



Hello prospective Solfester,

We always knew that the increase in ticket prices for Solfest 2008 was likely to raise a few eyebrows, but we hope that it will perhaps be slightly more palatable if we explain how and why we have been forced to reach this decision.

Firstly you should know that for the past four years Solfest has been luck enough to be supported by a Rural Regeneration Cumbria event development grant which allowed us to keep our ticket prices artificially low when compared to other festivals. This has now ended.

It is also worth noting that in 2007 Solfest only broke even by the skin of its teeth – in fact, we still have a number of bills outstanding which we have yet to pay before closing our accounts for this year. If we are to ensure the ongoing sustainability of Solfest in the face of rising costs, we cannot afford to take such risks again.

It has been pointed out to us that in the four years Solfest has been running ticket prices have risen from £38 to £80 - an increase of 110%
However, in the same period, the cost of actually running the festival has risen from £54,000 to £500,000 - an increase of 826%

In sort, – in order to keep ticket prices at the same cost as 2004 we would have to sell something like five times as many tickets which we feel would drastically alter the atmosphere of the festival and is something which our market research tells us that our punters do not want us to do.

We spent a lot of time discussing ticket prices for this year and we accept that we could have reduced the adult ticket price, but only if we had increased the child ticket price to cover the loss. However, we enjoy our status as a family event and did not want to alienate young families for many of whom we know that Solfest is the only annual family holiday which they can afford to take.

We did also consider the suggestion of half price tickets for teens, but this would have meant having to increase the price of adult tickets even further and we felt that it would have been unfair to penalise our punters who do not have teenage children by making them further subsidise the cost of other people's children. Ultimately, our decisions were based on the fact that we felt children under 12 would probably not be able to enjoy the festival in the same way as those over the age of 12 – the latter being much more mature and therefore more likely to be able to appreciate the bands in the same way as an adult would.

In reality, we think that Solfest still works out cheaper than almost any comparable festival anywhere in the country. The main reason for this is the fact that we all run it as unpaid volunteers and it is not designed to make any sort of a profit.

We only charge the punters exactly what it costs to run the festival and to run it to the standard which our punters expect and deserve.

The downside of this arrangement is that there is a very fine line between financial success and failure and that any reduction of income in one area has to be counter-balanced by an increase in income somewhere else. It is all very well suggesting things which should be cheaper, but ultimately, the funds have to come in from somewhere. We are very conscious that in recent years the Big Green Gathering and the Summer Sunrise Festival have both been in a position where they have been unable to pay their bills after the festival and that acts ended up not getting paid. It is very difficult for festivals to recover from this kind of reputation and it is definitely not something we want to see happen at Solfest.

With regard to the issue of charging a flat rate of £10 for anyone to bring a vehicle onto the Solfest site,

we reached this decision for a number of reasons. Space in the camping fields gets used up very quickly, particularly in 2007. One of the causes of this was because people insisted on travelling separately so we reached a situation where a group of six friends could potentially have up to four cars between them. Not only is this bad for the environment, it also takes up space which, if free, could allow us to sell a few more tickets, thus preventing the ticket price from having to rise further.

For the past four years, we have worked with Freewheelers who arrange lift sharing to Solfest from all over the country. In addition to this, we have created a dedicated thread on the Solfest message board where people can arrange to share transport. This is widely used every year. However, we take on board comments about public transport in Cumbria. We are currently working closely with Northern Rail to look at ways in which we can increase the number of visitors attending Solfest by train. In addition to this, we can confirm that all income from parking will be used to improve the greener aspects of the festival. Most notably by significantly increasing the capacity of the shuttle bus service so that it is much more of a realistic possibility for people to get to and from Solfest without using their own vehicles. Other income from the parking fees will be used to offset the cost of reducing the number of diesel powered generators on site (something we have been widely criticised for having in the past).

The committee meeting where we decided on ticket prices was both long and fraught, but ultimately, we reached the conclusion that we were not prepared to compromise on the quality of our festival just to keep prices artificially low. We feel that our punters deserve the best and trust that your loyalty to Solfest is such that you will accept the cost.

We hope to see you at Solfest!

Lots of love,

The Solfest Committee