

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 18 September 2023

Title: Christmas Lights

Contact Officer: Operations Manager

Background

2023 marks the final year of the current Christmas lights contract for Witney Town Council, The Rotary Club of Witney will be running the switch-on event on the 24th of November.

The illumination contract runs for 3 years and includes the design, installation, maintenance and storage of Christmas lights. Officers will need to invite contractors to tender for the new contract in March 2024 and it would be advisable to give officers as much time as possible to produce a suitable tender document.

Current Situation

2024-27 Christmas Lights Display

Listed below are some key areas councillors may wish to input on the design and extent of the Christmas lights contract for 2024-27.

The Christmas Lights Display rating in the 2022 resident's satisfaction survey was:

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	N/A	Total
Christmas Lights Display	76	86	38	12	6	218

A comment was received, 'Christmas lights - always the same/cheap and tacky/waste of money'.

Extent of Display

The current display runs the length of Church Green, through the Market Square, down the High Street and along Corn Street, Langdale Gate and Welch Way. To extend this display much further it would require a substantial budget and it's unlikely it would add any benefit to the Town. However, it has previously been requested that the display be extended further up Corn Street and down Bridge Street by both residents and businesses. The extension would cost more but also require further infrastructure installations both fixing points and power connections.

Colours

Traditionally the Christmas lights design has been white and gold, there is an option to include colours in this design brief for the tendering process. A huge range of colours such as red and greens may not give Witney the design that suits its character but pops of one or two colours could help to freshen up the traditional display.

Children's Lights Design

Each year the Town Council runs a Christmas lights design competition. The winning light is displayed on the Town Hall with past winners being displayed above Como Lounge. It is recommended that the council continue this tradition as they offer character to the Christmas lights display and make it personal to Witney. However, a more impactful impression may be to amend the location of these and start installing them along the lampposts of Langdale Gate. Permission would have to be granted by highways and the correct infrastructure would have to be installed. A local business has sponsored the light to the sum of £250 in recent years.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

All the Christmas lights utilise LED's and the current illumination set-up is set to timers. The true energy reduction from the timers is nominal and the cost to reinstall timers when they fail far outweighs the cost to leave the lights on constantly. As previously stated, there is a minimal energy saving from the timers, but it does prompt a visual appearance that the correct energy-saving measures are in place.

A better statement from the Town Council on reducing its carbon footprint may come from removing the 2 large fir trees that are currently ordered. These trees obviously have to be felled for use and then are chipped down after use. Although traditional, the removal of these trees with the correct communication may mark a modernisation of the event. If this isn't received well they could always be reinstated for the following year as apart from the lights these aren't part of the contract.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Witney Christmas Lights are a valued event for the residents of Witney and an important attraction for the Town, benefitting its businesses and tourism. Any reduction in the scale of the event could draw criticism however, they come at considerable cost to Witney ratepayers.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- The current budget 4105/402 is £44,000.00, this includes the illumination contract, infrastructure repairs, maintenance and adjustments, trees, and electricity charges.
- Companies invited to tender in 2021 were given two design briefs, first a full area display for a budget of £33,500.00 and a reduced area display for £25,000.00.
- It recommended that for a full area display (the current display extent) for the 2024 – 2027 contract, the council look at increasing the budget to £45,000.00, not including infrastructure repairs, maintenance and adjustments, the trees, and electricity charges.
- The Council could explore sponsorship for the Christmas lights display, however, this has been approached in previous years and has not been successful.
- The cost for two 24ft Fir trees including delivery and installation for 2023 was: £2,395.00 Excl. Vat. This was offset by business sponsorship of one to the sum of £750.00.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Members are invited to discuss design for a brief to be used for the 2024-27 tender, such as colour, extent of display and location of children's lights.
2. Members are asked if they wish to continue with the installation of both Christmas trees for the 2024-27 display.
3. Members are asked to set a budget for the 2024-27 Christmas lights design for budget-setting.
4. Members are asked if a reduced display for the 2024-27 is required.