OTAS LIVE

Supporting Events and Professionals at Every Stage

OTAS Insight, licensing and law. Full report

When a social post draws a crowd: pop-up events without a plan

A joust on hire e-bikes drew thousands to a park in Hackney after an online invite. What it shows about crowds, permission and who is in charge when a post goes further than planned



An RSVP cap does not cap the crowd. OTAS style image, generated from real photography. Not a record of a specific event.

Operational **Tactical** **Strategic**

OTAS Insight v2.0 · 9 November 2026 · Correct as of 9 November 2026

OTAS Live Ltd.

SUMMARY

A post can draw a crowd faster than a plan. Before you share a location, know who owns the ground, who has agreed, and who is in charge on the day.

5,000

RSVPs within a day of the online invite, LBC reported. BBC News said RSVPs were capped online at 5,000 [1][2]

90 min

before the start, the location was released after police approval, LBC reported. BBC News said two hours [1][2]

50+

people at an event in a park in the borough means you must apply for permission, the council says [8]

Before you post an invite to a free gathering, ask the landowner and the council, tell the police, plan for more people than you invite, and name the person in charge.

By OTAS Insights. Edited by Kris Dailly. Correct as of 9 November 2026.



An RSVP cap does not cap the crowd. OTAS style image, generated from real photography. Not a record of a specific event.

CONTENTS

In this report

01 Read this first

02 What was reported

03 What these cases do and do not show

04 Who has a say over a gathering in a public space

05 Who to ask, and what to ask

06 Who owns what at a pop-up

07 Why social posts make crowds hard to plan

08 Tool: crowd size check for a free gathering

09 Signs a post is drawing more than you planned

10 Tool: go, hold or stop

11 Plan a pop-up from the idea to the clear up

12 Tool: steward brief for a pop-up

13 Tool: what to post, and when

14 The first ten minutes after the crowd outgrows the plan

15 What to do at each level

16 Readiness checklist

17 What we do not know yet

18 Questions, sources and notes

01
Read this first

Sources: 22 public sources opened on 9 November 2026. They are UK news reports from BBC News, LBC, The Telegraph and the North East Londoner, BBC News, The Guardian and LondonWorld on a 2023 crowd in London, CBS News and CNN on a 2023 crowd in New York, the council's parks events pages and policy, the Licensing Act 2003 guidance, the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, the Public Order Act 1986, HSE event safety guidance, the Purple Guide and Cabinet Office crowd guidance. We report what the council, the organisers, the police and the hire e-bike operator said. Where outlets differ, we give each with its source. We do not name people or brands in the text. Some source links carry names. Everything without a source number is OTAS guidance for event professionals.

On Saturday 31 October 2026, a second joust on hire e-bikes drew a large crowd to a park in Hackney, east London [1][2]. Within a day of the online invite, 5,000 people had RSVPed, LBC reported [2]. BBC News said RSVPs were capped online at 5,000, and the location was released two hours before [1]. LBC said an hour and a half before, once police approval was in place [2]. Reports of the crowd range from hundreds to thousands [2][3][5]. The council said it had not given permission for the event [1][3]. The organisers said they had told the council, had a safety team, and spoke to police before going ahead [3]. This Insight is for event professionals, and anyone asked to help with a gathering that starts as a post. It covers what was reported, how social posts draw crowds, who has a say over a public space, and how to plan when the crowd may be bigger than the invite.

> **In short:** an RSVP cap does not cap a crowd in a public place. Ask the landowner and the council early, tell the police, plan for more people than you invite, keep crowds and traffic apart, and name the person in charge.

Five things to take away

01	**A post can be shared thousands of times [5]. The crowd you invite is not the crowd that comes.**
02	**In a public park, the council or landowner decides. One council asks for permission for any event of more than 50 people [8].**
03	**Police approval is not landowner permission, and neither replaces a plan.**
04	**Releasing a location late can help, but it can also send a crowd to one place at once.**
05	**Name one person in charge, mark the edges, and keep the crowd away from traffic.**

ACTION

Read section 15, then agree one task for each level before your next event.



02

What was reported

Six reports cover the two jousts [1][2][3][4][5][6]. Each fact is given with its source. We describe the organisers and the hire e-bike operator rather than naming them.

A public park has no ticket gate. Everyone who hears can come. OTAS style image, generated from real photography. Not a record of a specific event.

Before the second joust

The first joust	Hundreds watched the first joust in the same park in mid October, and a video of it was watched more than four million times, BBC News reported [4]. The Observer put the crowd at about 1,000, with ten bamboo poles marking the arena [7]. One organiser told LBC they expected police to shut them down [6].
The hope	One organiser had hoped for 100,000 spectators, the Observer reported [7].
The operator	The hire e-bike operator said its bikes are designed for getting around the city, not for jousting, and that it discourages anyone from attempting similar events [4].
The invite	5,000 people RSVPed within a day of the invite link going out, LBC reported [2]. The post announcing the rematch was shared more than 20,000 times, the North East Londoner reported [5].
The plan	The organisers told BBC News that crowd safety was their biggest priority. They planned a bigger space with an action zone, a dead zone and a spectator area, stewards for crowd control and health professionals on hand [1].

On the day, Saturday 31 October 2026

The reveal	Two hours before the start, BBC News reported [1]. An hour and a half before, after police approval, LBC reported [2].
The crowd	More than a thousand onlookers formed a clearing for the riders, LBC reported [2]. The Telegraph reported hundreds [3]. The North East Londoner reported thousands [5].
The road	The riders had to stop every few minutes to let a delivery van pass, LBC reported [2].
The police	The Metropolitan Police monitored the event and gave the go ahead a few hours before, the North East Londoner reported [5].
The council	The council said it had not given permission for the event to be held in the borough [1][3]. The organisers said they had told the council it was going ahead with a full safety team [3].
Injury	Paramedics on site were needed after one organiser hurt his wrist, the North East Londoner reported [5].

	As reported
RSVPs	5,000 within a day [2]. Capped online at 5,000 [1]
Location released	Two hours before [1]. An hour and a half before [2]
Crowd	Hundreds [3]. More than a thousand [2]. Thousands [5]
Police	Approval before the reveal [2]. Monitored the event [5]
Council	Had not given permission [1][3]. Organisers say they told it [3]
Operator	Bikes not for jousting [4]

Table 1. The second joust in six lines, from BBC News [1][4], LBC [2], The Telegraph [3] and the North East Londoner [5].

ACTION

Ask your team: if a post about your next event was shared 20,000 times, how many people would come, and where would they stand?

03

What these cases do and do not show

Facts and judgement are kept apart here. The facts carry source numbers. The rest is OTAS guidance.

	What is reported	What is not known
Hackney 2026	5,000 RSVPs in a day, crowd of hundreds to thousands, council had not given permission [1][2][3][5]	What the police agreed, and any council action
London 2023	Posts urged a robbery on a shopping street and hundreds of teenagers gathered. 34 dispersal directions and 9 arrests [17][18][21]	Not an event: included as a social post crowd
New York 2023	A giveaway post drew thousands to a park. 65 arrests, officers and others hurt [19]	Not in the UK: included for the speed of growth

Table 3. Facts and open questions in the cases. Facts from [1][2][3][5][17][18][19][21].

The joust was not disorder. It was a planned, good natured gathering with stewards and first aid [1][3][5]. The other two cases show what can happen when a post draws a crowd with no one in charge. The lesson for organisers is the same: the crowd a post draws is not the crowd you invited.

ACTION

Read these cases with whoever posts for your organisation, and agree what needs to be in place before an invite goes out.



04

Who has a say over a gathering in a public space

In brief, from the council's events pages and policy [8][9], HSE [10] [11], the Licensing Act 2003 guidance [12], public order and anti social behaviour law [13][14], the Purple Guide [15] and Cabinet Office guidance [16]. Not legal advice.

Someone has to be in charge, and everyone has to know who. OTAS style image, generated from real photography. Not a record of a specific event.

The landowner

- In this borough, anyone holding an event for more than 50 people must apply for permission. This applies to events in a park, green space or street [8].
- The council recommends applying six months ahead for events of 250 to 4,999 people [8].
- Applications are reviewed by the police, the park user group and council teams. The council teams include licensing, noise, streetscene and community safety. The council may ask for an event management plan, insurance and a risk assessment [8].
- The council's policy says it may refuse an event that cannot show it can be delivered safely. It may also refuse an event that is refused support by one of the emergency services [9].

Safety law

- HSE says local authorities generally enforce health and safety at events [10]. Anyone running an event as a work activity has duties to the public.
- HSE guidance for organisers covers planning, running and reviewing an event. It also covers crowd management and how safety advisory groups work [22].
- HSE says organisers should put crowd controls in place, based on the risk. The risk includes the number of people, the space and the routes in and out [11].

Licensing

- A pop-up may sell alcohol or have some regulated entertainment. If so, a licence or a temporary event notice may be needed [12].
- In England and Wales, a temporary event notice covers no more than 499 people at any one time, including staff. A standard notice must be given at least ten working days before [12].

Police powers

- Police can impose conditions on public assemblies in some circumstances [13].
- In England and Wales, police can give a direction to leave an area under a dispersal authorisation. This power was used in central London in August 2023 [14][17].

Police approval, landowner permission and a licence are three different things. They come from three different bodies. A gathering can have one and not the others.

ACTION

Before you post an invite, list who owns the ground and who you have asked. Write down what each one said.

05
Who to ask, and what to ask

Before any post goes out. Sources shown. Not a full list.

Who	What to ask
Landowner or council	Do we need permission? What do you need from us, and how long does it take [8][9]?
Police	What do you need to know? Who is our contact on the day?
Council licensing	Does anything we plan need a licence or a temporary event notice [12]?
Safety advisory group	Will you want to see the plan [15]?
Anyone whose kit or brand is used	Do you agree? The operator in this case said its bikes were not for jousting [4]

Table 4. Who to ask before a pop-up. Sources shown.

Keep the answers in writing. If one body says no, the others agreeing does not change that.

ACTION

Send these questions this week for your next pop-up, and do not post until you have the answers.

06
Who owns what at a pop-up

Five roles, each with one named person. OTAS guidance, drawing on HSE [11] and the Purple Guide [15].

Role	What they own
Organiser in charge	The plan, the go or no go, and the stop
Landowner or council	The ground and the permission [8]
Police	Public order and any powers they choose to use [13][14]
Steward lead	The edges, the routes out and keeping traffic apart
First aid lead	Care for anyone hurt, and the ambulance route

Table 5. Roles at a pop-up. OTAS guidance, drawing on HSE [11] and the council [8].

ACTION

Put a name and a phone number against each role before you post.



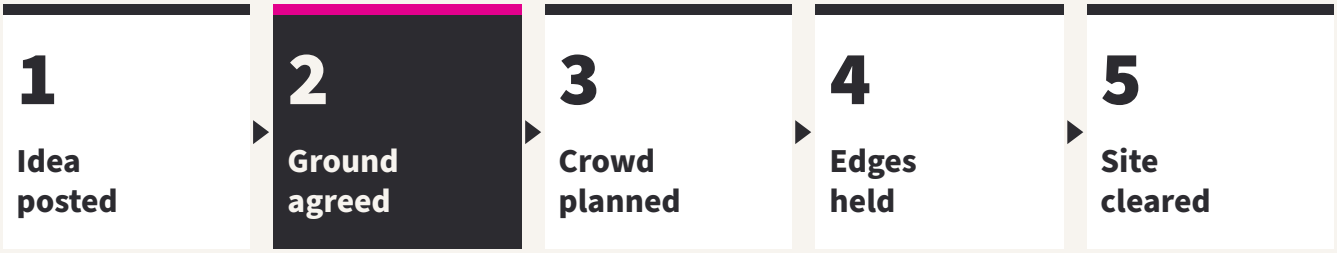
07

Why social posts make crowds hard to plan

In Hackney, an invite drew 5,000 RSVPs in a day [2], and one organiser had hoped for 100,000 spectators at the first joust [7]. In New York in 2023, police said the crowd went from about 300 to thousands in minutes after a post spread [19][20]. The rest of this section is OTAS guidance, drawing on Cabinet Office crowd guidance [16].

When the crowd outgrows the space, it spills where traffic is. OTAS style image, generated from real photography. Not a record of a specific event.

From a post to a planned gathering



The step most often missed is agreeing the ground with the landowner before the post goes out. OTAS guidance, drawing on the council's events process [8] and HSE [11].

No ticket, no count

An RSVP is not a ticket. In a public place anyone who sees the post can come, with friends.

Shares multiply

A post shared thousands of times reaches people you did not invite and cannot contact on the day.

Late reveals concentrate arrival

Releasing the location late can stop people camping out, but it sends everyone to one place within the same hour.

The space has other users

Parks have paths, roads, dog walkers and delivery vans. LBC reported riders stopping for a van [2].

Nobody is clearly in charge

If the council, the police and the organisers each think someone else is responsible, nobody is [16].

ACTION

Look at your last social post for an event. Count the shares, and ask whether your plan would hold at ten times the RSVPs.

08

Tool: crowd size check for a free gathering

Use this before you post. OTAS guidance, drawing on HSE crowd guidance [11] and Cabinet Office guidance [16].

Estimate

- Count RSVPs, then plan for many more. A shared post reaches people you did not invite.
- Check how many times the post has been shared, and by whom.

The space

- Measure the usable area, leaving the activity area and routes clear.
- Find the edges: roads, water, paths, fences.
- Check at least two routes out, away from roads. HSE says to consider overflow space and additional routes to prevent crushing [11].

The limit

- Decide the most people the space can hold safely.
- Decide what you will do above that number: stop new arrivals, move, or stop the event.

ACTION

Do this check for your next pop-up, and share it with the landowner and police.

09

Signs a post is drawing more than you planned

Signs 1 to 3 are drawn from the reports [1][2][4][5]. Signs 4 and 5 are OTAS guidance, drawing on the 2023 cases [17][19].

Signs a post is drawing more than you planned

01 RSVPs hit the cap fast

The invite fills in a day [2].

02 Shares outrun invites

The post is shared far more widely than your list [4][5].

03 A late reveal

The plan depends on releasing the location shortly before [1][2].

04 People arrive early

Groups gather before the time, near the likely spot [19].

05 Traffic in the crowd

Vehicles have to pass through people [2].

Signs 1 to 3 drawn from BBC News, LBC and the North East Londoner [1][2][4][5]. Signs 4 and 5 drawn from the 2023 cases [17][19].

ACTION

If you see two of these signs before your event, call the landowner and the police that day.

10
Tool: go, hold or stop

When to go ahead, hold or stop, and who decides. Agree before the day. OTAS guidance.

Stopping is part of the plan, not a failure. Say in your invite that the event may stop if the crowd is too big, so people expect it.

What you see	What to do	Who decides
Crowd within the plan, edges holding	Go	Organiser in charge
Crowd growing fast, edges stretching	Hold the activity, widen the space, post an update	Organiser in charge
People in the road or activity area	Stop the activity until clear	Organiser in charge
Vehicles through the crowd	Stop, hold the crowd clear of its path, one steward guides it through at walking pace, then restart	Steward lead
Disorder or injury	Stop, call 999, help people leave	Organiser in charge, then police

Table 6. Go, hold or stop. OTAS guidance.

ACTION

Agree this table with your team and the police contact before the day.



11

Plan a pop-up from the idea to the clear up

Five stages. OTAS guidance unless a source is shown.

The thing that draws the crowd may belong to someone else. OTAS style image, generated from real photography. Not a record of a specific event.

Five stages, from the idea to the clear up



STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5
Ask	**Size**	**Staff**	**Run**	**Clear**
Landowner first	Plan for more	One person in charge	Edges and traffic	Leave it clean

From the plan in this Insight. OTAS guidance.

Stage 1. Ask

Ask the landowner or council before you post. In this borough, more than 50 people needs permission [8]. Tell the police what you plan.

Stage 2. Size

Plan for more people than you invite. Pick a space with room to spare, clear edges and routes away from roads [11].

Stage 3. Staff

Name one person in charge. Brief stewards and first aiders, and agree how you will stop the event if the crowd grows too big [11][15].

Stage 4. Run

Hold the edges, keep people and traffic apart, watch the crowd and post updates. Stop if the plan no longer fits the crowd.

Stage 5. Clear

Leave the space as you found it. Thank the neighbours, and report back to the council [8].

Part	What it needs
The ground	Who owns it, and their answer in writing [8]
The police	Who you told, and what they said
The crowd	The most people the space can hold safely, and what you will do above it [11]
The edges	How the activity area, the crowd and traffic are kept apart [11]
The person in charge	One name, known to stewards, police and the landowner
The stop	Who can stop the event, and how people are told

Table 2. What to agree before you post. OTAS guidance, drawing on the council's events process [8] and HSE [11].

ACTION

Fill in Table 2 before your next invite goes out.

12
Tool: steward brief for a pop-up

Read to every steward and helper before the location is released. OTAS guidance.

Your job

- Know who is in charge and how to reach them.
- Hold your edge. Keep people out of the activity area and off the road.
- Keep the routes out clear.

If the crowd grows

- Call it in early.
- Ask people to step back, calmly and clearly.
- If told to stop, help people leave by the routes out.

Vehicles

- Call in any vehicle that needs to pass.
- Guide it slowly, with the crowd held back.

ACTION

Read this brief before the location goes out, and check every helper has the number of the person in charge.

13
Tool: what to post, and when

Short posts that help the crowd help you. OTAS guidance.

With the invite

- "This is a free event in a public park. Space is limited. If it is too busy when you arrive, please keep off the road and come back another time."

With the location

- "Please stay behind the markers, keep paths and roads clear, and follow the stewards in [colour]."

If you stop

- "We have stopped for safety. Thank you. Please leave by the main paths and do not walk in the road."

Post updates from one account, and repeat key messages. People act on the information they have [16].

ACTION

Write these three posts before you send the invite.



14

The first ten minutes after the crowd outgrows the plan

OTAS guidance. Agree it with your team and the police contact before the day.

Someone has to be in charge, and everyone has to know who. OTAS style image, generated from real photography. Not a record of a specific event.

First minute

- The organiser in charge holds the activity.
- Stewards ask people back from the activity area and the road.

Next five minutes

- Post an update, and use a loud hailer if you have one.
- Call the police contact. Call 999 if anyone is hurt or in danger.
- Clear a route for any vehicle or ambulance.

Up to ten minutes

- Decide to restart in a bigger space, or stop.
- If you stop, say so clearly and help people leave by safe routes.
- Note times, numbers and decisions.

ACTION

Run this as a ten minute table top with your team before your next pop-up.

15
What to do at each level

Operational

Know who is in charge

Keep off the road

Watch the edges

Know who is in charge. Keep people off the road and out of the activity area. Watch the edges of the crowd, not just the middle. Call in any vehicle that needs to pass.

Tactical

Mark edges and routes

Crowd and traffic apart

Ready to stop

Mark the edges and the routes out. Keep crowd and traffic apart. Agree a stop signal, and be ready to stop if the crowd outgrows the space. Post updates online.

Strategic

Landowner first

Plan for more

Name who is in charge

Ask the landowner and council before you post, and tell the police. Plan for more people than you invite. Check whether any licence is needed [12]. Name the person in charge.

ACTION

Pick one action at your level and do it before your next invite goes out.



16

Readiness checklist

OTAS guidance unless a source is shown.

The landowner deals with what is left behind. OTAS style image, generated from real photography. Not a record of a specific event.

Before you post

- Landowner or council asked, answer in writing [8].
- Police told.
- Licence need checked [12].
- Person in charge named.

Before the location goes out

- Space measured, edges and routes marked [11].
- Stewards and first aid in place.
- Posts written.

On the day

- Crowd watched against the limit.
- Roads kept clear.

After

- Site cleared.
- Report back to the council and police.

ACTION

Print this checklist and sign off each line before the invite goes out.

17
What we do not know yet

- What the police were asked, and what they agreed [2][5].
- Whether the council will take further action [1].
- The total number of people present. Reports range from hundreds to thousands [2][3][5].
- Whether a third joust is planned, and where.

ACTION

We will update this Insight if the council, the police or the organisers publish more.

18

Coming up: festive pop-ups

Christmas jumper runs, carol flash mobs, free giveaways and light switch on watch parties are often shared online first and planned second. Dark evenings and busy streets make a bigger crowd than expected harder to manage. Ask the landowner and tell the police before the post goes out [8][11].

ACTION

If you need support with planning a pop-up or free gathering, reach out to us to see how we can support you.

Questions

Do we need permission for a free gathering in a park?

Usually, from the landowner. In this borough, any event for more than 50 people in a park, green space or street needs permission [8]. Ask the council for its own rules.

The police said yes. Is that enough?

No. Police approval is not landowner permission, and neither is a licence. The council said it had not given permission for the joust, though the organisers said they had told it and spoke to police [1][3].

Does an RSVP cap limit the crowd?

Not in a public place. Anyone who sees the post can come. Plan for more people than you invite.

Should we release the location late?

It can stop people gathering early, but it sends everyone at once. If you do it, have stewards in place first, and tell the landowner and police where.

Do we need a licence?

Only if there are licensable activities, such as selling alcohol or some regulated entertainment. In England and Wales, a temporary event notice covers up to 499 people at any one time [12].

What if the crowd gets too big?

Stop the activity, tell people clearly, and help them leave by safe routes. Agree this before the day, and who makes the call [11][16].

If a post drew ten times the crowd to your next event, who would be in charge, and where would the crowd stand?

ACTION

Send us your question and we will add the answer to the next update.

Sources

Web sources opened 9 November 2026 and labelled with their publisher.

1. **BBC News, organisers say e-bike jousting is performance art, 1 November 2026** bbc.co.uk
2. **LBC, thousands turn up to watch round two of an e-bike jousting event in east London, 31 October 2026** lbc.co.uk
3. **The Telegraph, e-bike jousters defy warnings from the operator, 1 November 2026** telegraph.co.uk
4. **BBC News, hire e-bike operator says its bikes are not for jousting, 19 October 2026** bbc.co.uk
5. **North East Londoner, second e-bike joust draws thousands, 7 November 2026** nelondoner.co.uk
6. **LBC, hundreds gather for e-bike jousting event in east London, 18 October 2026** lbc.co.uk
7. **The Observer, these bikes are made for jousting, 26 October 2026** observer.co.uk
8. **Hackney Council, holding events in parks, green spaces and streets** hackney.gov.uk
9. **Hackney Council, parks and green spaces events policy** app1.apply4.com
10. **HSE, event safety, frequently asked questions** hse.gov.uk
11. **HSE, event safety, put crowd controls in place** hse.gov.uk
12. **Home Office, revised guidance issued under section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003, chapter 7, temporary event notices, updated 3 November 2026** gov.uk
13. **Public Order Act 1986, section 14, conditions on public assemblies** legislation.gov.uk
14. **Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, section 35, directions excluding a person from an area** legislation.gov.uk
15. **The Purple Guide, safety advisory groups** thepurpleguide.co.uk
16. **Cabinet Office, Understanding crowd behaviours: guidance and lessons identified** gov.uk
17. **BBC News, nine arrested after dispersal orders in central London, 9 August 2023** bbc.co.uk
18. **LondonWorld, what happened on Oxford Street, August 2023** londonworld.com
19. **CBS News New York, officers attacked and crushed during a giveaway crowd, 4 August 2023** cbsnews.com
20. **CNN, giveaway post draws crowds to a New York park, 4 August 2023** cnn.com
21. **The Guardian, arrests amid a social media robbery campaign in central London, 9 August 2023** theguardian.com
22. **HSE, event safety guidance for organisers** hse.gov.uk

Related OTAS Insights

These are links to other OTAS Insights pieces, not to any OTAS Live product or service.

What licensing committees ask of new festivals
When everyone is told to come in at once

Guidance: this Insight summarises council, HSE, Purple Guide and Cabinet Office guidance, with the Licensing Act 2003 guidance, the Public Order Act 1986 and the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. These cover England and Wales, and section 14 of the 1986 Act also covers Scotland. It is not legal advice. Ask the landowner, the council and the police what applies to your event.

Interest: OTAS Live Ltd, which publishes OTAS Insights, sells event operations services, handbooks and training related to this topic.

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Images are OTAS style images, generated from real photography. None is a record of a specific event.

ACTION

Check the sources before you quote them, and tell us if any link has changed.

OVER TO YOU

If a post drew ten times the crowd to your next event, who would be in charge, and where would the crowd stand?

If you need support with planning a pop-up or free gathering, reach out to us to see how we can support you.

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