

Report Purpose:

To update members on the current situation with the Christmas lights provision

Author

Assistant Town Clerk

Background

Following electrical supply issues affecting the Christmas lights in 2024, a site visit was undertaken in June 2025 which identified a number of faults. These were reported to Cheshire East Council (CEC) Street Lighting. CEC subsequently advised that, due to the installation of new sealed street lighting units on Mill Street as part of the Macc on Foot project, the existing electrical supplies could no longer be used for festive lighting and an alternative power source would be required.

A further joint site meeting took place in July 2025 involving CEC Street Lighting, Highways and the Town Council's Christmas lights contractor to review the issues and identify potential solutions. Highways confirmed their commitment to supporting a resolution.

To minimise the risk of disruption, the Christmas lights were installed earlier than usual in October 2025. However, the Mill Street lights failed to operate as three key electricity supplies had been disconnected during the CEC lighting upgrade works. The Town Council had not been informed of these particular changes, resulting in significant disruption to the festive lighting scheme.

Despite repeated requests, repair works were rescheduled on three occasions and, by mid-November 2025, there was still no assurance that the electrical supplies would be reinstated. The Council's lighting contractor was ultimately able to identify an alternative supply, allowing the majority of the Mill Street lights to be restored. Contingency plans had been prepared in the event that the lights remained inoperable.

These events demonstrated that reliance on the existing street lighting infrastructure is no longer sustainable. Discussions with Highways identified the installation of dedicated feeder pillars as the preferred long-term solution to provide an independent electrical supply for the festive lighting scheme.

Progress to Date

A quotation for the feeder pillar project was requested from Highways in November 2025. Before costs could be provided, CEC required a detailed electrical design and risk assessment from Ringway Jacobs.

A meeting was held in January 2026 to agree the requirements, following which the design work was commissioned. Approval for the design costs was given by email due to project timescales and subsequently ratified by the Services Committee.

In March 2026, representatives from Ringway Jacobs, CEC Street Lighting and the Town Council's Christmas lights contractor carried out a detailed site survey of all

proposed feeder pillar locations. The completed electrical design was received in May 2026.

Current Position

Following receipt of the electrical design, Highways were immediately asked to provide a quotation for the installation works, as they previously advised that only they are authorised to undertake work on Cheshire East Council's electrical infrastructure.

Despite regular follow-up since early May, no quotation has yet been received. On 1 June 2026, Highways advised that the estimate would be available by the end of the week; however, after further enquiries, on 1 July 2026 they confirmed that significant delays had affected progress and they could not guarantee that the quotation would be available in time for the July Full Council meeting.

We have been previously advised that the anticipated installation cost is approximately £15,000. Highways have also advised that, following approval, there is a 6–8 week lead time before works can be programmed.

If the quotation is not available for approval until the September Full Council meeting, the lead time would push installation to late November, which is too late to support the 2026 Christmas lights installation programme.

The Town Council's Christmas lights contractor has advised that, provided no further changes have been made to the existing electrical infrastructure without notification, the current Christmas lights should operate as they did in 2025.

The proposed feeder pillar project is intended to future-proof the festive lighting scheme by providing a dedicated, independent and more reliable electrical supply for future years.

Update:

We have been told that the delays are due to a new provider having issues with gaining consent to carry out connections.

They have said that they don't usually allow other contractors to carry out connections but, on this occasion, if our contractor meets their criteria, then they would allow it if CEC then sign off on the work.

We do not recommend this approach as we are concerned that if we use our own contractor, it will cause issues further down the line with support with maintaining the supply.

The recommended approach is to wait for CEC to quote for the work. If it isn't in time for this Christmas, as long as no changes have been made, the Christmas lights should be fully operational.