

New Mills Festival 2023  
Coordinator's report- Helen Wright

Preparation for the festival started in July 2023 when I started on a part-time temporary contract as Festival Co-ordinator. There were already many events organised and waiting for festival dates to be announced, so once the call went out for event submissions, the community programme calendar started filling up. Two events had already been set up: Wood, Willow and Weave on 10th September and the Antiques, Vintage and Craft Fair on October 1st. This is how the festival ran for three weeks for this year, from 8th-30th and including the 1st October fair.

A huge thanks to all of the event organisers for contributing events for the festival this year, to your volunteers and to the venues for hosting. Collectively, you created the festival for 2023.

In addition to the community programme, local businesses offered the Odd One Out Trail for the duration of the festival and Light Up New Mills for the final weekend. Thank you for your enthusiasm, support, ideas and efforts in making something happen this year in very little time!

Proms in the Park was a new and popular festival event organised by volunteers within just a 5 weeks timeframe. Thanks to Annie, Tina and Melody for all their hard work in organising, as well as to the many other volunteers who helped make it a success.

The promotion of all events was expertly handled by Alison Johnson writing the regular newsletter and press releases and a huge amount of social media content driven mainly by Alex Bond. Thanks to Mark Bodle (website content), Alison and Alex for all their hard work.

Thanks to the Directors Lyn, Patty, Toby, Alison V. and Alex for advice and support throughout.

**Facts and figures:**

Overall, 18 different indoor venues plus a variety of outdoor spaces hosted 43 different events submitted mainly by the variety of clubs, artists and community organisations in New Mills. Feedback received from 28 of those event organisers tells us that 3350 people attended their events.

44% of those audiences were in the 40-60s age bracket and lived in New Mills.

16% were under 25

The events were supported by over 600 volunteer hours.

**Feedback from event organisers** was generally very positive about the festival organisation and in particular the online marketing. There were some issues with communication which need to be ironed out and an overall push for a printed programme in future, which could not be provided this year due to time limitations. There was a feeling that the festival was generally quieter than usual.

**Feedback from the public** was extremely limited but from the 12 responses:

83% rated the festival good to excellent

50% said what they liked most was the variety of events

Improvements were suggested for clarity of event information, a printed programme, and more of a festival presence or atmosphere in town.

Light Up New Mills was felt to be disappointing due to a low number of participants.

Our social media channels reached a whopping 43 000 (facebook) and 2000 (instagram) people between July and October, an increase of over 87% (f) and 18% (i) from the previous 3 months.

Most of our followers are women and are living in New Mills and the High Peak area.

### **Next steps:**

Decisions and plan for 2024

Volunteers- in order for a 2024 festival to happen a small group of committed volunteers will be needed to help shape and organise the festival with a part-time Festival Co-ordinator.

This is a community festival which needs driving by the community.

Funding applications to be submitted

Festival Co-ordinator recruitment

### **My recommendations for 2024:**

With a festival coordinator and volunteer organising group of volunteers in place:

- A community programme of events
- An interactive,engaging family-friendly trail involving local businesses.
- Street theatre and busking licenses available so that free, pop up events can take place to generate a festival atmosphere in the town centre
- Street party
- Banners and flags for more of an obvious festival presence
- A printed festival programme
- Free, or low cost family-friendly and teenage-friendly events
- A series of fundraising events throughout the year- gigs, theatre (Handlebards) and Duck Race plus other ideas and suggestions

I also suggest parking the Lantern Parade at this point and focusing on making the festival itself a celebration in the town, boosting visitor numbers to the town centre, promoting the community events and generating a festival atmosphere leading up to and throughout the two week festival period, culminating in a Street Party.