

Community, Leisure & Recreation Committee

Date:	24 January 2017
Title:	Christmas Event Feedback 2016
Contact Officer:	Lizzie Fuller, Community Project Support Officer

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide feedback on the Christmas event for 2016.

Background

2. Last year's Christmas Event which took place on Friday 2 December 2016 was well attended by the community of Thame once again.
3. There were 28 stalls in attendance, including some regular market traders at Thame's Charter Market, achieving a stall income of £610. Nine of these stalls were local business and charities and were offered free of charge. In 2017, it is hoped that our Market Town Co-Ordinator will incorporate more local shops, market traders and crafters into the event. A similar layout to 2015 worked well, however due to there not being any stalls behind the Town Hall last year, the food stalls to the left of the Town Hall (by Greyhound Walk) did not trade as well as the area quickly became too crowded or people simply weren't aware they were there.
4. The introduction of the Masonic Lodge as a performance venue, in addition to the performance areas in the Upper Chamber and on the High Street, was very successful as it dispersed the crowds across the venues which subsequently assisted with stage management requirements and health and safety. The performers at the Masonic Lodge were very positive about this venue and their self-sufficient approach also reduced the pressure on our staff. Spacing the performances out and allowing time for changeovers and the audience to disperse, enabled the event to run much smoother, and this was reiterated in the feedback from the performers. There is a need to investigate new and different local performance groups and entertainment each year.
5. The use of the informal outdoor performance area again this year, instead of the traditional scaffolding stage, worked well. Following feedback from 2015, the Maintenance Team were able to raise and expand the podium to meet the requirements of the event. There is a pressing need to have preparations in place for bad weather, notably a cover for the podium. Options for this will be considered and implemented for this year's event.
6. All the attractions were well received by the public. The same providers of the Donkeys and Grotto were used again in 2016 and we were generally pleased with the quality of the service. The Go-Karts were a new attraction this year and did well on the night, providing the best return on investment. There were also two roaming children's characters which were hugely popular and were provided by a Children's Entertainment Company based in High Wycombe at a very reasonable price, as well as a pantomime character, Aladdin, from Aylesbury Waterside Theatre.

7. The booking of a celebrity, if at all, needs to be decided and agreed well in advance, between Officers, Councillors and the Mayor. There was some confusion last year as to whether a celebrity was needed or wanted. Early booking would assist in the publicity of the event. Following the success of local Olympian Victoria Pendleton in 2015, there are certainly benefits from having larger numbers attending the event, such as increased trade for stallholders and greater publicity, however there were logistical difficulties associated with this, which we were relieved of last year.
8. The lantern parade workshops at the three local primary schools were well attended by children and their family last year, although fewer lanterns were made compared to previous years. The workshops do incur a large financial cost to the Council, however there are a large amount of materials left over which can be used next year. Furthermore, the primary schools have all said they are able and willing to contribute £100 each towards the workshops. It is the Council's intention to repeat the workshops next year and, with a longer notice period and forward-planning, it is hoped that more community groups such as Thame and District Day Centre, SAFARI and Lord Williams's art students will also get involved. The support from Windles in the form of paper lantern templates once again was extremely helpful in getting those who are not associated with the primary schools involved in the event.
9. The town-wide Santa Circuit competition involved 24 local businesses and we received 16 entries, but numbers could be higher. The introduction of digital and printed entry forms allowed people to download a form from the Council's website and it also helped staff in marking the entries. The winner of the Santa Circuit was invited to turn on the Christmas Lights and lead the lantern parade alongside the Mayor.
10. The Council are hugely appreciative of the additional assistance received from Councillors and members of the community. Staffing levels have previously been an issue at the Christmas Event, however with three new members of staff and particularly the hiring of professional road closure management, R&R, at a cost of £600 for the duration of the road closure (midday to 9pm), proved an invaluable investment. In addition to manning the road closure, R&R worked to control the access of any unauthorised traders. There were direct benefits from R&R operating the road closure, as staff and volunteers – who lack the experience for this task – were able to focus on the event and this had a positive impact on everyone involved. The staff and volunteer rota worked well, however it is imperative that two members of staff are assigned to each cash-taking attraction at all times to manage ticket sales and to control the queue.
11. The timings of the event remained the same as recent years, with the event starting at 3pm and the lights being switched-on around 7pm. Feedback from the public, particularly those with children, have said 7pm is too late and therefore many families with young children either leave early or just come for the switch-on. The event is always quiet between 3pm and 4pm, and it has been questioned whether the road closure needs to come into force as early as midday.

Income and Expenditure

Below are the figures for the Income and Expenditure for the Christmas Event 2016.

Sponsorship, including the tree sponsor ASM, this year was £600 higher than in 2015 and was received from 8 local businesses. There has been very positive feedback from our sponsors with one stating "It's a pleasure to be associated with such a positive local event, so well done to you and the crew for continuing to make it such a special occasion."

Expenditure	
Lantern Materials	£477.99
Artist Support	£450.00
Grotto	£500.00
Donkey Hire	£300.00
Go-Karts	£350.00
Publicity	£209.32
Colonel Custard	£275.00
Other attractions*	£406.25
Road Closure Management	£600.00
TOTAL	£3,568.56

Income	
Event Budget	£2,500.00
Stalls	£610.00
Sponsorship	£1,800.00
Attractions	£469.44
TOTAL	£5,379.44

*this includes hire of Paw Patrol & Tinkerbell, Grotto gifts, Masonic Hall hire and Thame Concert Band.

Recommendation:

The Committee is asked:

- i) To note the report.***