

REPORT TO EVENTS COMMITTEE

RECENT AND UPCOMING EVENTS JANUARY 2025

Report Reference E-24-08
Meeting Date 6th January 2025
Agenda Item 6
Prepared by Events Manager / Civic Events Officer / Town Clerk



1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since the previous committee meeting (September 2024) the following events have taken place:

- Pumpkin Path – 31st October
- Remembrance Sunday – 10th November
- Christmas Market Weekend – 30th November/1st December
- Crib Service – 7th December

2.0 REVIEW OF RECENT EVENTS

2.1 PUMPKIN PATH

The Pumpkin Path was steadily busy from the start of the event with good numbers attending. Despite the high numbers, there were fewer entries to the trail competition (only 100). A number of parents reported to volunteers that they were not as interested in the trail element but attended for the atmosphere and children being able to trick or treat the businesses. The format of the trail will be reviewed for the 2025 event.

There were some issues with advance notice signage for the road closures which were not installed in time. To resolve this parking spaces were coned off from 2pm, however there were still some cars left in parking bays when the event started.

The more child friendly characters and performers went down well and were appreciated by those with small children. Fuchsia Dance and Knutsford Beats both drew good crowds. The committee previously requested additional entertainment be looked at for 2025 and this has been noted for event planning. For 2025 it is intended to continue with the same, more family friendly paid actors.

One child went missing on the evening. This was reported to Cheshire Police and, although the child was located whilst the Events Manager was on the phone to the police, they still attended to complete a welfare check. There are no further actions arising from this and following a debrief within the team we were satisfied that all procedures in place were effective.

Wallwood was quieter than usual, it is more detached from the rest of the trail and there is a notable gap between the end of activity and the wood. Options being explored for 2025 include hosting a pumpkin in Wallwood to draw visitors, or move the Wallwood elements to the grounds of St John's Church which is in the heart of the event.

The improved volunteer briefing, information and communications systems worked well. And Knutsford Hosts particularly commented that the event felt like a team effort. This will be repeated for 2025.

Other improvements for 2025 will include looking at additional signage, securing more sponsorship to fund the provision of sweets (as businesses continue to run out of these quickly) and improved traffic flow management for Moorside.

2.2 REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

The event went very well, and the Events Manager commends the Civic Events Officer for the excellent organisation and pre-planning and Knutsford Rotary Club for their management of the road closures. Those in attendance reported that it was the best attended parade for several years, this is thought to be due to both the good weather and the change in parade format.

This year was the first year in which the church service was held before the parade with the parade heading straight to the Centennial War Memorial for the main act of remembrance. The timings of the start of the service would be adjusted for 2025 to reduce the gap between the arrival of the parade and start of the service. There were some adverse comments about the laying of a white wreath.

It was noted that there were a number of attendees stood outside the library gardens and on the road. Measures will be implemented for 2025 to encourage crowds into the garden area and assessing what can be done to ensure the safety of those who do stand outside the garden.

There was no negative feedback about stopping the provision of refreshments at the end of the day. There was no formal negative feedback from stakeholders about the change to the order of the day (holding the service before the parade) however a member has requested that this is considered by Full Council and as such it will be an item on the next Full Council agenda for consideration.

2.3 CHRISTMAS WEEKEND

Overall, the weekend was a success. We delivered on the objectives for the weekend and stayed within budget. Reports were that it was the busiest people had seen it, and we received information from stall holders at the event and post event that they had experienced record sales figures.

Some issues raised post event included – difficulty with mobile phone signal which caused issues throughout the day for traders using card machines. Silk Mill Street was reported to have a lower footfall however the grotto, which is on Silk Mill Street reported a busier year than last.

There was mixed feedback from local businesses, some experienced higher numbers in their stores and some reported good sales days. There were some who stated they lost custom and many of the King Street businesses would like to see the market having some presence on King Street. Despite being made aware that stalls were available to them only two local businesses took advantage of this and had a stall on the market. Two local hospitality venues reported record sales to match May Day. Some businesses also suggested that the Christmas Lights should be switched on sooner, so that the town benefits from the festive displays for longer.

There was one incident which required the assistance of the medical team on site. The gentleman was treated appropriately and was taken to hospital in an ambulance. The report from the medical team was that the fall was unrelated to the market.

Increased numbers come with a need to update the risk assessment and plans for safety in the respect of the crowd. This has been raised within the team and through the fire service who visited the event on the Saturday, it will also consider updated anti-terrorism best practice.

There was some negative feedback about the Santa Parade, a number of people arrived for the parade ahead of the published start time and there was a long period of time before the parade passed. King Street was very busy and the road closure did not commence until the parade departed, meaning the road was both open and busy with pedestrians.

Building on the feedback, there are two proposals for the 2025 event for which committee direction is sought. Under both options, it is recommended that the committee recommends an amendment to the draft budget to reflect some increased costs.

2.3.1 OPTION 1 – NO CHANGE

The format of the Knutsford Christmas Market and Light Switch On to remain the same.

There are some changes that would be made, and it is recommended that the committee agrees a minor amendment to the draft budget for the event to reflect this. This includes:

- Provision of onsite security for the duration of the event
- Improved anti-vehicle protection to Canute Place and Princess Street
- Increasing the spacing within the market to reduce pinch points and created more passing gaps.
- Reattempting to implement a one-way system with suitable marshalling and signage

The staffing of the event will be reviewed and additional marshals would be needed throughout the day to support crowd control. This may be delivered through an events volunteering scheme or contracted support.

It would not be ideal to hold this event much earlier than the current timetable (late November) to avoid both overlap with the November Makers Market and creating a dearth of festive activity between switch on and Christmas.

An increase to the net budget for the events totalling £1,250 is recommended. This would cover the costs of security, one way system signage and additional stalls for spacing.

2.3.2 OPTION 2 – SPLITTING THE EVENTS

Under this option, the Christmas Light Switch On and the Christmas Market would be split into two separate events.

The Christmas Light Switch On would take place mid-November (suggested date 15th November). This would take place in Canute Place as at present, with a small number of food stalls and entertainment, such as fairground rides along Princess Street. The event would necessitate a road closure for Canute Place and Princess Street and this event would also include the Santa Parade leading to the switch on time. The focus of this event would be as an event for the community.

The Christmas Market would then take place on the last weekend of November/first weekend of December. It is suggested that this is trialled as taking place across Princess Street, Silk Mill Street and

the central section of King Street. This would enable the market to be more spread out and incorporate King Street into the event. Only the central section of King Street is proposed (from Church Hill to Egerton Square) to enable traffic to still access King Street car park and the properties to the rear of King Street and off Drury Lane. To ensure the more spread-out market and removal of Saturday's switch on entertainment do not reduce the atmosphere, some additional entertainment would be planned for across the market e.g. live music and brass bands in different locations. The focus of this event would be drawing in visitors from further afield, as well as from the local community.

The benefits of splitting the event are:

- a) It enables the switch on to take place earlier in November to create a longer period of festivity
- b) It does not reduce the overall festive programme leading to Christmas
- c) It enables the trialling of splitting the market across both main streets (as Canute Place would not be required for the switch on)
- d) It spreads out the crowds to reduce pinch points
- e) There will be some additional income from stalls at the switch on and potential for increased income at the market (due to greater area covered)

The main negatives of this are:

- a) Additional costs will be incurred for the traffic management of two separate road closures
- b) There will be additional cost for entertainment to create ambience across both events
- c) There would be an additional weekend with road closures¹.

An increase to the net budget for the events totalling £1,000 is recommended. This would cover the additional costs of traffic management, entertainment and security and makes allowance for some additional income and associated costs.

2.4 CRIB SERVICE

Due to forecast winds, the event was relocated to Knutsford Methodist Church who were extremely helpful in supporting the arrangements. The changes were communicated from the Thursday and councillors volunteered to direct any who attended at the crib to the church. The event was successful with a good attendance.

Noting this is the second year running that poor weather has required last minute changes, in planning for 2025, additional contingency plans will be made in advance.

3.0 DECISIONS REQUIRED

Feedback from the committee on the Pumpkin Path, Remembrance Sunday and the Christmas events is invited.

Direction from the committee on whether to split the Christmas weekend is requested.

It is recommended that the committee resolves to vary the recommended budget for the Christmas events as set out in 2.3.2 or 2.3.3.

¹ 1st Sunday, Makers Market; 2nd Sunday, Remembrance Sunday Parade; 3rd Saturday Switch On; 5th weekend, Christmas Market.