

World Pooh Sticks Championships look for new home

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Competitors get in the pooh sticks spirit at last year’s event

 (picture courtesy of Rotary Club of Oxford Spires)

Organisers of the annual World Pooh Sticks Championships are planning a dry land version of the game this year as they hunt for a new location.

The Rotary Club of Oxford Spires has run the event, which sees sticks race downriver, at Day’s Lock in Little Wittenham on the Thames since 2009.

It is based on the game in AA Milne’s Winnie the Pooh tales.

But the village has been hosting the event for 31 years and it usually coincides with the Earth Trust’s lambing weekends – which means the site is too busy.

Rotary club spokesperson Lesley Adams said: “We have got to continue it for the sake of all the fans of Winnie the Pooh and everyone who loves playing pooh sticks.

“We want to make it bigger than it ever has been.

“We would like to keep it in Oxfordshire because it has it roots in the county but it does not have to be the Thames.”

The pooh sticks event attracts about 1,000 people with more than 600 competitors, but it struggles to facilitate parking.

Ms Adams says the club are looking to move the event to relieve the pressure on the village and so it can be held in the summer.

Currently, the Environment Agency only allows the competition to be held between October and the end of March because of high levels of boat traffic from April.

The club are interested in moving anywhere in Oxford, Abingdon, Didcot, Wallingford or Witney.

Ms Adams added: “The village gets so busy at lambing weekends and there are so many visitors that it is just not big enough for pooh sticks and lambing.

“The Earth Trust can’t move because they are based there so we said we would start looking for a new home and venue.”

One solution for this year could be to hold it on dry land where string would be used to reel in the sticks fastest, similar to a Santa sleigh race held by the Rotary Club of Maidenhead Bridge.

Ms Adams said: “We’re just thinking outside the box to try and find a solution. It would be nice to hold one this year.”

Traditionally, players drop a stick into the water from a bridge and the winner is the competitor whose stick appears on the other side first.

If organisers manage to arrange the event at Day’s Lock this year it will be held on Sunday, March 29, in the river.

But if they cannot hold the championships there and do not manage to find another location it could be held on dry land somewhere else on another date.

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