

JMO DoD Planning Process – Beltane Border Morris Experience and Reflections

Establishing the basics

The year before: establish volunteers to act as organising committee. (although this did not work out in practice as 2 keen early volunteers didn't, in the end, do anything and others stepped in or were not replaced thus increasing the workload on the few).

We divided our team by expertise and had:

- A Lead team member who created the spreadsheets/draft Event Plan for shared info/Legal requirements/liaison with Police and County Council and pulled all the meetings together, most of them on Zoom.
- A person to create, fill and update the website (incl SEO, style/graphics, email form, create/update participant database, regular backups), Facebook promotion, digital ticketing of Ceilidh, create/manage dedicated gmail-account and create/manage dedicated Facebook group for photo/video sharing.
- A person to create a media package and advertising
- A merchandise person and organizer of indoor camping
- A person to organize all aspects of the ceilidh AND wrote all the dance schedules (this was too much work for one person)
- A person to organize the Stewards
- A person who made the online maps of dance spots/cafes/pubs/transport etc and organize the shape of the Opening and Closing ceremonies
- A Treasurer to handle bookings, charity collections, general expenditure and reimbursement

Liaise with your representative body and the JMO to agree/understand its specific goals for your JMO DoD.

Contact previous Teams' DoD organisers for advice/info/tips. Peterborough's had a document that you could find online. Great Western provided us with various documents from their JMO DoD from about 8? Years ago.

If not attending the previous year's DoD as a Team, visit it with a small team of observers. In hindsight we should have volunteered to be stewards to help see this aspect from the inside track.

Agree a diary date for DoD.

Review DoD date as soon as Football seasons, Rugby or other 'fixtures' lists are published that your day of dance does not clash with potential policing flash points. Our initial date clashed with a Devon Football derby, which had policing. Check also with City Council that the date does not clash with some large event someone is organizing.

Communicate with your Team/Side that there is a 100% turn out and support expectation for the DoD, and that will involve responsibilities above dancing/playing (eg stewarding or organizing/planning assistance). You will need a high buy-in by your team. For smaller sides this may mean that you do not dance on the day. We were able to do so as we could divide the dance team in half and still have a big enough side to do all our dances, thus having a morning and afternoon dance/steward side.

Do not be shy in asking for advice and suggestions from the JMO chair and its committee – it is their day, and they are keen for you to plan it successfully. We had a lot of help from the JMO committee.

Suggested divisions of responsibility

Divide areas of activity up so that volunteers can adopt a responsibility for planning parts of the DoD.

- Draft of Event Plan (for use with police and local authority/ies). (Town/county)
- Dance Spot Locations
- Permissions (landowners for dancing)
- Permissions local authority – collecting
- Event Risk assessment
- Each Spot location risk assessment
- Seeking supportive Pubs/cafes (for lunchbreak / and sessions)
- Seeking supportive Pubs for Friday evening /Saturday evening music sessions
- Event locations :Registration/Stewarding Hub/Wet weather contingency/St Johns Ambulance hub. Decide on location of hub registration/steward briefing/bag dump/money collection point at end of day. This was a big expense for us and maybe we could have used a smaller/less expensive area for this although it did serve as a wet weather contingency area.
- Consider inviting the Mayor/Town Crier and/or a local personality to open proceedings
- Steward Organisation
- Commemorative badges (Beltane sold 400 badges on the day) Contact for leather badges Al North badgesmith2022@gmail.com Ordered and sold 350 .Used The Badge Centre for metal badges bought 50 (not all sold) All sold at £2 each for ease. Could maybe have sold 50 more leather badges.
- Communications – email info to sides.
- Communications – website.
- Communications - social media..
- Consider creating a promo video.
- Prepare a media pack with all details and photos and send to local press at least 3 months before the event
- List event on all relevant event listing sites – Tradfolk, Folk & Honey, English Folk Dance & Song Society, etc, but also all local event listings including radio stations and TV stations.
- Write blog content for the website on the event and the location and use this to promote the event on social media channels
- Create the event on Facebook and share to all relevant morris groups and all relevant local groups on Facebook. Keep updating those groups regularly.
- Consider range of accommodation options (Try scout huts and The Friend's (Quakers) Halls if offering /organizing low budget indoor camping , hostels, budget and other hotels. And campsites
- Book St John's Ambulance first aid cover.
- Consider organising a ceilidh – ideally tap into the expertise of known morris folk who have ceilidh experience in your region.
- Locate suitable ceilidh hall and ceilidh band and caller
- Financial Budget
- Decide on Opening and Closing Ceremony locations. We used 2 different locations but they could be the same and one spot would have been our choice but was unavailable.
- Printing: create leaflets/hand out (of programme) and have them printed. We printed 200 leaflets (or 300?)

Suggested Activities

Dance Spots

Beltane used members with local knowledge, organised a Saturday walking tour (in kit) as early as we could to see what spots were like from a footfall and café table -wise in a year's time. If Easter falls before your DoD beware that post-Easter, a lot of cafes put tables out.

Beltane involved other local teams at this walking tour, this may help foster relations, improving good faith. We made a 'Come to Exeter's DoD' promo video, including other local sides to add interest and local buzz.

Decide upon dance spots for the DoD. You will need to identify more than you actually use: this enables the 3 Morris Orgs to have confidence in the numbers of teams they invite. It will also give you the opportunity to 'rest' certain spots during the day – especially smaller ones – reducing pinch points and those near cafes etc where perhaps eaters may get upset by constant loud music. This also gives flexibility to migrate teams geographically towards the closing ceremony – enhancing a good turn out rather than allowing the lure of alternative entertainment being sought.

The weekend before the event, a few of us visited shops and cafes around the dance spots again, to make sure they were aware of the event and iron out any last minute issues. This paid off with lots of support from shops (Lush even put on goody bags for our dancers!)

Official permissions, risk assessments and H&S

Contact local authorities to seek permissions to dance at spots. This will clarify 'who owns what' - for instance the shopping areas in Exeter are owned by private companies, and you may need to deal with their managing agents.

This was a headache to organize, and very frustrating – we started with a long list of dance spots and contacted all authorities about 8 months before the event, with few responses from local authorities or private landowners until much nearer the time – when they suddenly all wanted information sharpish. We recommend being persistent with communications!

We used the very helpful generic risk assessment produced by the Morris Federation and adapted it to ensure that risks adjacent to particular dance spots (roads or water nearby, etc) were covered adequately.

Following many repeat emails and phone calls, we were asked to (virtually) attend a Safety Meeting organized by the City Council, and this was a godsend – it had all the relevant events staff from city and county councils, fire service and police in attendance so any concerns about particular dance spots could be addressed. We were asked to produce an Event Management Plan according to a template, which we duly produced in draft and then heard nothing back in response – but at least we did it! The police were helpful, and knowing that our event was 'on their radar' was quite comforting in a way.

At the Safety Meeting discussion, several dance spots were struck off the list because of pressure on public thoroughfares on narrow streets, even if pedestrianized. It became clear that the main concerns of the authorities was public thoroughfare, noise created, and also issues like lost property / lost children. The event management plan was useful because it helped us to plan for these things.

Two private shopping centre companies owned a lot of our dance spots in Exeter. One of the companies was completely on it with official documentation and permissions, almost over-zealous.

The other shopping centre was completely useless. We agreed everything in person with this company, sent through documents and never heard anything else from them – then, on the day, in the one dance spot we had organized on their land, the security guards claimed no knowledge of our permission and became very arsey about public access and shop fronts. Not helpful at all. Beware, and make sure you get everything in writing in response from all authorities even if you think you have secured permissions – just to be sure!

A final thing to remember is permissions for street collection, organized usually through the City Council and a different department to events. Don't assume the different departments in your local authority actually communicate with one another. One of our dance spots actually had a Samba band double book for street collection which they assumed was permission to perform, even though we had organized our permissions months before – we only found out when they advertised their event on social media! Organise your street collection licence a good couple of months in advance. All the Morris organisations were very helpful in lending us collection boxes – make sure you have a system in place for numbering boxes, collecting full boxes at the end of the day, and counting and bagging up the cash. More card readers would be useful as we move towards a more cashless society.

Stewarding, H&S and risk assessments

Our system of stewarding had one steward for each dance spot (morning and afternoon shifts) plus an 'area' steward for each group of dance spots, to circulate, trouble-shoot etc. We hired the local arts centre hall (Phoenix) as our main 'base' for the day, for registration, first aid, welfare, dumping bags (at own risk) and wet weather space for dancing. Stewards wore high-viz jackets or, occasionally, tatters.

We produced a detailed briefing for stewards and another version for squires of each team. These detailed the risks particular to each dance spot, and made it clear that stewards and squires were jointly responsible for public and dancer safety at each dance spot.

We held a briefing session online for stewards in the week before the Day of Dance, and also required all stewards and squires of each team to sign to say they had read the risk assessment. This was important in case there were any incidents, as we would have needed to demonstrate that the risk assessment exercise was a 'live' one and not just a paper exercise.

In the event, only a couple of dance spots gave us problems. One was a wide dance area but adjacent to a busy thoroughfare on the High Street, which meant that shoppers wanting to get past the dancers spilled out into the road and into the path of buses. This meant the stewards were sometimes standing in the road to try and encourage people to the pavement side – not ideal. The other dance spot, in a shopping centre, was great but a wind tunnel on a cold day, leading to chilly dancers!

Finally – we hired St John's Ambulance to cover the event, and they used the green room at the Phoenix as their base. Note that their personal phone numbers for emergency contact will need to be circulated to all stewards on the day, the numbers may not be available to put on briefings beforehand.

Information Gather on Teams

Once you have a list of attendees, get their email addresses and create a side information questionnaire – Beltane asked the likely size of the team, mobility issues, whether they needed to share musicians with other sides, the size of each dance set, whether they had drums or not, whether

the music was amplified or not, what tradition of Morris they performed – Cotswold/Molly/Border Stave /NW etc. This information was used to make sure any spots with drum bans/loud music could be planned, and attempts to blend each spot with a variety of traditions. Also ask for a telephone number (that you can use in case you have to notify each team during the event – for example in case of emergencies or for retreat to the wet weather contingency).

Information sharing with Teams

Maintain a contact list of sides emails to provide updates. Beltane had more positive feedback about lots of information given out than it did negative feedback about too much information. We created a dedicated Gmail account email address (jmodayofdance2023@gmail.com) for the sole purpose of updated the participating teams and answering their questions. To avoid being marked as a spammer by various email systems (because of high volume receivers of emails) which increases the risk of teams not getting your email, we sent emails to no more than 10 email addresses per email. Monitor and follow up on error email reports to make sure each team gets the information. Have one person (or a team) monitor the incoming emails and respond (or distribute the email to the relevant organiser to deal with). Create folders in Gmail to archive the finished emails into (rather than deleting or keeping in a big bulk); this, and the search function within Gmail helps greatly to find any email back. Only keep 'live' emails (the ones that need action) into the inbox until they are dealt with, then archive into the relevant folders.

Communication between Organising Committee Members

The process created a lot of emails on our private email inbox. Some Beltane (if not all) DoD committee members suffered from information loss amongst emails. Changing the title of emails to reflect the subject rather than reply all with previous email title might help. Or think about using 'Discord' platform and then creating different channels for the different topics within the discord group. Beltane didn't do this but it might have helped. To manage communication between organising committee members **during** the event, a Whatsapp group was set up. Plus a seperate Whatsapp group was set up for communication of organisers with the Stewards during the day.

Timetabling

Beltane organised the day in 7 sessions, each team enjoyed 4 dance sessions:

1. Opening ceremony
2. Dance session 1
3. Dance session 2
4. Early lunch or dance session 3 for late lunchers
5. Late lunch or dance session 3 for early lunchers
6. Dance session 4
7. Closing ceremony

Beltane included an opening ceremony, 4 dance sessions a lunch and a closing ceremony. A copy of the schedule is available. On the whole there were 15 minutes between sessions for movement from spot to spot.

The opening ceremony worked well on the Cathedral Green and attracted a large crowd of people. The closing group dance and awards was brilliant, and only worked because of the huge space by the quayside we used!

We also organized a cinema session with a double bill of Morris films – this was a great idea but poorly attended. The evening ceilidh sold out very quickly and was a great success.

Helping other committee members

Some activities could only take place once another activity had been completed.

Those activities that could only be completed later we found, included:

- Steward Scheduling
- Creating and Proof-reading schedules and programme
- Creating and proof reading information to sides / information to stewards

Thought should be given to helping those with the 'last jobs' so that undue pressure isn't felt.

Website

For the JMO 2023 website, the domain and hosting were registered by Open Morris' administrator and a Wordpress installation was available for us to use to create the website's style and content. You will need a fairly IT-savvy person with website experience who can put in many hours of work. In our case, in the initial set up phase, it took about on average 1 to 2 hour a day for a whole month and a bit (December mostly, so we could be up and ready from beginning/mid January) but this included debugging and getting to know the software. After the initial set up, web work will include adding or tweaking content and style, updating participants database regularly with new overviews that come in through the joint morris organisations, adding new information as and when it becomes available etc.

Warning: boring technical details ahead (but may be of help to the next webmaster for JMO2024). Several free plugins were used (and some debugged), like Elementor (website builder) , CookieYes (GDPR cookie consent), ElementKit Lite (addons for Elementor for footer and header), Essential Addons for Elementor, Contact Form 7 (contact forms), Flamingo (message storage), Limit Login Attempts Reloaded (to block excessive login attempts and protect against brute force attacks), Easy Google Maps (create maps with markers, text, images etc), Participants Database (managing participants information), Premium Addons for Elementor (needed for Megamenu and sliders), Rank Math SEO (search engine optimisation made easy-ish), Updraft Plus – Backup/Restore, WP Post Nav (post navigation), WP Super Cache (fast caching), Site Kit by Google (one-stop solution for WP to use everything Google has to offer to make sites successful on the web) and Shortcodes Ultimate (for shortcodes).

Header: the website header contained a dedicated logo (that included the date, location and event name) and the navigation menu.

The navigation menu of the website included:

- Home: one front page which included everything in short and offered links/buttons to more detailed information.

- Message Board: This was used in the early stages to give information about what the JMO is, where it is held this year, who's the hosting team, morris dancing in general, info opening ceremony, things to do while in the area, a page with links only to all relevant information.
- Information: general information about that year's JMO DoD including our promo video, an overview of participating teams, time table and dance locations (all downloadable), car parks, ceilidh tickets, film evening tickets, folk sessions in pubs.
- Accommodation: an overview and info about hotels, bed and breakfasts, camping, indoor camping and group accommodation.
- Media Kit: under this menu item, our downloadable media kit could be found.
- Contact Us: a contact form

Footer: the website footer contained the JMO 2023 badge design, the charities, the hosting side's contact details, the social media icons with links, the all rights reserved note and the three logos of the joint morris organisations.

Some other points to be aware of or consider:

- Initially a 'staging' website was used (non-public) for creating the website and when it was ready for the public, the website content was then moved by the OM administrator from the staged link to the official domain link. DO check your links and other plugins afterwards, to see if anything didn't survive that move and need fixing. Maybe you are using your own web domain & hosting and in that case, the info here may not be relevant.
- Once the website is up and running, there is then on-going work to do to keep the website up-to-date with the latest information (as things evolve and more detail becomes available). It will take about 2-5 hours a week, depending on how much needs to be done.
- In the last 3 weeks, when dance schedule and locations become available, it will take a bit more time that week to get those onto the website and make the files downloadable. Time needed depends on how many documents you have to share.
- We included a QR code on our downloadable documents that lead to the website. Optional.
- Remember to make a backup when you finish web work for the day.
- Submit your website to Google sitemap for better ranking.
- When posting website content to Facebook using the website link, you can use Facebook Debugger (<https://developers.facebook.com/tools/debug/>) to scrape the content of the link and see how it would look like when shared on Facebook.
- Recommend using the Rank Math WP-plugin to create good looking shares for Facebook and other social media.