

MARCH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Christmas Lights Working Party Meeting held in The Skoulding Suite at March Town Hall on Monday 21 August 2023 at 7.45pm

Present:	Chairman	S Rayner	
	Councillors	G Christy S Court	M Purser M Field
	Members	A Stimpson D Fortuna N Spencer G Tustin	R Burry R Phipps I Gowler
		Town Clerk	S Lemmon

Apologies:

Apologies were received from Flt.Lt. R Kidger and Rob Phipps.

Minutes:

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2023 were circulated and approved.

Matters Arising, “Wash-up” of the 2022 Event and Actions for the 2023 Switch-On:

1. “Switch-on” date confirmed as Friday 24 November 2023.
2. The Clerk would complete the necessary road closure application forms for submission to Cambridgeshire County Council (S Rayner to be named as 24-hour event emergency contact). The roads traditionally remain closed until 10:00pm, although the fair had over-stayed in 2022. The Clerk to advise L Hedges that stalls and attractions must be moved away by 10:00pm. See point 4(a). Highway Event Application Form and Traffic Management Plan submitted by the Clerk on 24.1.23. Email from Highways Events received on, application reference CCC483682641. Highways will require Public Liability Insurance certificate and SAG progress. PLI insurance emailed to Martin Elwood at CCC on 14.3.23. *The Clerk emailed Highways on 28.6.23 to if progress had been made with the application. A reply on 29.6 advised that Highways were working with the Broad Street regeneration team. A further*

email of 4.7.23 stated that Broad Street was not available and perhaps a new application should be submitted. SL replied stating that we knew from the outset that Broad Street would not be utilised for the event, nor lights strung due to the absence of street furniture. However, the roads would still need to be closed as for any other year and therefore argued that a fresh application was unnecessary. Email from CCC on 6.7.23 – asking for a new plan and the EMP. There is an issue in that there is currently a TTRO (Temporary Traffic Regulation Order) in place for Broad Street and there cannot be a second covering the same area. CCC has agreed to work collaboratively to ensure that the project and switch-on can both work. The project only implements its TRRO at certain times. SL responded on 10.7.23. SL to chase again.

3. D Fortuna had provided the Committee with a quote for the installation and removal of the Christmas Tree for 2023 at a much-reduced cost to Ringways. The Clerk confirmed that she had received the invoice from Ringways for installation and removal of the 2022 tree for payment. Ringways invoice paid on 6.2.23.
4. The Clerk will contact the following interested parties regarding the 2023 event to confirm availability;
 - a) Lisa Hedges re fair rides and food stalls ([REDACTED]). Lisa will be happy to attend and understood the fairground would be on a smaller scale and in the High Street. Lisa will visit in August/September to assess the new siting. 10pm finish time also discussed. *MF to liaise with L Hedges. She only has the area from Iceland to Bevills Place to occupy this year.*
 - b) John Whitehead re MC duties ([REDACTED]). Confirmed on 25.1.23
 - c) Duncan Partington re entertainment ([REDACTED]). Duncan has some issues with his van MOT scheduled for 19 April. He cannot confirm the booking until after this date. Clerk contacted J Whitehead for details of alternative groups in the event that D Partington cannot commit; Tom Harlock would be delighted to provide a band for the switch-on. *D Partington confirmed to the Clerk that he would be delighted to perform at the "switch-on" in 2023.*
 - d) Ridgeons re loan of steps (662000). The contact is Lynn McGhee (branch manager, [REDACTED]). Confirmed by Lynn on 25.1.23
 - e) John Thomas re loan of lorry trailer (01945 450555). Confirmed by Ricky on 25.1.23
 - f) Lions Club re provision Father Christmas and sleigh including transport thereof. Derek Rutter confirmed on 25.1.23.
 - g) FDC to ensure that the Market Place car park will be closed all day and that the Broad Street toilets (if in situ) will be open until 10pm (Contracts: Isabel & Layna). Layna confirmed on 26.1.23
 - h) Order a Christmas tree from Elveden Farms. The tree this year was £3,636 (incl). Clerk emailed for quote on 25.1.23. Quote received on 30.1.23 and for £3,636 again. Quote accepted on 1.2.23. S Rayner enquired whether it would be possible to plant a tree rather than purchase one each year, to become more environmentally friendly. The practical viability of this was discussed and considered unlikely, especially in light of

recent works on the Market Place and the size of the tree required. *G Christy hopes to have secured a sponsor for the Christmas tree. Details to follow once confirmed.*

i) Ascertain whether Tesco and Lidl will allow bag-packing or collection. *No bag packing.* Clerk emailed Kelly Riddell at Tesco on 25.1.23. Kelly from Tesco emailed confirmation of 18-19 November to Clerk on 17.2.23. MP to contact Lidl. *MP confirmed that he had not been able to achieve this.* G Christy will contact Lidl himself re sponsorship opportunities. *Clerk to organise rota for Tesco collection. I Gowler confirmed that the cadets would assist this weekend, although cash collections were diminishing (see 12, below)*

j) Approach 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. Emailed Brian Crabbe on 25.1.23. They can, although they will need the column numbers to be used. *These are not yet known. SL emailed Ffion Daniel and Brian Crabbe on 10.7.23 for follow-up/clarification. SL to chase again.*

k) Assistant Clerk to book St John Ambulance. Online application submitted on 30.1.23. *Booking confirmed on 7.8.23.*

l) Clerk to apply for CCC Street Lighting License. Emailed Alan Hitch at CCC on 25.1.23. Online application submitted on 31.1.23. Application reference CCC482515944 approved on 9.2.23.

m) Clerk to contact UK Power Networks regarding the unmetered supply certificate and advised the dates of the switch-on, and off, and reduced illumination times as per 2022 (4:00-10:30). Bill requested on 25.1.23. Npower have requested the 25.11.22 – 06.01.23 bill to be raised. Chased again on 1.3.23. Received on 2.3.23 for payment on 6.3.23. *Letter from npower Business Solutions received on 2.8.23. The unmetered supply (UMS) tariff has increased by almost 50% as of 1 September. This will greatly increase the cost of lighting to MTC. Consider further reductions on the timings of the lights.*

n) Clerk emailed Richard Hircock at Ringway on 25.1.23 to ask for attendance at 2023 event for traffic management purposes. D Fortuna suggested that if Ringways did not respond, MLP could assist with the physical road closure (Tom Leader, 07799 599771). Clerk emailed R Hircock again on 14.3.23 for a response. Quote received on 20.2.23 in the sum of £1.890 (up £141.25 on 2022 price). Clerk to contact R Hircock re supervision responsibilities before accepting quote.

Chris and Natalie Moore of March-based CNM Highways Ltd were invited to the meeting on 21.8.23 following a successful meeting with representatives of the company, the Clerk and Cllr J French on 27.6.23 regarding the provision of traffic management for both the “switch-on” event and Remembrance parade. Unfortunately, CNM were unable to attend on 21.8.23 but will be contacted and invited to a future meeting. Ringways have been used previously. However, CNM can provide an enhanced service at a much-reduced cost to the committee. Additionally, they can also erect the lighting at a very competitive price. Given that amazing “volunteers” have hitherto been paid to help erect lights, it would perhaps be better to pay professionals going forward.

5. March Town Council has committed £27,750 in its 2023/2024 budget for Christmas-related expenditure.

6. 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. Payments made to 2022 volunteers (A Stimpson, N Bright & D Fortuna) on 6.2.23. Tax and Insurance certificates/declarations had been duly completed.
7. All cross-street wires and wall bolts were tested during 2022. Tests are due bi-annually, so will not need testing again until 2024.
8. S Lemmon received quotes for new PPL/PRS licenses on 9 November 2022 for Broad Street [and West End Park].

Discussion points:

1. Works/improvements to Broad Street would not be completed until Summer 2024. In future years, the Christmas tree would likely be located in Broad Street, although it would need to be located on the Market Place once again in 2023. There would be new street lighting in town upon completion and the Clerk would seek to ensure that FDC provided appropriate street furniture and digital timers. When positioned in Broad Street, there would be more space to enable the tree to be fenced off, thereby allowing lighting to be strung much lower than when situated on the Market Place.
2. SAG paperwork should be completed at the earliest opportunity *see 3 post
3. MP would set about completing the application for the Licence to Occupy the Market Place soonest. Permission letter received from Isabel on 21.2.23. Martin Field had previously volunteered to take on the role of Event Manager and complete SAG paperwork going forward. MP would contact M Field urgently to ask whether he is still happy to take this on. Email received from FDC SAG team on 10.2.23 and forwarded by Clerk to M Purser and S Rayner on 13.2.23. Completion of the SAG is the responsibility of the most senior Councillor on the Committee. MF confirmed he was not in a position to take on the role of Event Manager but would assist with the SAG and attend meetings along with MP. Licence to Occupy the Market Place submitted. MP confirmed that the Licence application had been received and approved. *MP to email copy of the licence to the Clerk.* MP and MF meeting on Friday 23 June to discuss/progress the SAG. *M Field had circulated a draft to committee members on 21.8.23. Can all committee members assist MF with the missing information by the end of the week so that the SAG can be completed as far as possible. L Hedges to provide details of stalls and Showmans Guild number. Information such as stewards would not be able to be completed until nearer the time.*
4. Rachel Burry and Stuart Rayner would remain in the joint roles of Head Steward (*See also 29, post*).

5. Steward recruitment continues to be a priority for the event. More hands-on-deck were needed to manage the event comfortably. M Purser had had positive discussions with members of the Kick Boxing Club who had expressed an interest in helping with stewarding duties. All stewards/volunteers to be DBS checked. Who will pay for the DBS checks? Standard and enhanced volunteer applications are free of charge. The core committee can proceed with their applications. N Spencer advised that one person should submit a list of applicants who are then contacted individually for data protection reasons. *G Christy and M Field to work together on the DBS process and applications.*
6. A Christmas Shop Window competition will be arranged in due course.
7. Decision to be made regarding the continuance of the “Best Decorated House” competition. Decision made to discontinue due to lack of interest and rising cost of living/energy prices.
8. It was agreed that the grotto should not be re-instated for 2023. *At a meeting of March Town Council on 3.7.23 Cllr French enquired whether this was a permanent decision. The Christmas Market/Fayre has a grotto run by Fenland Farmers. M Purser argued that demand for this had been low at the “switch-on” event, although a conversation could be had.*
9. The Committee now have approximately 19 radios. These will be tested for efficacy in noisy locations in due course and must all be in full working order prior to the 2023 event. Testing to be completed. MP confirmed that following the Summer Festival broken radios and headsets were disposed of, leaving 16 complete sets. *More holsters had been purchased.*
10. Refreshments to be discussed in due course. M Purser happy to organise once again. Whilst no longer a councillor, MP advised that Ruth Johnson was still happy to assist with refreshments.
11. Sponsorship opportunities should be explored for 2023. D Fortuna advised that the Bretts Transport had indicated that they wished to support us this year. D Fortuna would enquire whether they would be happy to sponsor the tree. D Fortuna advised on 24.1.23 that Simon Brett would make a donation of £500 to the Christmas Lights. Clerk spoke to Simon Brett on 25.1.23 and emailed with bank details ([REDACTED]). This has not been received, D Fortuna to chase. DF contacted S Brett on Friday 19 May. SL to contact S Brett with Council’s new bank details on Monday 22 May. The donation would be paid soonest. *This was actually received on 5.7.23 but had been paid into the wrong (old) bank account in error. DF to thank Mr Brett for his generosity.* G Christy enquired as to what other sponsorship opportunities had been explored; currently most monies were raised through the bag-pack at Tesco and fund-raising collections. MP tasked with applying to Tesco to take part in the Bags for Help and liaising with Lidl’s with regard to a bag pack/collection there. (see (i) (above)).

12. M Purser is researching the purchase of card reader machines for fund-raising purposes. They range from £19-£60 per unit. M Purser to research and source recommended units. G Christy will make enquiries regarding machines and the setting up of a dedicated [CIC] bank account. *G Christy confirmed that he had drawn up a committee constitution in order that a bank account could be set up. This will be circulated to all committee members.*
13. It is hoped that the Air Cadets would be able to support the collections and possible stewarding duties at the switch-on once again in 2023. Email received from Flt Lt R Kidger on 20.2 advising that the Cadets would continue to support the event with stewarding and collections etc. R Burry confirmed that the Army Cadets would also be happy to support and would contact them formally. R Burry contacted Kelly Summersell (March Army Cadets) by email on 1.3.23. Kelly will attend the 20 March meeting [Kelly did not attend the meeting]. Kelly was unable to attend the 22.5.23 meeting. RB to make contact with the army cadets *and arrange a meeting on a day other than a Monday.*
14. The Clerk to invite Karen Beckwith of March Rotary Club to the February meeting to discuss her idea for a “Festival of Light”. 27.1.23 Karen confirmed she will attend with fellow Rotarian, Graham Lockwood on 20.2.23. Karen, the incoming President of March Rotary Club presented her ideas on a Festival of Light to the Committee. Festivals of Light were popular in other market towns and help to bring communities together at Christmastime. Karen proposes to approach and work with local schools who will make lanterns (illuminated with battery operated nightlights) who could then form part of the switch-on ceremony. Issues surrounding the Broad Street redevelopment, SAG, EMP and supervision were discussed. It was proposed that the children would be supervised by parents and TA’s and numbers could be limited, if necessary, since it could not be guaranteed that enough stewards would be available to satisfy SAG. The idea that a children’s competition could be devised, with the winner turning on the Christmas lights was mooted. Another warmly welcomed idea was for the school children to sing carols at the event, possibly giving the children an early slot to sing prior to the start of the traditional entertainment on the Market Place. K Beckwith and G Lockwood would liaise with local schools to gauge interest to see if the concept of the festival could be taken forward. The Clerk emailed K Beckwith on 6.3.23 further to the meeting regarding supervision of children. No response received to date. The Clerk would try and contact K Beckwith once again, but we could perhaps assume at this stage that the interest from local schools was low? R Phipps still felt it would be nice to involve local school children to sing carols. MP advised that K Beckwith would be officially installed as President this month and was liaising with schools regarding the festival of lights. We need confirmation of plans soonest for the purposes of the SAG/EMP. *No further communications or contact from K Beckwith regarding the Festival of Light have been received.*
15. The wristbands idea for lost children was agreed as being a good one, although it was decided that the system should be better communicated and advertised with proper

signage. G Tustin kindly offered to provide an event “warm-up” from 6:00pm when many families with children would start to arrive so that he could explain the lost child procedures as well as helping to build up the event to the actual switch-on. Facebook can be used to provide information about the wristbands and lost children procedures etc. R Burry enquired whether we could purchase a big banner to highlight the location the Information Point/Lost Children Station. G Christy had recently purchased some feather flag banners and will check out costings. *G Christy confirmed that a banner would be approximately £70.00. Banner to be designed to include Lost Children, First Aid and Information Point.*

16. R Burry suggested that stewards wear high visibility hats as well as jackets to distinguish them from members of the public and others wearing high visibility clothing. M Purser had purchased a selection of high vis hats, sashes and lanyards.
17. All vehicles to be escorted whilst the road closure is in place. Conversation to be had with the Fire Service in this matter, as well as a few other local businesses who had failed to observe the closure. Fire vehicles do need access in the event of an emergency!
18. Consider offering the Scouts and Cadets a stall at the switch-on. It seemed unlikely that the Watermans Club would host a stall in future, but would be asked, of course. R Burry to offer the Cadets a stall. Location cannot yet be determined. *It is unclear whether the Town Bridge can be utilised at this stage.*
19. With the majority of Broad Street unavailable this year, consideration was given to having more food stalls and attractions in the High Street towards Iceland. The Clerk to discuss this with L Hedges who provides the fun fair, which would, by definition, need to be on a smaller scale in 2023, hopefully returning to normal in 2024. Confirmed with Lisa on 25.1.23. Lisa would carry out a site visit later on in the year to assess the options. The SAG could then be updated accordingly.
20. Facebook and social media communication must improve to raise awareness about the event and share information and potentially attract volunteers/stewards. R Phipps would set up a Facebook page. Live streaming the switch-on event was discussed and using a drone to get some good advertising footage (once the Broad Street works were completed in 2024) for marketing purposes.
21. The Committee to decide on a suitable person to switch on the lights in 2023 *see 14 (above). The Committee were in favour of Father Christmas switching on the lights to support the Mayor, who had agreed to be in attendance. *S Lemmon would contact Cllr K French who had taken over from Cllr Purser as Mayor of March for the remainder of the 2023/2024 mayoral term to check her availability for the switch-on. Attendance confirmed on 21.8.23.*
22. The Clerk thanked the Committee for all of their hard work in challenging circumstances. All the lights had now been removed and packed away.

23. A Stimpson enquired whether there would still be suitable access to the Market Place. The Clerk confirmed this remains unchanged and there will be no issues so long as the trailer used is of the same size as in previous years.
24. A Stimpson advised that there were issues with the lamppost nearest to Iceland and that adjacent to the former Georges public house. The timers do not work. It is believed that these lampposts are owned by FDC and this needs to be investigated and remedied. SL emailed Garry Edwards at FDC on 31.5.23 to ascertain ownership of the lampposts. They do belong to FDC who will assess the operation of the solar timers and replace as necessary. Cost to be borne by March Town Council. *SL chased Garry & Lisa at FDC for a response on 10.7.23. The Assets teams at FDC advised that they'd received an update from CTL who had attended on 20.6.23 and found all lights to be functioning. SL questioned this and advised A Simpson to check again when possible. Garry Edwards at FDC promised that if there were continuing issues, they would get CTL back out on site. On 2.8.23 G Edwards clarified that the contractor had fitted commando sockets to the top of the columns and solar timers into the base compartment for Christmas light use. We have permission from FDC to check again. A Stimpson to re-check.*
25. K Nightingale of 20Twenty Productions was invited to the meeting of 19.6.23 to discuss involvement in the switch-on event. Whilst it was decided that 20Twenty's Winter Wonderland could not be relocated from the library to the Skoulding Suite due to the venue being required by the committee as the switch-on control centre and base for stewards and first aid etcetera, 20Twenty would like to be involved at the beginning of the evening (6-7pm during G Tustin's warm-up) to sing some Christmas songs or production numbers.
26. Consideration was given in future years to the possibility of combining the switch-on event with the Christmas Market. This would arguably enhance both events and reduce costs. The logistical viability could be explored more fully at a future date. *At a meeting of March Town Council on 3.7.23 Cllr J French advised that this had been explored in previous years but was not considered safe or practicable because of the movement of the market traders. Additionally, shops would be unlikely to open on a Sunday to allow access to the timer switches. G Tustin noted that based on the results of a facebook "poll" respondents were mostly in favour of keeping the events separate in any event.*
27. N Spencer advised that the "Purple Guide" be used to assist with the SAG/EMP. The Guide covers every element of an event to be considered and covers lost children as well as risk assessments. He will circulate a link to the free-to-download, web-friendly version. *Link emailed on 20.6.23.*
28. *S Lemmon advised that Matt Wright from FDC would be coming to the next meeting to discuss designs for the new lights in Broad Street.*

29. *S Rayner will remain Chairman of the committee for now, but will be stepping down shortly from this role.*

Dates of Next Meeting:

Monday 18 September 2023 at 7.45pm in The Skoulding Suite at March Town Hall.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8:55pm.

Councillor K French 4 September 2023
Mayor of March.