

# Gathering given go-ahead

Controversial plans for an arts festival on the Mendip Hills have been given the go-ahead.

Mendip District Council's licensing board voted this week to allow the Big Green Gathering to be held at Fernhill Farm, near Charterhouse, in August.

The Big Green Gathering has been held almost every year since 1994, twice at the site at Fernhill Farm in 2003 and 2005, but in the past a licence has not been required.

However, because of the changes in the licensing laws this year, the organisers needed to apply for a licence similar to the one required for the Glastonbury Festival.

The Big Green Gathering is a five-day event which is powered predominantly by renewable energy such as wind, solar and pedal power.

And although this year they need to apply for a licence, there are no plans to increase the amount of entertainment, or the number of venues on the site.

**By Emma Dance**

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The new licence will allow up to 20,000 people, including all staff and performers, to attend the event.

But neighbouring residents, who were opposed to holding the festival at Fernhill Farm, turned out to voice their concerns to members of the licensing board.

Solicitor Jane Hanney spoke on behalf of the objecting residents.

She said: "The objections are based on the experiences of 2003 and 2005, when the numbers were considerably less than those envisaged this year.

"My clients are not totally reassured that the problems of the past will not recur.

"The problems included criminal damage, noise, unauthorised parking and public safety.

"In 2005, there were definite improvements but a number of promises were made and not kept and clients are reluctant to believe that the

promises made this year will be carried out."

The licensing officer suggested that a number of conditions should be attached to the licence, including a curfew across the site and a noise limit.

The licensing board voted to grant a licence for the Big Green gathering, but agreed that conditions should be attached. These conditions have yet to be finalised.

Brig Oubridge, spokesperson for the organisers, said: "We are pleased to have gone through the first hearing, which went very well, but there is a lot of work still to do.

"All the objections were raised and listened to, and we were pleased that the Department for

the Environment issued a statement saying there would not be any deleterious effect on the Mendips Area of Outstanding National Beauty.

"We have not received the formal results of the meeting yet, but we know we now have a range of conditions and requirements to fulfil, such as traffic planning and major incident preparation. There's plenty of paperwork to complete and deadlines to meet before we receive the licence for the event to take place."

● The Big Green Gathering will take place from August 2 until August 6.

More information is available from [www.big-green-gathering.com](http://www.big-green-gathering.com).

