

## Community, Leisure & Recreation Committee

---

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Christmas Activities Feedback 2023</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>20 February 2024</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Clare Peacock, Communications and Events Officer</b>

### Purpose of the Report

1. To provide feedback on the Christmas events and activities held in 2023.
2. To agree the shape of the 2024 Christmas event.

### Background

1. The light switch on Friday 1 December 2023 was the launch of our Christmas events taking place throughout December. We continued with the shorter, and simpler light switch on event, with other activities happening throughout the month. The event was run in partnership with several local organisations, and we were supported by sponsorship from local businesses. Other festive activities run by partners were included in our Christmas publications such as concerts, wreath making and church services, were also highlighted in the Christmas booklet.

### Feedback and Review

2. **Christmas booklet:** This year the booklet was a smaller leaflet with information on the Christmas lights event and included a calendar which had all the events happening from all community groups between 1 December and Christmas Day. This was not delivered to houses due to the costs. Sponsorship had been hard to get this year for the Town Guide and therefore did not want to pressure businesses. The booklet was available in the Library, Information Centre and in the holder placed on the tree fencing outside the town hall.
3. **Light Switch On event:** formal feedback was very limited, we only had 29 responses from the surveys posted via Facebook and in the newsletter. However, the general feel from on the night, is quite mixed, some loved the food, some thought it was too expensive, some loved that it was a quick event and families could get out of the cold and back home in time for tea, however in the feedback, 22 responses were hoping for a longer event with large rides and entertainment. When asking for volunteers, out of the 29 only 3 were willing to join in. Food stall feedback, included many asking for a coffee/hot drink stand to be featured in the 2024 event. At the time of planning, we were under the impression that the Rotary Club would be doing hot drinks as well as mulled wine. We have contacts for a hot drinks van which work with the team who run the street food section of our Christmas event, ready for 2024. The food stands would love to return in 2024. A key negative from the feedback was the pedlars, residents are not aware that they were not invited, and they have a legal right to trade, so would not leave the public event. We were able to secure £50 walk in sellers fee per seller which ended up at £300.
4. **Santa's grotto & gift fair:** the grotto was held the day after the light switch on, at the same time as a gift fair on Saturday 2 December in the upper chamber. The Thame & District Round Table struggled with a low footfall; this could have been due to the weather. For 2024, we propose that we host the grotto at the same time as the Charities Fair, to secure more footfall,

and advertisement as the charities will also be promoting the grotto. This could all be held in the Upper Chamber or split between the Information Centre and Upper Chamber. We have reserved the Upper Chamber on our booking systems for 30 November to cater for this.

#### 5. **Community elements:**

- **Town Trail:** The town trail was not as popular this year, with many of the shops taking their present out early or making it difficult for children to see. Due to staff commitments, we were unable to keep checking each store window. For 2024 it would be good to go back to the large sticker on the window, with maybe a clue for the next stop on the trail.
- **Selfie station:** The selfie stations were out at opening times of the Information Centre, but due to bad weather and children being at school during this time the entries were mainly parents and babies/toddlers. The nutcrackers were loved by residents, and they were very happy to see them back in the town.
- **Winter Wonderland:** The library created an art installation with the 3 primary schools and ThameCop to create an educational piece on winter animals and how to protect them. The library did not receive pictures from one school, which is a shame as we delivered them, and said we would arrange to pick them up, however no response. The library felt that the drawings were not festive enough. Next year if we stick with the nutcrackers as our selfie station, colouring these in may be better for the library.
- **Window display competition:** This was the most popular community element. The QR 'Vote for me' wall signs worked well for the businesses. There were just under 200 votes in total, with nearly 100 going to our winner.

6. **Partnership:** Delivering the events this year was well supported by partner organisations, with charities and businesses being willing to get involved. The local churches participated and helped with the switch on event. There was a good response to sponsorship of the key activities and attractions. My view for 2024, we do need to have more councillors taking part in the running of the event, this year we were short due to staff not working on Fridays, and illness.

7. **Sponsorship:** We were very thankful for the sponsorship we received, all of 2023's sponsors have expressed an interest in sponsoring again in 2024. Residents are a little negative about the logo of the sponsor of the Christmas tree being on the fencing around the tree, however we are proud to have businesses who want to make Christmas a wonderful time in Thame and would not consider removing this in future years, (unless a suitable alternative is found).

8. **Event operational requirements:** This year a reduction in security costs was achieved due to the change of Light Switch on event as the layout enabled the High Street to be closed from 3pm rather than noon. Staff overtime and time off in lieu are not factored into these costs.

#### **Future thoughts**

9. Looking ahead to this year, consideration should be given to:
- Printing 2000 of the *Christmas in Thame* leaflet and delivering enough to each of the primary schools, so every student can take one home in their book bag, with the remainder going to the Information Centre and Churches.
  - If the event needs bigger attractions, and having council staff operate these as council staff are already looking after the Information Centre, backstage running of the event.

- Employing a bigger stage to maximise visibility, community interaction and engagement at the switch on event.
- Charity fair and grotto joining together on Saturday 30 November to enable a larger footfall for both events.

**Event Date 2024**

10. It is proposed that the Christmas events open with the switch on, on Friday 29 November 2024, as this is the closed Friday to the start of December.

**Income and Expenditure (Budget Code 105)**

11. Below are the figures (excluding VAT) for the income and expenditure for the Christmas events 2023 as at the accounts for the end of January 2024<sup>1</sup>. *Please note that the LED electricity costs for Christmas Seasonal lighting are yet to be received.*

<b>Expenditure £</b>	
Budget	25,910
<b>Actuals</b>	
Operational	6,018
Lights Contract	18,200
Tea Party	243
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,461</b>
<b>Underspend</b>	1,449

<b>Income £</b>	
Budget	5,300
<b>Actuals</b>	
Sponsorship / donations	3,353
Stall Income	640
<b>Total Supplementary Income</b>	<b>3,993</b>

This means the total cost of our Christmas events equates to £20,468<sup>2</sup>.

**Recommendation:**

***The committee is asked:***

- i) To receive feedback on the Christmas events and activities held in 2023.***

<sup>1</sup> Figures on the budget monitoring spreadsheet are based on the end of December 2023

<sup>2</sup> Figures on the budget monitoring spreadsheet are based on the end of December 2023