

Notes of Christmas Lights Working Party held on Monday 16th March 2009

Present:

Cllr N Chard (Chairman), Cllr J Heron, Mr P Harmsworth, Mr J Grant

In Attendance:

Mr T Simpson

Apologies:

Mr P Chambers, Mr N Welsh, Mrs B Woodfield

1. Notes of Last Meeting

Agreed that the notes of the meeting held on 15 July 2008 be approved and signed as a correct record.

2. Financial Statement

(i) It was noted that the approved budget for 2008/09 was £8,400, of which slightly in excess of £3,200 had been spent. This left an uncommitted balance for the current year of just over £5,000. This underspend was due to the fact that it had not been possible to agree an extension to the scheme during the current year. Efforts had been made to encourage traders to take part in a scheme for the provision of Christmas trees with lights, but take up had been poor, and this had been partly responsible for the underspend.

(ii) It was noted that the Town Council had again included a sum of £8,400 in its budget for 2009/10. After taking account for committed expenditure, the balance in the 2009/10 budget would be about £5,000. The Town Clerk indicated, however, that in the absence of Christmas trees with lights on shops, it would be necessary to change at least some of the bulbs in the cross-street displays, as the blue and green did not show the appropriate lustre on their own. It was thought that some red, white and other bright colours would need to be introduced into each of the cross-street displays.

3. Proposals for 2009

The Working Party discussed a number of options on the way forward, taking account particularly of the current economic circumstances and the ability of traders to incur additional expenditure at the present time. It had been difficult to obtain any funding from traders in the better economic times and it would be more difficult to achieve a contribution from traders towards Christmas lights in the present circumstances.

It was noted that all expenditure was currently being met by the Town Council, although it received no benefit from the business rates. Therefore, all costs were being met from the Council Tax from residential properties. The Town Council had only taken over the financial burden after difficulties experienced by Chamber several years ago. It was felt that the Chamber did need to get traders more involved and the possibility of employing a Consultant to achieve

this was discussed. It was, however, felt that if fees were paid to a Consultant for one element of the Chamber's activities, there could be an expectation that fees would be available for other activities.

Whilst the Chamber was now trying to have a more prominent role within the town, it was felt that it might be a bit difficult to achieve any significant progress in relation to funding Christmas lights or the provision of trees on shops this year. In these circumstances, Cllr Heron suggested that the Town Council might wish to look at single displays at either the Memorial Gardens, the trees on the long stay car park or alternatively displays in places such as Dr Little Gardens or Jubilee Gardens.

The benefits of the different types of approach were discussed in some detail and it was eventually **agreed** that:-

- a) A decision on any changes to the displays in the town need to be made within the next 6-8 weeks if they are to be effective for the current year;
- b) The Chamber representatives would discuss with their Members the possibility of an improvement scheme this year and report back on the outcome at the next meeting;
- c) If the Chamber submits a viable scheme for this year, the Town Council would seek to offer some financial support for its implementation;
- d) The Chamber representatives would explain to their Members that artificial trees could be provided on shop fronts on the basis of phased payment over three years and that the Town Council would consider, without commitment, some financial assistance to the provision of such trees;
- e) In the event of artificial trees being provided with LED lights, on a single contract basis, the lights in the trees can be connected to the Council's electricity supplies and the Town Council would meet the cost of electricity consumed;
- f) At this stage no provision be made to employ a person to encourage traders to join any scheme; and
- g) The Town Clerk be requested to investigate and report back on the cost of replacing a proportion of the bulbs in the cross street displays.

4. Contractor Compliance

It was noted that the contractor had erected and dismantled the lights and, although there were some marginal difficulties with regard to certification, these were in the process of being resolved.

5. Date of Next Meeting

Agreed that the next meeting be held at Greenways at 5pm on 7th May 2009.