

COUNCIL – 12 DECEMBER 2022

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS AND FESTIVAL

The Christmas Festival took place on Friday 25 November and feedback following the event has been extremely positive.

Christmas Lights

A new Christmas lighting scheme was introduced, hired on a three-year contract and provided by a local contractor, using LED festoon lighting dressed with falling tubes and glittering ball display. In January the decorative lights will be removed leaving the festoon lighting in place but switched off. This allows flexibility for them to be turned on for other events in the town throughout the year.

Members had agreed at Full Council on 24 January 2022 that the Christmas lights would be switched on at installation. This was to:

- (i) reduce congestion generated by crowds gathering in Fore Street for an official lights switch on event. The format used to involve a parade down the street first but was changed last year to bring in a large market in place of it;
- (ii) spread public attendance over the four-hour duration of the event rather than focus on a specific time where crowds gather then quickly disperse;
- (iii) reduce expenditure on drafting in a lighting contracting team specifically for the event.

Installation took a number of days and was finished the week preceding the Christmas Festival. As agreed the lights were switched on then.

Christmas market and entertainment

This year the event was located in Fore Street, Glanvilles Mill and Glanvilles Mill car park from 4pm until 8pm.

Miss Ivy Events, a local leading organiser of street food and artisan events with connections to many exhibitors, was invited to manage the Christmas Festival again following the successful event she delivered the previous year. This year she brought in over forty quality craft gift stalls plus hot food spread throughout the town. Priority for pitches was given to local people before opening the market up to all traders.

Prior to the event the Town Clerk, Assistant Town Clerk and Admin Officer visited the businesses on a number of occasions, identifying who planned to stay open. Late night shopping was promoted and requests sent to shops requesting what they would like the Town Council to promote on social media, as well as posters produced to display in their windows publicising that they would be open late.

Much deliberation was also given to applications from food stalls wishing to attend so as not to compete or conflict with hot food already being sold in the town. The Town Clerk, Assistant Town Clerk and Miss Ivy Events undertook numerous site visits, liaising with businesses about food locations. Applications from a coffee van, cake seller and crepe stall were declined attendance, and a negotiation was made directly between a non-food business and a stall holder not to bring in certain items that they felt would conflict. However, it seems that there will always be cross overs and if the aim of the event is to increase footfall in the town then this will probably continue to be a challenge. There was also reports of food retailers selling out and so there is still capacity to provide street food to the public to enhance their enjoyment of the evening and provide that experience.

Funding

In addition to the funds from the Christmas Festival budget, sponsorship was sought, and the Town Council was successful in securing three main sponsors totalling over £2000 including London and Cambridge Properties who are the owners of Glanvilles Mill, Palladium Building Supplies, Manning and Company, Ivybridge Dental Centre, Ivor Jones Financial Planning, Richard Peachey and Christopher's South. Lawsons donated their electricity supply free of charge, and Manning and Company donated their reimbursement for electricity back into the Mayor's charity for Ivybridge Young Carers.

The Town Council's arrangement with Miss Ivy Events was for her to bring in revenue from the stalls. This offset her fee, and some of the additional charges for marketing and staffing to manage the market. The remainder of the Town Council's funds were mainly used for the Christmas lighting, live music and entertainment.

Miss Ivy Events helped to coordinate the event in an extremely friendly and professional manner. She brought in more than the expected revenue and secured some excellent entertainment, including the extremely popular Paw Patrol and festive Punch and Judy, plus stilt walkers and live music artists. There were some unexpected costs, for example additional event insurance. The costs are still being finalised but the budget is projected to be on target.

Logistics

The one-way section of Fore Street was closed from 2pm to 9.30pm. Prior to submitting the application, the Assistant Town Clerk and Admin Officer visited and consulted with businesses and householders in the town, hand delivering letters to each address. The road closure incorporated marshalled access and egress between the top of Fore Street down to Hartley Court in order to avoid as much disruption as possible to householders and businesses. This year vehicles marshalled within the road closure were requested to wait until performances in the street had finished so as not to conflict with crowds. Unfortunately, this did cause some friction with one business.

Last year Erme Court car park was used for the event activities, however it was felt that it was rather detached from the rest of the festivities. South Hams District Council kindly permitted use of the Glanvilles Mill car park free of charge to accommodate part of the event. A section of Glanvilles Mill car park was cordoned off for blue badge holders, EV charging and taxis although one taxi operating on the day refused to use the allocated area insisting on entering the pedestrian only zone that was being set up. Being more central than Erme Court car park it worked extremely well, providing additional space whilst being cohesive and helping the event to flow throughout the town centre. A floodlight was hired to illuminate the car park and the footbridge, and provided a good link to Glanvilles Mill and Fore Street.

Leonards Road car park was used for parking with a two-way system introduced at the normal exit. Due to the amount of people visiting the town and the reduction of car parking available, the high demand for parking spaces was noticeable. It may be worth using the park and ride car park next year and possibly Ring and Ride buses if they would be available to assist.

Summary

The running of the event was successful, not only due to the assistance of a professional events coordinator, but also to the management on the day by the dedicated Town Hall team with the help of their families and Rotary Club members plus seven councillors. The staff are grateful to all those volunteers as without their help in safely managing the road closures and the car park, plus helping to set up and take down the marquees and staging, the event would not have been possible. We were also grateful to have a strong presence from the police and fire services.

The weather was calm and dry and the town was incredibly busy. Feedback from residents and businesses has been extremely positive and social media comments were excellent, indicating that the community had found the event very enjoyable.

Improvements

Addressing the criticisms of last year, more entertainment was provided at the top of Fore Street to encourage footfall further up, however due to objections from one business a food van allocated to the upper part of the street had to be relocated elsewhere.

To reduce congestion in Glanvilles Mill and avoid pinch points more stalls were set out in Glanvilles Mill car park.

Further feedback to be addressed for next year:

- Lights Switch On - A price is being obtained from the lighting contractor as public desire is to have a lights switch on;
- Litter - Six large bins for Fore Street were purchased, an 1100 litre bin for Glanvilles Mill car park was hired and litter picker volunteers were out clearing up for the duration of the event. Despite these efforts complaints about litter

in Erme Court car park and the leisure centre play area (areas not included in the event) were made, and litter picking will be extended to outside the event next year although large numbers of people were observed in Erme Court well beyond the time of the event finishing;

- Road Closure - During the course of the road closure there were a number of instances of hostile behaviour towards marshals. These originated from vehicles at the top of the street to a vociferous retail manager within the road closure area who had to wait to be marshalled out due to a performance being underway. Back up assistance was called in an attempt to calm the situation. As part of the event risk assessment operating vehicles in a road closure area will need to be considered fully for future road closures;
- Food/Market stalls – displeasure from some retailers about what is being brought in for four hours. The event aims to work with businesses as well as offering consumer choice. Due to the sensational footfall some food outlets reported that they sold out before the evening was over. Therefore, it probably was not an issue having extra food stalls available, and could be an argument for more, especially as it seems to be such a draw to attract the public in.
- Date of next year's Christmas Festival - The Chamber had mooted the possibility of the Christmas Festival being moved to a Saturday, however following the success of this Christmas some business opinion is to leave it as the Friday including one key retailer in the town. The Town Council staff work long hours and into the late evening on the Friday, taking the full weekend to recover before returning to work on the Monday. This would become more difficult if there was only one day off on the Sunday, unless businesses were willing to assist run the event. Also, the last Friday in November is an established date for the Christmas Festival. Judging by the footfall at the last Christmas festival it would be a challenge to supersede this, plus many people tend to go out of the town at weekends, especially in the festive season. Miss Ivy Events had previously advised that there would be more competition for the entertainment bookings over a weekend too.

Therefore, in order to secure the best performers and stall holders, and the services of Miss Ivy Events, it is **recommended** that Council instruct officers to commence planning the event for the 24th November 2023, including engaging Miss Ivy Events for a further year.

Julie Gilbert
Assistant Town Clerk