

Partnership Committee

Date: 12 February 2015

Title: Christmas Festival Weekend

Purpose of the Report: Event Report

Contact Officer: Gill Miller

1. RECOMMENDATION

1.1 To note the report.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 This three day event was organised jointly by LLTC and LBFIRST. Following initial discussions in April to determine roles and responsibilities, 11 working group meetings took place with representatives from both parties attending.

2.2 Over the three days the event incorporated the firework display launching the street lights and the event itself which included market stalls, street entertainment and a food court operating over all three days.

2.3 The working group agreed as a trial for this year's event, to reduce the number of fun fair rides in the High Street but still offer those rides which would enhance the traditional nature of the festive season, with a family friendly focus. It was agreed that additional family /activities rides for the Friday evening would be accommodated in North Street.

3. CHRISTMAS MARKET

3.1 Allocation of 35 pre-erected stalls and 30 traders own stalls were made available for traders on Friday and Sunday. The total number of stalls that attended was 35 on Friday and 25 stalls on Sunday.

3.2 A variety of goods to fit the "Gift" criteria were on sale on both days. Feedback from traders suggested that business was much better on the Friday due to the longer day and the high number of visitors who attended the evening lights switch on and firework display.

- 3.3 The European Market which was expected to attend over a four day period did not turn up which was a big disappointment. In response to this, a letter of complaint has been sent to the organiser.

4. FOOD COURT

- 4.1 Marquee cover and lighting was hired and installed in Church Square. 16 spaces were provided with 10 traders operating each day in the food court over the weekend offering a variety of food choices. Food vendors were happy that they had space between each trader otherwise it would have been very cramped if all 16 spaces were occupied. Furniture was hired to provide a seating area for diners and this appeared to be well received.

5. FRIDAY & SWITCH ON OF THE LIGHTS

- 5.1 Estimates put the number of visitors in the High Street to approximately 4000 who packed the full length of the High Street as far down as the bus station area. Stewards were located at exit points from the High Street and due to the density of the crowd, worked in pairs throughout the evening. Each pair carried a two way radio communications and all wearing hi-visibility orange vests.
- 5.2 Council Officers and LB First members worked throughout the day and were supported by Councillors and additional volunteers to oversee the evening's activities.
- 5.3 As in previous years, the firework display was launched from the top of the multi story car park. Alternative sites were considered but deemed not suitable for Health & Safety reasons. Continuing use of the car park is dependant on agreement with CBC.

6. ENTERTAINMENT & ATTRACTIONS

- 6.1 A fully equipped stage was hired for the three days, with it comes equipment which can cater for the solo singer to a choir to a DJ or 4 piece band and provides an opportunity for a diverse programme of music and entertainment.
- 6.2 As a trial for this year, it was agreed that a Carousel, Big Wheel and four children's rides would be located in the High Street over the weekend and additional family rides in North Street for Friday only. Both areas were reported to be extremely busy on the Friday but removal of some of the more traditional rides over the weekend proved to be a disappointment for some visitors.

7. PUBLICITY & PROGRAMME

- 7.1 Following a decision not to create flyers and a programme, a successful quotation for a publication of the event guide was awarded to Mudcreative and SLB Directory who used their combined local business contacts and extensive magazine design experience to produce a guide which would provide a powerful one stop point of reference for the event.
- 7.2 30,000 copies were produced with 23,400 delivered door to door throughout the town and surrounding villages with the remainder being distributed to local shops, churches, town centre businesses and library. The guide was totally funded by advertising.
- 7.3 The guide was widely received though feedback indicates that it didn't reach all residents. A short evaluation form was included in the guide but disappointingly, the Town Council only received 8 completed forms in one of the two "Post boxes" made available over the weekend. Further feedback received verbally can be read at the end of this report.

8. BUDGET

- 8.1 Event Budget: **£12,000**
- Expenditure: **£15,094**
- Income Total: **£4,959**
- Profit **£1,959**
- Stewarding costs: **£4,524**

9. STEWARDING

- 9.1 This three day event demands a high number of stewards to ensure the health & safety of all attending as well as ensuring the event is successful. The nature of the event and weather conditions impacts greatly on how long stewards can work for and what duties can be done. Majority of the manual handling roles (set up, clear away and manning road closure barriers) are covered by LLTC staff with volunteers taking on a more customer service role.
- 9.2 19 Council Officers worked the weekend supported by 14 volunteers. Additional stewarding was required and recruited from a local security company who stayed on site over night to ensure the security of the stage equipment, food court and stalls. Costs have been covered by the Staff overtime budget (503) 4408.

10. SUMMARY

- 10.1 The working group meetings worked well and once responsibilities and roles were established, preparation and plans moved forward.
- 10.2 Currently, stewarding of events is dependant on Council staff and volunteers being available and willing to work weekends. It is proving increasingly difficult to ensure a guaranteed number of stewards will be available on the day, therefore, Officers are looking into the use of an events services company to provide experienced stewards for Council run events. Consideration will also be given to forming an agreement with the appropriate company, to provide stewarding for all events which would ensure continuity, familiarity and supply.
- 10.3 With the European Market cancelling its visit at the last minute, this left areas of empty space within the High Street. This is a large area to fill and Officers were disappointed at the amount of un-used space that could have been utilised. Serious consideration should be given to ensure the attendance of traders/entertainers/activities are guaranteed especially for events taking place in the High Street, to avoid further disappoint for organisers and visitors.
- 10.4 Several local groups and organisations who time their own events to take place over this same weekend to catch the crowds indicated that they would like to be more incorporated in this event. This suggests that there is a great deal of support for this weekend event through participation and sponsorship. This suggests that consideration should be given to early round the table discussions with all parties who are interested to determine if this would enhance the quality of the event. This will prevent last minute arrangements being made to deal with safety issues.

11. VISITOR EVALUATION

The following feedback was received at the Information Point over the weekend.

Resident.....Stalls were laid out much better this year. If you wanted to walk up the pavement you could, if you wanted to walk through the High Street you could!

Gentleman recently moved to LB..... very impressed with events, went to Canal Festival and had a great time. Impressed with what LLTC do for the area.

Resident.....very disappointed with Saturday, no Christmas Market nor Christmas activities on stage.

Families.....Reindeer Rodeo & "snow globe" excellent entertainment for kids and great that they were either cheap or free.

Resident..... Thank you to the Town Council – really working hard on events- fireworks best ever – beach & Splash & Play also great.

Senior resident: - This is the best town around because the Town Council does so much.

Visitor.....Music on stage not Christmassy – no Christmas atmosphere

Complaints received about the advertised European Market & Birds of Prey display not turning up.

Residents.....couldn't hear or see anything that was happening on stage, didn't even know who had switched on the lights.

Report Author: Gill Miller, Town & Community Promotions Manager

E-mail: Gill.Miller@leightonlinlade-tc.gov.uk