

**CHRISTMAS LIGHTS WORKING PARTY COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Wednesday, 17 January 2024

At 4.12 pm in the Virtual Meeting via MS Teams - Virtual Meeting

Present:

Councillor T Ashby (Chair)

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| Councillors: | R Crouch G Doughty | D Edwards-Hughes |
| Officers: | Mark Lewis Derek Mackenzie Angus Whitburn | Head of Estates & Operations Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Operations Manager |
| Others: | 0 members of the public. Councillor Ruth Smith | |

6 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

8 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Christmas Lights Working Party held on 13 November 2023 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the meeting of the Christmas Lights Working Party held on 13 November 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

9 CHRISTMAS LIGHTS TENDER 2024 & BEYOND

Members received a verbal update by way of a PowerPoint presentation from the Head of Estates & Operations (HE&O) which consolidated the ideas that arose from the walkabout members undertook on 27 November 2023 to evaluate the 2023 display.

Members discussed the inclusion of businesses and welcomed any sponsorship that could be sourced. They asked that Officers approach businesses once a supplier was appointed when it would be better known where sponsorship may fit.

They discussed the idea of having trees attached to businesses in a similar way other local towns and councils have. Officers will investigate this along with alternative ideas to ensure that these additional displays would be integrated within the scope rather than stand alone in order to help protect against any “gaps” if businesses did not wish to participate.

Members also liked the idea of including businesses in a shop window decoration scheme and hoped that this is an idea that can be supported.

Members discussed the areas they would like to see the display extend to including some new areas to be included in the contract.

Church Green – it was proposed that lights be added to the Western side of Church Green to complement those on the Eastern Side. Members asked that consideration be given to the brightness of the lights in order to not inconvenience residents; residents should be consulted and also invited to the meeting to agree the new display.

Corn Street – The HE&O explained that it would be necessary to gain the authority of the landlords of the properties in Corn Street if lights were to be erected on their premises, this could provide difficult due to the number of landlords. The feeling from members was that if there were gaps in the display this would detract from the overall appearance and potentially make the display look sparse.

Welch Way – The Operations Manager explained that the trees along Welch Way, from the junction with High Street to Marriotts Shopping Centre were small and this limited what decorations could be placed. Therefore, the junction of Welch Way and High Street would be the limit. This would also create a buffer between the Town Council lights and those of Marriotts Shopping Area.

Northern end of High Street – Members would like the display to extend up to 61 High Street, currently occupied by Witney Lighting. It was felt this this would ensure that residents and visitors still visit the business premises in this area.

High Street and Market Square – Members felt that the wonderful trees in this area should be utilised, the strings of icicle lights previously used have created a simple but effective display and the use of hanging motifs may not be necessary in this area.

Members also asked that a projection onto the Corn Exchange be included and also for it to extend to projection onto the Market Square itself.

Tree/Pole Motifs – The Operations Manager explained that there was a huge number of designs to choose from however once a supplier had been appointed these could be considered, though it would be advisable to move away from a “star” being used as these had been part of the display for the past seven years.

Members liked the idea of potentially wrapping or part wrapping some trees with lights as it was felt this gave an alternative visually impressive result.

Length of Contract – The Operations Manager explained that the standard term of a Christmas Lights contract was three years, however officers would like to consider a two plus one-year term, this would give the Council some time to consider bringing some of the lighting “in house”

following an evaluation of how they would test, store and maintain any lighting that the Council took on.

The HE&O explained that it was imperative that communications with a new provider were considered following difficulties experienced with previous companies. He then ran through the remaining timeline of the project so that members were clear on what was required to ensure that the council had sufficient time to appointment a suitable supplier.

Members asked that better fencing be sourced for the bottom of the Christmas Trees rather than the use of steel barriers.

Members reviewed images of another local towns light display with the overall response being that they were of poor quality and sparse. Members agreed that there was huge value and satisfaction for residents in providing a good display and that at a cost of approx. £1 per resident it was a worthy expense. However, it was important to consider options that would maximise the display but illustrate prudent budget control, such as maximising the lights in trees rather than column lights on lampposts.

A member asked for an update on the replacement of the timers that were removed by Oxfordshire County Council during the street light upgrades. The Operations Manager reported that when OCC investigated, they were surprised at the number that has been removed and were therefore still in the process of sourcing replacements to install. It was hoped that these will be installed soon.

Recommended:

1. That, the verbal update be noted and,
2. That, Officers prepare the scope of the Christmas Lights tender based on the areas discussed above subject to approval by the Stronger Communities Committee and the budget already agreed for 2024 and,
3. That, residents of Church Green be consulted on the new lighting.

The meeting closed at: 5.00 pm

Chair