

At the January meeting of the Town Council the following resolution was passed

388/23 Resolved: - that the proposed Christmas lights budget amount be agreed for the purposes of the 2023-24 budget. But that the final implementation of a new or revised lighting scheme be deferred to allow for further discussions with the Christmas Lights and Festival Committee with a final decision to be made by the end of March 2023.

A meeting was held with members of the committee and the working party on 14.3.23 (Appendix A). The recommendation from the meeting was that a community consultation on the lights is undertaken (Appendix B) before public funds are committed to this project. Therefore, it is the Clerk's recommendation that:

A decision on this matter is deferred to the April meeting of the Town Council and that the Town Council undertakes a community consultation into the lights as outlined in Appendix B .

Appendix A

Notes from a meeting between members of the Wem Christmas Lights and Festival Committee and Wem Town Council's Christmas lights working party held at 13.15 on 14.3.23 in The Roden Suite.

Present

Christmas Lights Working Party - Cllr Soul, Cllr Parry, Cllr Johnson

Christmas Lights and Festival Committee Connie Granger, Mandy Meakin, Peter Broomhall, Liz Broomhall

Christmas Lights

A discussion took place on discussions held at the January Town Council meeting and whether the Christmas Lights and Festival Committee now wished to retain control of the management of the lights and running of the festival instead of passing it onto the Town Council as originally requested. It was agreed by those present that as any upgrading of the lights would require significant expenditure it was important to understand the views of the community on this matter and that a consultation should take place to find out whether the community wished to

a) Retain the existing small Christmas Trees as Wem's main Christmas decoration.

b) Install a new lighting scheme without the small Christmas Trees

c) Develop a mix between the two schemes with shop owners being gifted a small tree on the proviso that they take on responsibility for its installation and removal – it was acknowledged that this could be problematic to manage as each tree would need to be wired using the buildings electricity and not via the wires.

Resolved:- to request that the Town Council organise a community consultation into the Christmas lights to take place at the beginning of April with the deadline for comments 18th April. The survey would be short and would be advertised on social and using posters with hard copies in Wem Library.

The Clerk was also to research wiring options and find out if the external lines are necessary and whether other towns manage switch on events without external wiring.

Festival

A discussion took place on whether the Town Council could take on the responsibility for running the switch on event and festival in partnership with the current committee. It was explained that this would help reduce the burden of responsibility on the current committee as well as the cost of insurance for running the event.

It was explained that there may be drawbacks to this option as the Town Council may wish to alter elements of the event, however a compromise solution could be worked out by working together.

Resolved:- that the Christmas Lights and Festival Committee would meet independently to discuss this festival prior to meeting again with members of the working party to discuss the results of the survey and consider a way forward before the April full council meeting.

Next meeting to be held before 20th April 2023 so a final decision can be made at the April meeting.

Appendix B Proposed Questions for Survey

At Christmas Wem Town Centre is decorated by volunteers from the Christmas Lights and Festival Committee who install 80 small lit Christmas trees in brackets mounted on individual businesses in the town. These trees have been in place for many years and the electrical connections that link the trees along a large part of the High Street now need to be upgraded. This upgrading work will cost a significant amount of money, so the Town Council is working with members of the Christmas Lights and Festival Committee to consider alternative options for festive lighting in Wem.

Outlined below are the options currently being considered

Option 1

Remove the Christmas trees from the High Street and replace them with fewer, large (1.5m high) lighting displays similar to those used in other North Shropshire towns. The height of the buildings on the High Street limits us to just 2 locations where lighting displays can span the road. But larger lighting units can be attached to individual buildings using brackets.

Option 2

Remove the small Christmas trees from the High Street and replace them with fewer, larger lighting displays bracketed to buildings; and permit individual businesses to adopt a Christmas tree for their building and take on responsibility for installation of the tree and the electrical supply to it.

Option 3

Just upgrade the electrical connections and retain the small lit Christmas trees on the High Street.

Before any decision is made, we want to hear your views so please help us by completing the short survey below

Which option do you prefer?

a) Remove the small lit Christmas trees and replace them with fewer, larger (1.5m) lighting displays along the High Street.

b) Allow businesses to take responsibility for their individual small lit Christmas tree, and also install additional larger lit displays along the High Street.

c) No change - just upgrade the electrics and keep the small lit Christmas trees on the High Street.

Do you have any other comments or suggestions you wish to make about the Christmas Lights?