

RideLondon-Surrey Case Study

Celebrate Pырford

Celebrate Pырford was a family fun day at Pырford Cricket Ground that ran alongside the RideLondon-Surrey events. The cycling events were shown on a big screen during the festival and when the cyclists – both amateur and pro – came through Pырford, festival goers were encouraged to stand by the roadside to offer support and encouragement.

Chris Wood is Managing Director of www.engagecustomer.com and one of the organisers of Celebrate Pырford. He explains how the village came together to put on this popular event, which attracted more than 3,000 visitors.

"I live in the village of Pырford, on a road that was part of the Olympic road cycling route, so when we heard about the Olympic road race coming through the village, we thought that we had to celebrate this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity so we decided to put on Celebrate Pырford alongside the Olympic cycling events.

"There were a few people in the village who moaned about the road closures but we just said to them, 'How often does the Olympics come to your village'? A few people made similar comments about the road closures for RideLondon-Surrey so we tried to get them to see the bigger picture and realise that cycling offers benefits to millions of people.

"I'm a great believer that if you're part of a community you should get involved and do something positive for the local area and that's exactly what we did at Celebrate Pырford. We started off by inviting groups within the village to get involved and give

their support. I've been involved with Pырford Cricket Club, which has been part of the village since 1858, for years so we took the lead on Celebrate Pырford but there were lots of other groups in the village like the Scouts, the village hall, the Pырford social club and the church who came together to put on the event.

"The Pырford & Wisley Flower Show has also taken place on the cricket ground for more than 50 years so we were also able to get loads of helpful

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advice from the team that has been running the flower show for years.

"Before the Olympics we had the help of our local councilor Liz Bowes from Woking County Council so that was really useful in terms of guidance and funding. If anyone is interested in putting on a similar event to celebrate Pырford, I'd recommend contacting your local council to find out if there are any grants you can apply for.

"You might secure some useful contributions but you still need to be prepared to raise money before the event so that you can hire things like a big screen, organise the catering and so on, and be aware that you're still taking a big risk with the British weather so you need to have some resources in case things don't go to plan.

"We also included information about road closures in the programme and sold advertising. On the day of the

rides we sold this to people for £2, while also explaining to them that entry to Celebrate Pырford was free. We offered a variety of activities at the festival, including giant inflatables for the kids and the Pырford Games for all ages to take part in things like egg-and-spoon races, and plenty of refreshment options from a BBQ to a beer and Pimm's tent.

"It was a great success so we stuck to the same plan for the RideLondon-Surrey events. We didn't

really know how many people would turn out but we knew that the event was a big deal. Hundreds

of local cyclists did the sportive so we got in touch with as many as possible through the grapevine and Woking Cycling Club then featured their stories in the Celebrate Pырford programme. That's what RideLondon-Surrey is all about; as well as celebrating the Olympic cycle route, it's about the stories people have to tell.

"I run my business using local contacts so we adopted the same approach with Celebrate Pырford. We approached local businesses that have supported the cricket club before, as well as businesses in West Byfleet and around, to sponsor activities. We focused on the cycling side of things more for the 2013 event and got Woking Cycling Club involved. We did manage to get a cycling sponsor in 2013 – www.bikeswanky.com – who came along to sell and repair bikes. All of the local businesses involved appreciated that it was a great opportunity to increase their exposure,



reach a wider audience and get publicity via the event programme.

"In the months leading up to Celebrate Pyrford, it took around 12 of us to organise the event. I took the overall lead, and other people were responsible for catering (within that one person was responsible for the BBQ, one for teas, one for lunches and one for running the beer and Pimm's tent), site security and operations, advertising and promotion and finance on site.

"We did all of the catering, which was hugely popular, ourselves and divided the roles based on previous experience. The scouts ran the BBQ and the cricket club ran the bar. Visitors to the festival appreciated being served by someone they know rather than an outside commercial operation, and we offered much better customer service because we really cared about putting on a great day.

"Despite all our planning, we ran out of beer, white wine and food so we had to organise a dash to the local cash and carry to shore up supplies. Homemade cakes and the Hogs Back Brewery beer proved popular too.

"We were absolutely delighted with the turnout of 3,000-plus on the day. People enjoyed watching the BBC coverage on the big screen and the Pyrford Games were a big hit. We installed a 60m running track marked out so it had a real sports-day feel. We also had a great live band from Guildford, who we found through Surrey Music Academy.

"Parents could sit and have a chat while their kids ran around or

played on the inflatables. People also appreciated the fact that we didn't have any 'outside' commercial activities like a tacky fun fair; they felt it was an event for the community by the community. We had some great feedback asking us to run Celebrate Pyrford every year.

"The village hall, which is next to the cricket ground, was an official drinks station at the sportive so plenty of the cyclists taking part came over to Celebrate Pyrford to buy food and drinks and chill out for 10 minutes or so before carrying on. Boris Johnson even wandered over to check it out.

"The Police provided free bike security marking and we had a secure bike park to encourage people to ride to and from the event. Cycling has become so popular so we felt it was important to offer children road safety demos, encourage local cycling initiatives and let people know about funding coming into cycling from local councils.

"We made a great start on emphasising the benefits of cycling at the 2013 Celebrate Pyrford but we plan to make even more of this in 2014. We'll also have more road-safety demos at the event and people will be able to learn to on a cycling track.

"We wanted local people to understand that RideLondon-Surrey not only celebrated the Olympic legacy, but also to realise how many local people were riding the sportive, many of them to raise money for local charities. Next year we want to reinforce the charity element of the event and provide more information about how local cyclists are fundraising at the event.

"The festival, which we ran through the registered charity of the cricket club, has made a great contribution to the club. Our long-term goal is to launch a proper fundraising campaign to raise enough money to build a new clubhouse as the cricket pavilion is falling down. Celebrate Pyrford has helped us to engage with the local community, which will make a big difference when we launch an appeal fund in time for next year's festival.

"There were a few people in the village who moaned about the road closures so we gave them as much advice and information as possible about the road-closure timings and we also explained where they could cross roads on foot etc. You're always going to get someone who feels inconvenienced by an event like the Olympics or RideLondon-Surrey but they have to see the bigger picture and understand that the benefits that cycling brings are tremendous.

"Anyone who is looking to run an event like Celebrate Pyrford in 2014 should start by getting the support of the key members of the community and bringing together all the different voluntary. It's key to bring these groups together because not only can they actually help put on the event, they can also promote it by getting the word out through their communities. Involving these groups will also give the event a local, community feel and we found that people really loved that."

To find out more about Celebrate Pyrford, visit the event's website at <http://www.celebratepyrford.moonfruit.com/>