

MARCH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Christmas Lights Working Party Meeting held in The Skoulding Suite at March Town Hall on Monday 18 March 2024 at 7.45pm

Present:	Chairman	M Field
Councillors	G Christy M Purser	S Court
Members	R Burry A Stimpson	D Fortuna
	Town Clerk	S Lemmon

Apologies:

Apologies were received from R Kidger and R Phipps.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2024 were circulated and approved and were signed by the Mayor at the main meeting of March Town Council on 4 March 2024.

Committee Administration

The current Chair, Stuart Rayner confirmed his intention to retire as Chairman of the Committee (and joint chief steward). He would no longer attend meetings but would remain involved in the event on the night with setting-up and stewarding etc. G Christy proposed M Field as the new Chairman. This was seconded by A Stimpson and carried by a vote.

M Purser nominated G Christy to remain as Treasurer to the committee. This was seconded by M Field and carried by a vote of committee members.

The Clerk would remain as Secretary to the committee.

The committee thanked S Rayner for his many years of dedication, hard-work and involvement with the Christmas Lights.

M Field to contact R Burry to check whether she would remain as chief steward, either individually or to share the role.

Switch-on Event 2024

“Switch-on” date confirmed as Friday 29 November 2024.

TRRO / Road Closure / Traffic Management

The Clerk had instructed C Brown Support Services to apply for the TRRO and complete necessary road closure application forms for submission to Cambridgeshire County Council (M Field to be named as 24-hour event emergency contact).

Roads traditionally remain closed until 23:00.

C Brown has successfully supported the MAFF event for the past two years, and, as such, would provide the necessary expertise and reliability required for this year’s event.

Provisional plans and application received from C Brown on 25.1.24. **No further updates at this stage.**

Lighting / Permissions / Licenses / Compliance / Legal

1. Clerk to apply for CCC Street Lighting License. Emailed CCC on 17.1.24 explaining current situation in Broad Street and with the new lights. It is hoped that there would be joined-up working and a common-sense approach adopted in view of the project. Reply received on 24.1.24. Comms with Matt (FDC) and Shafir (CCC) on 30.1.24. **No further update at this stage.**
2. Clerk to contact Balfour Beatty to ascertain whether they will again supervise electrical works since this is the only practical way the Committee can legally access CCC street lighting columns.
Clerk emailed Brian Crabbe on 17.1.24. **Brian has diarised to quote later in the year as it was too early to process on their system. However, he highlighted the fact that the regeneration project would not be able to be used until it had been adopted by CCC. Clerk escalated this urgent issue with Matt Wright at FDC and Shafir at CCC.**
3. Clerk contacted UK Power Networks on 17.1.24 regarding the unmetered supply certificate and advised the dates of the switch-on, and off, and reduced illumination times as per 2023 (4:00-10:30).
(As members will recall, the UMS tariff increased by almost 50% from 1 September 2023).
The bill for 2023 has not yet been received.
Clerk chased Rob Smith at E-On on 16.1.24 for the UMS bill. He confirmed this would not be received until March.
2024 certificate received and copy forwarded to the energy supplier. **Invoice received on 11.3.24 for payment on 18.3.24.**

4. All cross-street wires and wall bolts were tested during 2022. Tests are due bi-annually, so they are required to be tested in 2024 by Glomac. Clerk contacted Peter at Glomac by email on 17.1.24. **Tel con with Peter on 12.3. Last tested on Sunday 8 August 2022. TDServices provided the cherry picker, A Stimson attended along with 2 Glomac employees who tested all 25 brackets in Broad Street and High Street. Peter advised these really need doing every year. Clerk to get availability for A Stimson and D Fortuna (and cherry picker) for Sundays in August and September 2024 to attend with Glomac once again.**
5. Clerk confirmed with FDC (Layna & Isabel) on 17.1.24 that the Market Place car park will be closed all day on 29.11.24 and that the Broad Street toilets will be open until 22:00.

Christmas Tree & Decorations

1. Clerk to order a Christmas tree from Elveden Farms. The tree last year was £3,636 (inclusive of VAT).
Last year's wonky tree had initially generated much toxicity on social media. However, our little tree became world-famous and put March on the map and gave the town a much-needed boost economically.
Could we source a wonky/imperfect tree again this year which would become a talking-point/local attraction?
Elveden emailed for a quote on 17.1.24. Quote received on 13.2.24 - 10% discount this year on last year's price which equates to £2,700.00 & VAT (£540.00) = £3,240.00. Accepted on 14.2.24.
2. D Fortuna (Doctor Tree) had provided the Committee with a quote for the installation and removal of the Christmas Tree for 2024 once again. The quotation is £600 plus VAT (as per 2023/4). The Clerk confirmed that she had now received the invoice from D Fortuna for installation and removal of the 2023 tree for payment. This was paid on 5 February.
3. D Fortuna would slice the trunk of the famous 2023 tree with a view to selling "a slice of local history" from either the FACT depot and/or from a stall at The St George's Fayre. **G Christy to enquire about getting a stall at the Fayre. Pricing and wording discussed.**
4. Works/improvements to Broad Street would not be completed until Autumn 2024. The Christmas tree will be located in Broad Street this year.
There will be new street lighting in town upon completion (funded by FDC). FDC representatives attended a meeting of March Town Council in January 2024 to present Atkins' designs for the Christmas lights and decorations in Broad Street.

Town Councillors resolved for Atkins to deliver the festive lights package (the lights will need to be ordered by mid-February for October delivery and installation).

The new lighting will all be attached to County Council infrastructure with all new, digital timer switches.

Owing to the new road layout, there will no longer be any catenary lights.

Many of our lights will be not be fit-for-purpose going forward and these can be re-purposed, sold or gifted, as appropriate (M Field, G Christy and D Fortuna to prepare an inventory of our light stock and identify all those that cannot be used in future).

5. Clerk to discuss with FDC/Atkins substitution of feature gnomes/gonks with snowmen if possible and source a copy of the concept design board to share with committee members.

Issue of vandalism of proposed ground-based festive features raised. Clerk emailed /spoke with M Wright (FDC) on 23.2.24.

31.1.24 Teams meeting between Christmas Lights Council Sub-Committee (J French, K French, N Spencer [apologies], S Lemmon and FDC and two Atkins representatives to discuss Christmas Lights package.

6. Discussion to be had as to whether the lighting traditionally placed on the shops in Broad Street would be used going forward. These are arguably not be in keeping with the aesthetic of the new lights and may well detract from them. Additionally, it would be far easier going forward not to erect the shop lighting so as to avoid issues with accessing the shops and unpredictable timer switches in the future. It was agreed that the Train and Boat set pieces designed for the bridge would continue to be used, however. **D Fortuna, G Christy and Chairman to conduct an audit of the existing decorations. Consider an alternative setting for the Nativity, historically located on the Collingwoods building.**

SAG / Event Management Plan / Health & Safety

1. SAG paperwork to be completed at the earliest opportunity (M Field). **The SAG team had been in touch already and a meeting was scheduled for September. It was raised that SAG had suggested hiring security for the event. Chairman to obtain quotes if this was an essential requirement.**
2. M Purser to complete the application for the Licence to Occupy the Market Place. **M Purser will chase this, this week.**
3. Assistant Clerk requested St John Ambulance attendance on 17.1.24.
4. Clerk to request local press advertise the event (which would also satisfy SAG requirement to notify residents of possible noise/nuisance etc)

5. What Three Words app to be used once again in the event of emergencies on the night.
6. The wristbands for lost children would continue and this was better advertised in 2023 (in part due to the 6pm “warm-up” by G Tustin). A banner had been purchased in 2023 advertising the location of Lost Children, First Aid and Information Point.
7. The information point (FACT van) would be located on the Market Place as per the 2023 event.
8. R Burry enquired as to whether it was possible to attend fire marshal training. G Christy to make enquiries with the fire service. **Chairman to contact to SAG to ask whether this training was *essential* for stewards.**

Finance / Fund-Raising / Collections / Sponsorship

1. March Town Council has committed £20,000 in its 2024/2025 budget for Christmas-related expenditure, representing a reduction of £7,500 p.a. More emphasis must be placed on fund-raising activities going forward.

In previous years a maximum of £7,500 has been paid out to helpers. All payments were subject to recipients signing a receipt acknowledging that they were responsible for their own tax and national insurance. (Dan’s received by Clerk on 5.2.24). **Alan and Nigel’s forms handed to Clerk on 18.3.24.**

2. Those erecting the lights again in 2024 are to review and sign a revised Method Statement and Risk Assessment (to be circulated shortly). Both documents emailed to M Field and G Christy on 23.1.24 for approval. **Comments received from G Christy. Chairman to confirm his approval.**
3. Kelly Riddell at Tesco ([REDACTED]) confirmed that the weekend of Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 November was available for a collection at the Hostmoor store.
4. G Christy to liaise with Lidl re the possibility of a collection/bag pack. Sainsbury had failed to respond to any requests in 2023 once again. **G Christy confirmed that Lidl’s were happy to support and would ask the army cadets whether they can attend.**
5. G Christy to purchase new card readers now that the Friends of March Christmas Lights bank account had been set up and Money Laundering Policy and Procedure for Identifying Donors had been drafted. Last year the bank decided at the eleventh hour that it required a Power of Attorney and this did not give the committee enough time to get the application process and authorised in time for the switch-on event. **G Christy confirmed a new card reader had been ordered from Lloyds Bank.**

6. Sponsorship opportunities should be explored for 2024. G Christy to lead, with all committee members tasked with exploring any opportunities for funding. **G Christy had identified a number of potential sponsors. It is going to be crucial to obtain sufficient sponsorship to cover the costs of the 2024 event.**
7. To boost fund-raising activities, a Just Giving page could be set up again this year and QR codes generated (M Field).
8. It is hoped that the Air Cadets would be able to support with the Tesco collection and stewarding duties at the switch-on once again in 2024. **G Christy to contact R Kidger.**
9. R Burry to liaise with Kelly Summersell to enquire whether the Army Cadets would be able to help this year. **R Burry advised that Kelly has now moved on, but she has a new contact for the March branch and will forward to the Chairman to progress.**

Stewards

1. Steward recruitment continues to be a priority for the event. More stewards must be sourced and available to help on the night to allow the event to run smoothly and safely. Facebook recruitment campaign to commence in the late Spring. M Field has taken over Facebook. Without additional stewards the switch-on event **cannot** happen.
2. All stewards will now be DBS checked. This process had commenced in 2023.
3. Stewards to wear high visibility clothing – vests, hats, sashes and lanyards. Waterproof torches had kindly been donated by Wrights Tools in 2023. **The illuminated beany hats had worked very well, allowing stewards to be easily identified.**
4. S Rayner advised that the trollies needed repairing and he would arrange this.
5. The Committee now have approximately 20 radios. These will be tested for efficacy in noisy locations in due course and must all be in full working order prior to the 2024 event. M Purser to explore new ear-piece options following reports of discomfort.
6. Skoulding Suite steward refreshments to be discussed in due course.

Entertainment / Fairground / Catering / Refreshments

1. Clerk contacted Lisa Hedges re fair rides and food stalls ([REDACTED]) on 17.1.24 and confirmed the date of the 2024 switch-on.
2. John Whitehead ([REDACTED]) confirmed by email on 17.1.24 that he will be available for MC duties at the event once again this year.
3. Duncan Partington ([REDACTED]). Duncan and his band are regrettably retiring after 11 years of entertaining at the event.
Clerk to approach Tom Harlock regarding availability. Emailed on 23.1.24. Quote received on 23.1.24. Decision to be taken by committee to authorise acceptance of the quote which is considerably over-budget on previous year's entertainment expenditure. **Clerk had confirmed booking with Tom 27.2.24 (band only, not the sound and light crew).**
4. K Nightingale of 20Twenty Productions to be contacted regarding its involvement in the event as per 2023 **(Chairman to liaise).**
5. The Clerk contacted Derek Rutter (March Lions) regarding provision of a Father Christmas and sleigh on 17.1.24. [Tentative yes]
6. New PPL/PRS licenses for Broad Street [and also West End Park] purchased by Clerk in December 2023. The licence has a start date of 1 November 2018 (and has no expiry date).
7. The Committee resolved that Father Christmas would switch on the lights and the Mayor would be invited to attend the event.
8. Scouts and Cadets to be offered a stall at the switch-on.

Communications / Advertising / Social Media

Facebook and social media communication usage/advertising must improve to raise awareness about the event and fund-raising activities, to share information and recruit/attract volunteers/stewards without which, the committee would not be able to continue to provide Christmas Lights or a switch-on event in the town. **Chairman to review and update the Facebook page and remove all external, non-Christmas light related posts/adverts.**

Miscellaneous

1. The Clerk contacted Lynn McGhee, Branch Manager, of Ridgeons/Huwsgray regarding the loan of steps for the trailer once again (662000). Lynn confirmed on 17.1.24 that we can rely on their continued support in 2024.
2. John Thomas (01945 450555) confirmed they would loan a trailer once again in 2024 for the Market Place.
3. The Christmas Shop Window competition remains suspended for the foreseeable future. The “Best Decorated House” competition is also discontinued due to lack of interest and rising cost of living/energy prices. It was agreed that the grotto should not be re-instated for 2024.
4. A generous donation of £376.41 had been received from Turner & Son from a collection at the funeral of the late Mick Beer. The Clerk had thanked wife Sue for this kind donation as well as their many years of hard work in connection with March Christmas lights.

Date of Next Meeting:

Monday 29 April 2024 at 7.30pm in The Skoulding Suite at March Town Hall.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8:45pm.

Councillor K French 8 April 2024
Mayor of March.