

Community, Leisure & Recreation Committee

Date:	11 February 2020
Title:	Christmas Event Feedback 2019 / Date 2020
Contact Officer:	Lizzie Fuller, Committee Services Officer

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide feedback on the Christmas event for 2019.
2. To agree the date of the 2020 Christmas event.

Background

3. The annual Christmas Lights Switch-On event took place on Friday 6 December 2019 from 4pm-7:30pm. It was another festive, well-attended community event. The town's new Christmas Lights looked brilliant and were well-received.
4. Feedback was obtained largely via an online survey which was well-publicised to event participants and the public via email, social media, website and newsletter. The feedback was generally positive with lots of useful suggestions on how to improve the event. The Town Council will continue to review all feedback and welcomes suggestions for ways to improve the event. This report summarises the main points of feedback.
5. This report also asks Members to consider whether the event this year should be held on Friday 27 November or Friday 4 December 2020.

Feedback and Review

6. **Stalls** – a range of gifts and refreshments lined the High Street and Cornmarket. Stalls brought in an income of £1,070. Feedback has been generally positive about the selection of stalls, although perhaps a few too many refreshment stalls. The stall layout worked better in 2019 with no stalls located around the back of the Town Hall and the majority of refreshment stalls grouped together on Cornmarket. Having two mulled wine stalls, rather than one, worked well.
7. **Performances** – The Town Hall Upper Chamber, Masonic Hall and a designated area / small stage in front of the Town Hall all provided spaces for live entertainment performances. There were some last-minute changes to the timetable due to the weather. The dispersed layout continues to work well. The common feedback theme regarding performances was that the current audio system for the outdoor performances & comping is inadequate for the scale of the event. Officers will investigate options to improve the sound system for this year's event.
8. **Attractions** – Three attractions were booked; Santa's Grotto, two reindeer and a miniature steam train. Due to safety concerns regarding high wind speeds, the inflatable Santa's Grotto was relocated inside to the Town Hall meeting room. This worked well and should be considered for future years. Two live reindeer and the miniature steam train were both well received by the public. A minor medical incident occurred on the steam train with first aid treatment required. Two children's rides attended the event and this worked well.

9. **Activities** – a ‘meet and greet’ with three children’s characters was held in the Masonic Hall for the first hour of the event, and then outdoors for the rest of the event. This worked very well and complimented the free craft activities and face painting provided by Grace Church in the Masonic Hall. The public feedback was overwhelming positive about these aspects of the event, with comments appreciating the free activities.
10. **Lantern Parade** - Lantern workshops were held in each of the three primary schools in Thame, with student volunteers from Lord Williams’s School helping at some of the sessions. The sessions and the ordering / delivery of materials is co-ordinated by the Town Council. 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. It is suggested the lantern parade takes place closer to the switch-on as the gap between the two is too large. The lantern parade was kindly sponsored by Thame Cars, with a representative attending the final session.
11. **Town Trail** – A Christmas-themed town centre trail was held again this year. 24 shops and businesses took part by displaying a numbered Steam Train in their shop window for two and a half weeks in November which residents were invited to find, mainly through the ‘Christmas in Thame’ Facebook page and booklet. The winner helped push the plunger on the lights and 3 runners-up receiving gifts kindly donated by Rumsey’s, Wally’s Toy Shop, Thame Children’s Cinema and Whizz Kids. The number of entries was similar to 2018, despite a change in approach to publicity.
12. **Publicity** – Following the continued success of the Christmas in Thame Facebook page, a booklet replicating that information was produced and widely distributed locally including in all primary school children’s bookbags in November. The event was also publicised through the usual channels – social media, website, newsletter and town entrance boards.
13. **Operations and Staffing** – The event is only made possible with all Town Council Officers working the event, and with the support of Councillors. This year there were 6 Councillors who volunteered with the event and this made a huge difference in enabling Officers to deal with issues at the event – although even with extra staff there were times when we were short on cover. 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. Professional medical cover was also hired.
14. **Timings** – Following feedback in 2018, the event started at 4pm (rather than 3:30pm) and closed at 7:30pm, with the switch-on brought forward to 6:30pm. This worked very well and did not appear to have an impact on the number of visitors. Furthermore, a large number of people stayed at the event until it closed at 7:30pm, browsing stalls, purchasing food & drink and enjoying the live music. The survey feedback indicates that the majority of visitors / participants felt 6:30pm was the right time for the switch-on.

Event Date

15. The 2019 event was held on 6 December. This was the same as in 2013, however there was some feedback – particularly from businesses – that this was too late in the festive season.

A poll was held on social media (30 January to 5 February) to gauge whether residents and businesses would prefer the event to be held on Friday 27 November or Friday 4 December 2020.

A total of 638 responses were received.

- 269 responses - 27 November 2020
- 369 responses – 4 December 2020

It is proposed that the event is held on Friday 4 December, and in future it should be held on the Friday closest to the 1st December.

Income and Expenditure

Below are the figures (excluding VAT) for the Income and Expenditure for the Christmas Event 2019.

Sponsorship was generously received from a total of 9 businesses, including four new sponsors, and was up by £550 from last year. The tree was once again kindly sponsored by ASM Auto Recycling and the lantern parade was sponsored by Thame Cars. It is thanks to the generous sponsorship of local businesses that this event and the standard of attractions are able to be sustained each year.

Expenditure	
Lantern Materials	£225
Artist Support	£450
Grotto	£500
Reindeer	£1,100
Steam Train	£760
Printing & Publicity	£570
Other*	£540
Road Closure Management	£580
Medical Cover	£425
TOTAL	£4,970

Income	
Event Budget	£2,500
Stalls	£1,070
Sponsorship**	£2,450
Attractions	£500
TOTAL	£6,520

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

**excluding sponsorship of the Christmas Tree.

Recommendation:

The Committee is asked:

- To note the report and event feedback.**
- To decide the date of the 2020 Christmas Event.**