

REPORT STATEMENT

REPORT PURPOSE:

To consider the format of the 2022 main Christmas event in the town centre

AUTHOR: Events team

Background

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the main Christmas event followed the same format each year; brass band at midday around the tree, stage entertainment throughout the day followed by an official switch on time of 5pm.

In 2020, due to national covid-19 restrictions, we were unable to hold an event.

In 2021, we made the decision to plan an event which could go ahead even if social distancing measures were imposed again.

Current situation

Before the pandemic began, historically, Christmas light switch on events have always been relatively quiet throughout the day before becoming extremely busy for the hour of the switch on. As soon as the lights are turned on, people turn around and go home.

In 2021, we held our first Step into Christmas event. This did not have an official switch on time. Instead, there was entertainment throughout the day on the stage and in the street as well as fairground rides, followed by a Father Christmas parade. Feedback from traders was that the day was busier throughout the whole day rather than just for the hour of the switch on. The Christmas lights came on in the early afternoon so that they were able to be seen throughout the event. We also utilised tables and chairs to create an outdoor dining area around the tree. This was very popular and wouldn't be possible within a traditional 'switch on' event.

The added benefit of the format used in 2021 is that if covid cases rise in the winter as they did last year, social distancing is achievable.

One of the things the Officers have been looking at is trying to get a comparison of how the switch on events in 2019 and 2021 differed in terms of footfall, taking into account the fact the events were very different.

Figures for the footfall counter in Market Place (so counting people who pass it, rather than just enter the town) showed footfall to be 50k for both events (2019 being a 'normal' switch on with smaller events in the day and a big crowd at 5pm for switch on and fireworks, 2021 being the new style event)

Officers are keen to point out that 2021's non switch on celebrations drew as many people as previous years but that members should bear in mind that in 2019, the vast majority of people would have come in for a maximum of an hour for the switch on (therefore less dwell and spending time).

Decision required

We have planned to hold our major Christmas event on Saturday 26th November. This will be the first in our series of festive events which will include the advent trail, late night shopping and the Tree of Light.

The committee are asked to consider which format they would like the main Christmas event to consist of;

Option 1 – A full day packed with festive entertainment, Father Christmas Parade, stage and street entertainers and an outdoor dining area in Market Place around the Christmas tree. No official switch on time but the lights will come on in the afternoon for people to enjoy throughout the event.

Option 2 – A day of festive entertainment, stage performances, street performers Father Christmas parade and an official switch on time.

END OF REPORT