

REPORT TO EVENTS COMMITTEE

KNUTSFORD CHRISTMAS MARKET 2026

Report Reference E-25-11
Meeting Date 13th April 2026
Agenda Item 7
Prepared by Events Manager



1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report provides a consolidated review of the 2025 Knutsford Christmas Market, bringing together the findings from multiple sources including:

- Business Christmas Benchmarking Survey (reported in detail to Town Centre Committee report ref T-25-24)
- Christmas Market Trader feedback (see appendix 1)
- Officer observations
- Public feedback (see appendix 2)

The aim of this report is to present a balanced overview of the event's performance, identify key themes and support informed decisions for the 2026 Christmas Market Event.

2.0 EVENT OVERVIEW

For 2025, the two-day Christmas market was split across Princess Street, Silk Mill Street and the central section of King Street. This expanded footprint represents a significant development compared with previous years, with Silk Mill Street designated as a dedicated food court area.

The event remains a key fixture in the town's calendar, attracting substantial footfall. It was supported by the park and ride service operating from Booths Hall, which helped to alleviate parking pressures within the town centre.

2025 marked the first occasion that the market was distributed across multiple principal streets. Preliminary public feedback has been positive, with the expanded layout noted for providing a more enjoyable visitor experience, increased space for browsing and improved pedestrian flow.

Weather conditions had an impact on trading performance over the weekend. The wet start on Saturday affected early trade. However, conditions improved later in the day and continued into Sunday. Sunday benefited from drier weather and was widely reported as a stronger trading day for both market traders and town centre businesses.

3.0 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The Christmas market is widely recognised as a valuable and well-established event that contributes positively to Knutsford's reputation and the local visitor economy. Feedback indicates that the event was generally well received, with strong organisational delivery and supportive staff.

However, a key concern raised through feedback is the disconnect between high footfall and the direct economic benefit for some stakeholders, particularly businesses on King Street and those located in lower footfall areas. The uneven distribution of footfall between Princess Street and King Street was consistently highlighted, with concerns expressed regarding fairness in pricing relative to trading location and opportunity.

There is a clear need to review the current market layout to either confirm the location of the second street or to achieve a more balanced distribution of footfall and commercial opportunity across the town centre.

It should be noted that the 61 responses received represent a relatively small proportion of total town centre businesses, although they provide useful insight into town centre business experiences. A significant number of businesses, particularly on King Street, reported low conversion rates and expressed opposition to the market being located on King Street. Feedback from January and March Knutsford One meetings reinforced this, with some businesses stating that they may reconsider their position in Knutsford if the market were to return to King Street.

Concerns were also raised regarding trader placement, with some reporting dissatisfaction when allocated to King Street and requesting relocation to Princess Street during the event. This highlights the need to review trader allocation and ensure a fair, balanced and commercially viable arrangement across all trading areas.

While most stall traders indicate a willingness to return, there is a clear risk to retention and reputation if the operational issues are not addressed.

4.0 CONSIDERATIONS FOR 2026 LAYOUT

Following consideration of feedback and the overall performance of the Christmas market, several layout options have been evaluated for 2026. These options have been assessed in relation to trader experience, footfall distribution, and the strategic aim of expanding and improving the market offer.

4.1 RECOMMENDED LAYOUT: PRINCESS STREET WITH PRINCESS STREET CAR PARK EXTENSION

The recommended approach is to locate the Christmas market primarily on Princess Street, with additional stalls extending into the Princess Street (rear of Waitrose) car park. The food vendor area would remain in the Silk Mill Street car park, which has been confirmed as a suitable and effective location.

This option is considered to provide the most balanced solution, offering:

- Improved distribution of footfall across the market footprint
- A clearer and more cohesive event layout
- Enhanced opportunity for traders to benefit from visitor movement
- Reduced concentration of activity in lower-performing trading areas
- The ability to expand the market footprint in a controlled and sustainable manner

Successful delivery of this option would require clear signage and wayfinding to encourage visitors into the Princess Street car park, ensuring that all areas are fully integrated into the overall market experience.

4.2 PRINCESS STREET ONLY (WITH SILK MILL FOOD COURT)

This option would return the market to a single-street format on Princess Street, with food vendors remaining in the Silk Mill car park.

This option is not recommended for the following reasons:

- It reduces the overall scale and footprint of the market, which is contrary to the strategic aim of expanding and developing the event.
- It limits the number of trading opportunities available to businesses and potential traders.
- It restricts the ability to accommodate future growth and innovation within the event.

While this option offers simplicity in delivery, it is considered a step backwards in terms of event development and does not align with the long-term objective of growing the Christmas market. It will require a reduction in the number of traders (and therefore reduced income) in order to maintain increased stall spacing to reduce crowding.

4.3 PRINCESS STREET AND KING STREET (SPLIT LOCATION)

This option would retain the 2025 format, with stalls located across both Princess Street and King Street, alongside the food court in the Silk Mill Street car park.

This option is not recommended for the following reasons:

- Continued imbalance in footfall between the two streets
- Ongoing concerns regarding fairness in trading location and pricing
- Negative impact on trader satisfaction, particularly on King Street
- Feedback indicating low conversion rates for town centre businesses on King Street
- Strong opposition from several King Street businesses

This option does not address the key concerns raised through stakeholder feedback and may risk further dissatisfaction among businesses.

4.4 SUMMARY OF LOCATION

Princess Street with Princess Street car park extension market location is recommended as the preferred approach for 2026, as it aligns with the objective of expanding the market while improving the distribution of footfall and enhancing the overall visitor and trader experience.

5.0 DECISIONS REQUIRED

The committee is asked are asked to:

- a) Consider the report findings, feedback and operational considerations in determining the preferred approach for the 2026 Christmas Market, aligned with the strategic objective of ongoing improvement and growth.
- b) Approve the recommended layout for 2026, Princess Street / Silk Mill Car Park with the Princess Street car park extension, as it provides a balanced distribution of footfall and supports controlled, sustainable expansion.

- c) Note stakeholder feedback, particularly concerns from businesses on King Street regarding trading performance and business confidence.
- d) Agree any additional measures required to support delivery, including enhanced signage, wayfinding and visitor flow to maximise event success and full utilisation of all market areas.

APPENDIX 1: CHRISTMAS MARKET TRADER FEEDBACK

1. SUMMARY

The trader feedback for the Knutsford Christmas Market indicates a generally positive event experience, with strong organisational performance, helpful staff and high-quality infrastructure.

However, several critical operational issues impacted trader satisfaction and business outcomes.

The most significant concerns relate to:

- Uneven footfall between Princess Street and King Street
- Perceived unfairness in pricing vs. location quality
- Logistics and trader accessibility (parking, unloading)
- Layout constraints and overcrowding
- Insufficient facilities (notably toilets)

While many traders expressed willingness to return, these issues present clear risks to long-term trader retention and reputation if not addressed.

2. KEY STRENGTHS

Organisation and Staff:

- Consistently high ratings
- Friendly, visible, and supportive staff
- Clear pre-event communication

Event Infrastructure:

- High-quality gazebos, lighting, and stalls
- Efficient setup and takedown

Trader Experience:

- Strong engagement in busy areas
- Positive atmosphere when music present

3. KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

- Footfall Imbalance - Princess Street vs King Street imbalance significantly impacted trader performance.
- Pricing Concerns - £80 fee perceived as high for lower-footfall areas.
- Layout Issues - narrow walkways and overcrowding reduced browsing.
- Parking & Logistics - lack of trader parking and difficult unloading.

4. ARISING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve signage and visibility across all streets
- Improve trader parking and logistics
- Increase facilities (toilets, shelter)
- Enhance entertainment and atmosphere
- Strengthen communication and planning accuracy

5. ACTION PLAN

Short-Term:

- Improve signage
- Increase staff presence
- Fix stall allocation issues
- Ensure consistent music

Medium-Term:

- Introduce trader parking
- Improve layout design
- Implement pricing tiers

Long-Term:

- Evaluate layout structure
- Strengthen branding and marketing
- Build feedback systems

6. IDENTIFIED KPIS

- 90% trader satisfaction
- 80% trader retention
- Balanced footfall across streets
- 75% perceive value for money
- <5% traders reporting operational issues
- 80% facilities satisfaction
- 25% reduction in complaints
- 80% positive atmosphere feedback

7. CONCLUSION

Overall, the feedback highlights that the Knutsford Christmas Market is a highly valued and well-established event with strong foundations. The professionalism of the organisation and the quality of infrastructure are consistently recognised as key strengths. However, the feedback also clearly demonstrates that trader experience is heavily influenced by location, footfall distribution and operational logistics.

Addressing the imbalance between trading areas will have a direct and measurable impact on trader satisfaction and economic success. Ensuring fairness in trading conditions and improving visibility across all areas of the market will be essential in maintaining trader confidence.

By implementing the recommended action plan and tracking the proposed KPIs, the event organisers will be well-positioned to enhance both trader outcomes and overall visitor experience. With targeted improvements, the market has strong potential to further strengthen its reputation, increase trader retention and continue growing as a flagship festive event for the region.

APPENDIX 2: CHRISTMAS EVENTS VISITOR FEEDBACK

The survey was promoted online and via the Knutsford Guardian to invite feedback on the council's Christmas events. 83 responses were received.

CHRISTMAS LIGHT SWITCH ON

53 responses were received to this section.

- 51% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the event, against 32% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, with a net satisfaction of 19%.
- 96% of respondents indicated they felt safe at the event
- 42% of respondents felt that the changes introduced in 2026 were positive for the switch on, with 35% negative.

Positive feedback highlighted the sense of it being a community atmosphere (particularly praising the school choirs) and that the split from the Christmas Market made it feel safer and more relaxed.

Negative feedback was primarily around the split of the event (not having the Christmas Market and associated additional entertainment beyond the stage) and the timing (too early in November).

Improvements highlighted were:

- Development of the Santa Parade
- Inclusion of fairground rides and additional entertainment / activity
- Resolving issues with the sound system
- Holding the event slightly later in the month closer to Christmas

CHRISTMAS MARKET

74 responses were received for this section.

- 80% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the event, against 8% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, with a net satisfaction of 72%.
- 99% of respondents indicated they felt safe at the event
- 84% of respondents preferred the layout of 2026 (including King Street), vs 7% preferring the "normal" layout (just Princess Street)
- 42% of respondents felt that the changes introduced in 2026 were positive for the market, with 18% negative.

CRIB SERVICE

Five people gave feedback on the Crib Service:

- Thoroughly enjoyed it
- I think the crib service is a highlight of the Christmas season. Christmas isn't just about shopping and it's good to have something like this, and to be able to have dogs attending. which wouldn't necessarily be possible in church!
- Layout for children singing could be improved, no need for stage if thought given to layout. Christmas message from priest was very appropriate to the town, more focus to be placed on the clergy participation and mix of carols/ Christmas stories/readings
- It was lovely - the kids needed a microphone in front of them (the adults had one and were under a marquee)
- The crib service was nice however I think there should have been hot coffee/tea/hot chocolate served as well. Unless I missed it and there was.