inviting NHS K&M Talking Therapies – we were overwhelmed with engagement.”

These comments highlight how Tonbridge Pride creates a safe, supportive, and celebratory environment, helping individuals feel accepted and valued while fostering a sense of community pride.

Economic and Reputational Benefits

The event also brings significant economic benefits to Tonbridge:

- Increased footfall for local businesses, including shops, cafés, and restaurants, which benefit from thousands of attendees.
- Opportunities for small, local businesses to engage with the community at an affordable cost.
- Positive media coverage and social media engagement that enhances Tonbridge’s reputation as a progressive and inclusive town.

Motion

This Council recognises the significant cultural, economic, and social value of Tonbridge Pride to the town of Tonbridge and its residents.

In support of this vital community event, this Council resolves to:

- (1) Waive the £360 “loss of earnings” fee for the use of the Cannon Lawn for Tonbridge Pride in 2025 and future years; and
- (2) Collaborate with the organisers of Tonbridge Pride to explore other ways to support the event’s long-term sustainability and success, recognising its role in fostering inclusivity, diversity, and community cohesion.

Closing Statement

By waiving this fee, the Council will demonstrate its commitment to supporting non-profit community events that deliver widespread benefits to our town. Tonbridge Pride is not just a celebration of the LGBTQIA+ community but a celebration of Tonbridge itself – of its values, its people, and its potential.

Let us ensure that this event continues to thrive, free from unnecessary financial burdens, for the benefit of our residents and the future of our town. I urge all councillors to support this motion.