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Leicester Diwali Cuts Spark Fears of Economic Impact

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Leicester's decision to significantly scale back its cherished Diwali festivities this year has triggered widespread concern among local business owners and community leaders, who fear the move will deal a serious blow to the city's economy and cultural life.

Leicester City Council recently confirmed that fireworks displays, stage performances, and the use of Cossington Street Recreation Ground will be suspended for this year's Diwali

celebrations, citing escalating safety risks posed by the ever-growing crowds. Although lights along the Golden Mile and the Wheel of Light will still be featured, many believe these pared-down plans fall short of what residents and visitors expect from one of the country's most vibrant celebrations.

Conservative members of Leicester City Council have voiced strong opposition to what they see as a hasty and ill-considered decision. Councillor Hemant Rae Bhatia argued that public safety must, of course, be paramount, but insisted that other solutions, such as extending road closures on Loughborough Road and Melton Road or moving some activities to more open spaces, could have been explored instead of gutting the event altogether. "Show me an event anywhere in the world where people turn up to see nothing," Bhatia told LeicestershireLive, emphasising that Diwali is not just about lights but about sustaining the local economy and protecting Leicester's cultural identity.

Councillor Yogesh Chauhan echoed these concerns, describing Diwali as a "major economic lifeline" for small businesses along the Golden Mile. According to Chauhan, thousands of visitors flock to Leicester each year, including some who might otherwise travel to London or Birmingham, spending money in hotels, restaurants, taxis, and shops. He warned that Labour's scaled-back approach could easily drive those tourism dollars elsewhere, weakening the city's brand and long-term prosperity.

Labour's Assistant Mayor for Culture, Vi Dempster, defended the changes, stating that the festival had effectively become a victim of its success, with unrestricted crowd numbers now posing unacceptable risks. She insisted that the council remains committed to keeping Diwali on the Golden Mile, where it has been celebrated for over four decades, but stressed that safety warnings from emergency services and event security providers could not be ignored.

Graham Callister, Leicester City Council's Head of Festivals, Events and Cultural Policy, reinforced this position, saying the sheer volume of attendees had created significant public safety concerns. He explained that reducing infrastructure and organised activities would help ease congestion, making it safer for families to gather along Belgrave Road.

While officials maintain that scaling back is necessary, critics remain unconvinced that this is the only way forward. For many, Leicester's Diwali is more than a seasonal attraction; it is a symbol of unity and resilience that deserves thoughtful preservation rather than drastic cutbacks.

