

Report to: Events and Town Centre
Management Committee



Report Ref: E1922
Meeting Date: 27th April 2020
Agenda Item: 11b
Prepared By: Events Officer

Subject: Christmas Events 2020

1.0 BACKGROUND

The 2020 Christmas events will be organised and operate in the same manner as previous years, with the Christmas Weekend taking place on Saturday 28th and Sunday 29th November 2020. The line-up of Christmas events will include the Christmas Markets, Christmas Lights Switch On, Parade and Crib Service, and this year will also feature the Lantern Parade as it returns for its bi-annual feature.

2.0 CHRISTMAS MARKET

2.1 PARK AND RIDE

The Park and Ride shuttle service was implemented for the second year at the 2019 Christmas Markets and was extremely well received. Usage appeared to be increased in the second year as volunteers noted more users of the service and more cars parked in the car park, and officers on duty at the event noted buses were fuller throughout the weekend. Clicker counters will be provided to volunteers to obtain data of number of users by either counting the number of users of the shuttle service or counting the number of cars parked in the car park intermittently throughout each day. It is intended the Park and Ride service will be implemented for the 2020 Christmas Markets and the Events Officer has already been in contact with Go Goodwins who provide the shuttle buses and drivers to make arrangements for this years' service at the same costings as the previous two years at £980.

2.2 FUNFAIR

The funfair returned to the Christmas Market last year following the agreement of the committee to re-implement it for the 2019 event. Due to the new costings put in place by Cheshire East Council for carrying out health and safety checks for funfairs and charges for funfairs taking place on their land, it was uncertain for several months whether the funfair would take place. The fees were eventually reduced for both John Collins Funfairs and the Town Council meaning the funfair was able to proceed. The funfair providers reported moderate use of the attractions, mainly in peak periods. Usage of the funfair attractions may have been decreased due to the extremely low temperatures during the weekend.

No signage was put in place by the funfair to advertise their presence and many visitors commented that they did not even know the funfair was in attendance. Some feedback received suggests that

many do not feel the funfair adds much to the event and that a more festive attraction may be more appropriate.

The funfair brought in £1,100 in income to recuperate some of the costs of the event, however Cheshire East Council has indicated (but not invoiced) that it will charge the council £500 for use of the car park. The attendance of the funfair means closing Princess Street car park; whilst some market traders noted this decreases the amount of available parking for traders close to the market site, it is noted that many traders who used the car park in 2018 on the Saturday did not on the Sunday due to the amount of time it takes to leave the market (as they cannot leave until the street has been fully cleared of gazebos, which can take 2-3 hours).

Given the underwhelming feedback regarding the funfair's attendance the committee should consider whether the funfair should be invited to attend the 2020 event.

2.3 ONE-WAY WALKING SYSTEM

The one-way walking system was re-implemented for a second time at the 2019 event and large A1 signage was placed at ends of the market site to encourage visitors to walk in a clockwise direction around the market to ease congestion and promote an easier flow of foot traffic around the site. This signage replaced the smaller signs displayed at the event in 2018 which many reported were not visible enough.

Despite a lot of promotion to implement the one-way system and the new large signage, there was still low use of the one-way system. Officers have discussed options for signage that could be displayed higher up to be more visible including banners and signs attached to the traders' gazebos, as well as volunteers who can promote the one-way system during the event. Officers note that it will take some time for the new system to be widely used amongst returning visitors. The Events Officer will explore costings of different options and officers will create a plan for better implementing the one-way system for the 2020 event.

2.4 SANTA'S GROTTTO

The wooden shed that previously housed our Santa's Grotto had rotted and had to be disposed of after the 2019 event, as such a new structure will need be required to house the grotto this year. The committee could opt for a hire of a prop grotto for the event or purchase another structure for longer term use. The best costs for the two options that have been sourced by the Events Officer are as follows:

2.4.1 Option A - Purchase

A 7ft x 7ft shed with double opening doors at a total cost of £463.99 to purchase. The previous shed was purchased for a cost of £450, so this is only a small increase. Please see Appendix A for a photo of the proposed shed. The shed would be decorated inside and outside by volunteers as it has been previously. Though this shed is quite different than the previous shed style wise, the design is quite traditional and would look festive once decorated.

The previous shed lasted for three years; assuming this shed lasted for the same timescale, the cost split across three years is £154.66. A contractor is paid a fee of around £200 to erect and dismantle the grotto each year which should be factored in with the cost.

Cost per year:	£354.66
Cost over three years:	£1,036.99

The primary issue affecting the life of the structure is its storage as it has to be stored dismantled at the depot on Longridge; the old grotto was stored under a tarpaulin to protect it from the elements and if this option is progressed this would be regularly inspected throughout the year to seek to prolong its life.

2.4.2 Option B - Hire

A grotto could also be hired each year from contractors who would deliver, install and dismantle the grotto. The provider would also decorate the grotto for an additional fee or some decorations could be placed inside by volunteers. Please see Appendix A for a photo of the proposed hire option. The hired grotto would be inflatable, 12ft x 7ft and suitable for use in up to 23mph wind speeds. The cost of hire per weekend for a basic grotto (structure only, limited outside decoration) is £300. This fee includes delivery, set-up and removal of the grotto each day.

Cost per year:	£300
Cost over three years:	£900

2.5 SILK MILL STREET STALLS

Feedback over the last couple of years has suggested that stalls further down Silk Mill Street are significantly less successful than stalls further toward the top of Silk Mill Street and stalls located on Princess Street. To try and combat this in 2019, the layout for Silk Mill Street stalls was kept the same on both days instead of increasing the number of stalls on the street on Sunday which was how the market previously operated. Though this did increase visibility of all stalls, feedback from stalls located further down the street still suggested that it was not as successful for them when they have traded at the market in other locations.

Discussions that took place amongst officers following the 2019 event included whether to further limit the number of stalls on Silk Mill Street to only stretch as far as facing just opposite the Market Hall against the bricked wall of the opposite building; these stalls are all visible from the junction with Princess Street and are the most successful stalls on Silk Mill Street each year. This would decrease the number of stalls on the street by 8 which would decrease the income gained; assuming all 8 stalls were weekend traders and charged a fee of £120 each, the income lost would total £960. Whilst this amount is significant, the market exceeded budget income in 2019 and the loss of this would not affect the overall surplus of the event and there would be a minor reduction in cost through a reduced number of gazebos being hired. Feedback suggests that these stalls are overall detrimental to the event and have discouraged traders from re-applying to trade which on a more long term basis could be more financially detrimental; some traders have cancelled stalls at the market upon finding out they were allocated a stall on Silk Mill Street.

An attraction of some sort could be sourced to be placed at the end of the limited number of stalls to help encourage footfall down Silk Mill Street to replace the stalls that would be taken away. Options for an attraction that could bring in a source of income for the event could be explored.

3.0 SANTA PARADE

3.1 PROPOSAL

It is proposed that the Santa Parade format remains for the most part as it was formed for the 2019 parade. Following feedback that the LED light performers and Christmas characters were the most popular features of the parade, the performers would be re-booked for the parade and an on-stage 10-minute performance before or after the parade. Actors from Knutsford Little Theatre have offered their services for a second year to dress up as the Christmas characters.

A more suitable vehicle to transport Santa has been identified for this year (see Appendix B) - a fully functional replica fire engine. The vehicle is suitable for uphill use to travel the length of the parade route and the provider can offer a day rate of £350 which can include some walkabout magic and balloons during the afternoon prior to the parade. Use of the vehicle would negate the need to hire a sleigh to be placed into a trailer and the red colouring of the vehicle mimics the red colour of Santa's Sleigh and tinsel and other festive decorations could be added.

There is also an option of using the vehicle for rides with Santa before or after the parade. An option to have sponsor boards attached to the vehicle is available, meaning the vehicle can be sponsored and the company's branding can be displayed on the vehicle during the parade. Local company Total Vehicle Leasing sponsored the parade in 2019 by covering the cost of the Bentley and have been contacted again to see if they are interested in sponsoring the parade in this new format. Other sponsor options can be explored including a sponsor for the whole parade at a cost of £500 or other sponsors for the vehicle if the previous sponsor is not interested.

Feedback from the 2019 parade suggests more music is required, so the City of Chester Brass Band have been booked to provide brass music at the front of the parade as per previous years; a local community choir can be recruited to follow the band and sing along to the carols. The band will also provide music for this year's Lantern Parade. A speaker playing Christmas music will be located at the rear of the parade to provide music throughout as the parade progresses.

Participants from a local primary school can join the parade; children from Bexton Primary School joined the parade in 2019, the opportunity would be offered to another Knutsford primary school to offer fair opportunities for inclusion.

Other community groups could be offered the chance to join the parade as the feedback suggested, these groups could have a decorative theme to add some visual impact to the parade.

Feedback suggested other performers could be added to the parade, no options for this have currently been explored but could include some form of dancing from a local troupe or musical performances.

3.2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications for the 2020 Santa Parade are as follows:

LED Light Performers:	£600
Fire Engine Vehicle:	£350
Balloons for school children:	£37.80
City of Chester Brass Band:	£275
 Total cost:	 £1,262.80 (less £500 sponsorship = £762.80)

The total cost of the 2019 Santa Parade was £1,217.80. The cost of the reindeer when hired for previous Reindeer Parades was £2,225. Additional costs for this year's parade could include purchase of additional costumes for Christmas characters if desired and additional performers if applicable.

4.0 LANTERN PARADE AND CRIB SERVICE

3.1 BACKGROUND

The Lantern Parade and Crib Service traditionally take place the Saturday after the Christmas Markets, the date for which will be Saturday 5th December for the 2020 events. The two events though separate were traditionally linked, with the parade setting off from Moorside or the Barncroft and proceeding onto King Street, Minshull Street, to Princess Street via Canute Place and finally ending outside the Lost and Found where the Crib Service takes place.

In December 2018, as part of setting the 2019/20 budget, the committee resolved that the event become a bi-annual event. As such no event took place in 2019 and the Crib Service was held as a lone event. The parade is now due to return in 2020.

3.2 LANTERN PARADE

The Lantern Parade was introduced in 2014 as a community parade where families can join the parade with handmade lanterns. Two workshops are held approx. two weeks prior to the parade where around 50 children can craft lanterns to walk with in the parade. Lanterns are collected on the day of the parade and families can join the parade with lanterns made in previous years or with their own lanterns. Organisations such as the Scouts have previously held their own workshops to produce lanterns for the parade. Large feature lanterns are hired and a brass band leads the parade as it proceeds through the town centre. King Street, Minshull Street, Canute Place and Princess Street are closed on a rolling road closure for the parade.

The parade has previously started behind the Moor or on the Barncroft when the St Cross Christmas Tree Festival was held bi-annually to encourage parade participants to attend the festival before the parade. The main part of the parade always assembled on Church Walk beside the Moor and it is proposed that the event start always start here noting that the previous route from the Barncroft is extremely dark and liable to be slippery during wet weather. The parade departs at 5pm.

There were some comments that the parade was missed in 2019 and whether it could be re-instated as an annual event given that the Crib Service still remains an annual event.

3.3 CRIB SERVICE

The Crib Service will be moved back to its previous start time after the parade at approximately 5.45pm to follow after the Lantern Parade. It is suggested that in years when the parade does not take place that the Crib Service takes place at 4pm as it did in 2019, as this was a more appropriate start time without the parade to precede the service.

The small stretch of Princess Street outside the Lost and Found is closed from around 3-7pm on a parade year and 2-6pm on a non-parade year to allow the staging to be set-up for the Crib Service and for the service to safely take place. This stretch remains closed after the other roads have re-opened after the procession of the Lantern Parade arrives.

3.4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

From 2015-2019 the Town Council worked with a company called Handmade Parade on the Lantern Parade. The company run the two lantern making workshops two weeks prior to the parade, provide the feature lanterns for the parade and staff to man the feature lanterns and assist with the parade. The Events Officer has spoken to several lantern companies and obtained prices for running the parade and the price for Handmade Parade has come back as the most competitive at £2,400 for the workshops and parade, including three staff for the parade. Booking this provider also comes with the advantage of previous knowledge of how the parade works and would make for the smoothest transition back into holding this event.

The City of Chester Brass Band have been booked for both the Santa Parade and Lantern Parade at a package deal price of £550 and the band will also lead the congregation in carols for the Crib Service and as such the cost of the band can be split across both budgets.

The total cost implications for this year's Lantern Parade have not yet been determined as the traffic management quotes have not yet been received. The costs currently known are Handmade Parade (£2,400) and City of Chester Brass Band (£275). The costs for the Crib Service are to be determined but it is anticipated that all elements of the Christmas Events can be organised within the budget provided.

5.0 FUTURE CHRISTMAS DATES

At the meeting of the committee on 18th February 2019, dates for next year's Christmas Weekend were set as Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th November 2021. The Lantern Parade would return in 2022 unless re-instated as an annual feature.

6.0 DECISIONS REQUIRED

- 6.1 It is recommended that the committee approves the outlined plan and delegates authority to officers to organise the same.
- 6.2 The Committee should consider if they wish for the funfair to return to the market.
- 6.3 The Committee should consider if they wish for the Santa Parade to continue in the proposed format and delegate authority to officers to organise the same.
- 6.4 The Committee should consider if they wish for the Lantern Parade to remain a bi-annual event or whether to re-instate it as an annual event.

APPENDIX A

Santa's Grotto Purchase Option – 7ft x 7ft Shed



Santa's Grotto Hire Option – 12ft x 7ft Inflatable Grotto



APPENDIX B

Suggested vehicle for the 2020 Santa Parade

