

Community, Leisure & Recreation Committee

Date:	5 February 2019
Title:	Christmas Event Feedback 2018
Contact Officer:	Lizzie Fuller, Community Project Officer

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide feedback on the Christmas event for 2018.
2. To note the date of the 2019 Christmas event.

Background

3. The annual Christmas Lights Switch-On event took place on Friday 30 November 2018 from 3:30pm-7:15pm. It was another festive, well-attended community event.
4. To promote community engagement, a poll was held on the Christmas in Thame Facebook page in July to gather ideas for which attractions should be booked for the event and a post-event feedback survey was used to gather feedback from those involved in the event (including stallholders and performers) and the general public. The majority of the feedback, both via the survey and on social media, has been very positive with many describing it as a lovely community event and stating they wouldn't change anything about it. One lovely comment reads: "the event was really well organised and everyone had a great time and we appreciate how lucky we are to live in a town that puts on so many events across the year that we're able to enjoy."

Feedback and Review

5. Stalls offering a range of gifts and refreshments lined the High Street and Cornmarket. A total of 35 stalls were in attendance (down from 40 last year) bringing in an income of £945 (this includes 3 cancellations). Feedback has been generally positive about the selection of stalls. To reduce queues and running out of Mulled Wine, it is suggested that another charity or local business sells this at the event to complement Thame Lions Club who have always been the only sellers of this.
6. The two main performance areas for entertainment were the Masonic Hall and the small stage / performance area in front of the Town Hall. There was also a pop-up performance from St Joseph's School Orchestra outside Sainsburys. The Upper Chamber was not used this year as none of the performers requested the space, as such it acted as a reserve performance space in the case of bad weather. The performance area in front of the Town Hall did experience some audio problems, notably that it was difficult to hear some of the singers and the Concert Band during the carol singing. It was felt that having the carol singing after the switch-on didn't really work; most people left once the lights were switched-on, there were too many carols and the band couldn't be heard very well.
7. We were once again pleased with the Santa's Grotto hiring and this continues to be a popular attraction. A snow globe was hired again but from a different supplier who could provide lighting and we were pleased with this. Ticket sales from these two attractions enabled us to recoup some

of the costs. Following the Facebook poll, Reindeer were the most popular request and were therefore hired from an Oxfordshire-based company. Again, we were very impressed with the Reindeer and it was excellent that guests could pet and feed the Reindeer. Two children's characters were hired from the same company as last year and these were a great success once again. Despite a last minute cancellation, we were able to provide a children's ride which proved popular and it should be considered whether having two children's rides would be feasible, particularly as several people noted there should be more for children to do at the event.

8. Lantern workshops were held in each of the three primary schools in Thame, with student volunteers from Lord Williams's School helping at each of the sessions. Local business Windles Group kindly printed and donated card lantern templates for schoolchildren not involved in the workshops to decorate. The lantern parade start time was brought forward to alleviate some of the operational pressures associated with having it just before the switch-on, and the Air Cadets assisted this further by leading the parade. This enabled a much smoother and safer ending to the parade as crowds were able to disperse before the switch-on. On the night, the Reindeer providers offered to lead the parade with their reindeer and this was a real treat for parade spectators.
9. A Christmas-themed Town Trail 'Runaway Reindeer' was held this year. 24 shops and businesses took part by displaying a numbered reindeer in their shop window for the month of November which residents were invited to find. The winner helped push the plunger on the lights and received complimentary tickets to the Thame Players panto, with 3 runners-up receiving a gift from Rumsey's. 32 entries were received (up from 19 in 2017).
10. The Town Council is extremely grateful for the support from Council Staff, Councillors and members of the community who give their time to enable this event to take place. Professional road closure marshals were hired as this continues to be an invaluable investment, ensuring public safety is paramount at all times and alleviating demands on Town Council staff. Following a minor medical incident last year professional medical cover was hired this year but fortunately was not required.
11. A common theme in the feedback was timings. Survey data, feedback and observations at the event suggest that the peak time for visiting is 6-7pm, with many proposing the switch-on should be brought forward and be in the middle of the event (perhaps at 6/6:30pm with attractions and stalls open until 7:30pm). The switch-on has been around 7:15pm in recent years – it was intended for 7pm in 2018 but there were some unforeseen delays with Santa's arrival! The first hour or two of the event are generally very quiet so the 3:30pm start time should be reviewed. As changing the event timings will have implications for every aspect of the event, this should be considered and decided as early as possible. Therefore Officers will review the options for changing the timings to ensure the event meets the needs of the community.
12. It is proposed that the event is held on Friday 6 December 2019, as per 2013.
13. The Town Council will continue to review all feedback and welcomes suggestions for ways to improve the event.

Income and Expenditure

Below are the figures (excluding VAT) for the Income and Expenditure for the Christmas Event 2018.

Sponsorship was generously received from a total of 9 businesses, the majority of which were repeat sponsors from 2017, and was up by £600 from last year. The tree was once again kindly sponsored by ASM Auto Recycling. Lantern material costs decreased as surplus materials are used up and printing

costs were reduced due to greater use of social media to promote the event. Attraction costs increased but this was counterbalanced by an increase in sponsorship.

Expenditure	
Lantern Materials	£200
Artist Support	£450
Grotto	£500
Snow Globe	£1,250
Reindeer	£1,100
Printing & Publicity	£200
Other*	£420
Road Closure Management	£690
Medical Cover	£425
TOTAL	£5,235

Income	
Event Budget	£2,500
Stalls	£945
Sponsorship	£1,900
Attractions	£360
TOTAL	£5,705

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

Recommendation:

The Committee is asked:

- i) To note the report and event feedback.***
- ii) To note the date of the 2019 Christmas Event.***