

## Community, Leisure & Recreation Committee

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<b>Date:</b>	<b>6 February 2018</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Christmas Event Feedback 2017</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Lizzie Fuller, Community Project Support Officer</b>

### Purpose of the Report

1. To provide feedback on the Christmas event for 2017.
2. To decide the date and timings for the 2018 Christmas event.

### Background

3. The community of Thame donned their woolly hats and gloves and braved the cold and drizzly weather on Friday 1 December 2017 to enjoy an evening of festive fun and entertainment before the town's Christmas Lights were officially switched-on.
4. A total of 40 stalls booked onto the event achieving a stall income of £910, a 50% increase on last year's income. Of these stalls, 6 were regular traders at Thame's weekly Charter or monthly Farmers' Markets, 11 were Thame-based businesses, traders, charities or organisations and 11 were locally based in Aylesbury, Bicester or High Wycombe. In addition to this, the Market Town Co-Ordinator encouraged Town Centre businesses to stay open late for the event. On the night, 5 businesses stayed open with a range of deals and festive treats on offer as well as many of the local pubs also offering seasonal drinks and activities. One of the businesses told us they felt it was definitely worth staying open as they had people in their shop until the end of the event, which they attributed to the publicity listed on the event programme. Feedback from the stallholders has been generally positive, with a suggestion that stalls are spaced further apart.
5. The reuse of the Masonic Hall as a performance venue as per 2016, in addition to the Town Hall's Upper Chamber and outside podium, allowed us to increase the number of performers and the length of the intervals which enabled smooth and safe transitions between each performance. The feedback from the performers has been overwhelming positive, with many stating the event has become a highlight event in their performance calendar. In addition to the regular performers, this year we welcomed six Thame-based groups who have never performed at the event before, including one of the primary school orchestras. Provisions for bad weather need to be considered, particularly a cover for the podium.
6. Following their success in 2016, the Santa's Grotto and Go-Karts were re-booked using the same providers and we were once again pleased with the quality of these attractions. At least one new and different attraction is introduced each year, and in 2017 we invited a human-sized snow globe to the event! The Oxfordshire-based company were very helpful throughout the booking process and at the event, however there were some teething problems with the globe which would need to be considered if booked again such as poor lighting and its positioning to prevent triggering nearby building alarms. Two roaming children's characters ('the Snow Sisters') were also re-booked from the same company as 2016, who proved popular once again.

7. No celebrity was booked to turn on the lights last year, although a few famous faces were approached. The event inevitably attracts a larger crowd when a celebrity is turning on the lights, however similarly the event last year worked just as successfully without a celebrity.
8. Three lantern workshops were held last year, one in each of the primary schools, which were all well attended by children and their parents/grandparents. The Mayor attended all three workshops and enjoyed learning how the lanterns were made and getting involved. At Barley Hill School's workshop, three students from Lord Williams's School volunteered to help and it is hoped that we can build on this for 2018, with students helping at all three workshops. Discussions were held with Thame Youth Café who are keen to host a workshop, alongside another community group, in 2018 subject to Town Council funding. Cornerstone Arts, who have previously funded the workshops, have informed us they would like to find a sustainable source funding for these workshops, by incorporating this with the Market Town Co-Ordinator's Public Arts Strategy. The support from Windles in the form of card lantern templates once again was extremely helpful in engaging those not involved in the lantern workshops with the event. There is an increasing need to reconsider the parade route and/or timings as the parade tends to bottleneck when it reaches the crowds outside the Town Hall waiting for the lights to turn on, whilst children in the parade struggle to reach the front of the crowds for the school choir/community carol singing.
9. The town-wide trail, themed the 'Snowflake Search', involved 24 local businesses and shops, and ran throughout the month of November. The winner of the Snowflake Search was invited to turn on the Christmas Lights and lead the lantern parade alongside the Mayor. Prizes, sought from local shops, were given to the winners and runners up. Digital entry forms were available from the Town Council's website, and printed forms were available from the Town Hall. Despite receiving extensive coverage in local media and publicity via the Town Council's channels (including the new 'Christmas in Thame' Facebook page), we only received 19 entries (3 more than 2016). The format of the trail (24 images to find without clues) and time of year (cold weather/dark), may make it unappealing to children. It has been suggested that a different competition is held in 2018 to decide who turns-on the lights, such as designing the Mayor's Christmas cards (as has previously been held) or the best decorated card lantern.
10. The Council are hugely appreciative of the additional assistance received throughout the event from Council Staff, Councillors, community groups and members of the community. A special thank you goes to the Council's Maintenance Team who, despite being two men down from last year, did a fantastic job of setting up and clearing away the stage, gazebos, event signage and electricity amongst a variety of other operational tasks. R&R Frontline Services were hired again to man the road closure and direct stall arrivals, which alleviated the workload demands for Council Officers and ensured public safety was ensured at all time. The staff and volunteer rota worked well, however, where possible, Event Organisers should not be assigned to a specific task to ensure smooth running of the event. As the event becomes busier, two members of staff should be assigned to each cash-taking attraction at all times to manage ticket sales and to control the queue.
11. The event ran from 3:30pm-7:30pm, with the lights being switched-on at 7pm. The event was particularly quiet during the first hour and it has been suggested that the event starts an hour later (at 4:30pm), and subsequently the road closure to come in force at 1pm rather than midday. Some feedback has suggested the lights are turned on in the middle of the event, as opposed to at the end, so that younger children can see the lights being turned on without this having an impact on the length of the event, however the crowds do usually disperse once the lights have been turned on.
12. Officers will continue to review the event feedback and format, and would welcome suggestions from Councillors on how the event could be further improved.

## Income and Expenditure

Below are the figures (excluding VAT) for the Income and Expenditure for the Christmas Event 2017.

Sponsorship was generously received from a total of 7 local businesses, the majority of which were repeat sponsors from 2016. The tree was once again kindly sponsored by ASM Auto Recycling.

<b>Expenditure</b>	
Lantern Materials	£311
Artist Support	£450
Grotto	£500
Snow Globe	£796
Go-Karts	£370
Printing & Publicity	£143
Other*	£518
Road Closure Management	£780
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£3,868</b>

<b>Income</b>	
Event Budget	£2,500
Stalls	£910
Sponsorship	£1,300
Attractions	£452
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£5,162</b>

\*this includes hire of the roaming children's characters, Grotto gifts, Masonic Hall hire and Thame Concert Band.

## 2018 Event Date

Traditionally, the Christmas Lights Switch-On event is held on the first Friday in December, however in 2018 this will fall on Friday 7 December. It is therefore proposed that the 2018 event is brought forward a week to Friday 30 November 2018, as per the event in 2012, to timely coincide with the start of the festive period, particularly for businesses.

## Recommendation:

***The Committee is asked:***

- i) To note the report and event feedback.***
- ii) To confirm the date and time of the event for 2018.***