

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 03 August 2020

Portfolio:	Leisure and Community
Subject:	Christmas Lights Switch On – Alternative Proposals For 2020
Report of:	Director of Leisure and Community
Corporate Priorities:	Leisure Opportunities for Health and Fun

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to seek approval, following the COVID-19 pandemic, for an alternative proposal to recognise the switching on of Fareham's Christmas lights in Fareham Town Centre.

Executive summary:

Historically, each year Fareham Borough Council holds a large, public event in November to mark the switching on of the Christmas lights in the town centre. The event is well received and attended by approximately 4,000 people, who see it as the start of Christmas.

Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 restrictions, large scale public events are unable to take place, and therefore the normal event arrangements have been cancelled.

The festive lights will still be installed in the Town Centre as they are each year and will be switched on by the Mayor and Mayoress. This will take place on Sunday 22 November at 4.30pm, albeit without the usual activities associated with Fareham's usual Christmas light switch on event.

During the lead up to Christmas the Council would still like to support local businesses and encourage shoppers into the Town Centre, Fareham Shopping Centre, West Street and Fareham High Street. Therefore, the proposal is that instead of the usual one-day large-scale event, a festive market will run for 3 consecutive days, from Friday 4 December to Sunday 6 December.

The festive market arrangements will ensure that social distancing and safety requirements are in accordance with Government guidance to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19, whilst still providing people with a reason to come into Fareham and support local businesses and traders.

To encourage people into the Town Centre, it is also proposed that free parking is made available in all Pay and Display car parks, from 12.00 noon until 6.00pm, on

each day that the festive market is in situ, and when parking charges apply.

Recommendation/Recommended Option:

It is recommended that the Executive:

- (a) agrees to an alternative proposal, as set out in the report, to recognise the switching on of Fareham's Christmas lights in Fareham Town Centre, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Government restrictions currently in place; and
- (b) agrees to free parking between 12 noon and 6.00pm in the Pay and Display car parks within the Town Centre, on each day that the festive market is in situ, and when parking charges apply.

Reason:

To continue to encourage footfall into the Town Centre in the lead up to Christmas and to support local businesses and traders.

Cost of proposals:

The cost of providing the event will be £5,000 which will be funded from European Regional Development Fund for reopening High Streets safely.

The estimated loss of parking income is estimated to be £5,100. Regeneration grants to help fund the gap for any loss of parking income would be explored by Officers.

Appendices: None

Background papers: None

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Executive Member Briefing Paper

Date:	03 August 2020
Subject:	Christmas Lights Switch On – Alternative Proposals For 2020
Briefing by:	Director of Leisure and Community
Portfolio:	Leisure Opportunities for Health and Fun

INTRODUCTION

1. Each year, Fareham Borough Council holds a large Christmas lights switch on event, at the end of November, to mark the start of the Christmas festivities in Fareham Town Centre. It includes fun fair rides, food and drink concessions, market stalls, reindeer attendance, face painting, children's craft activities, performances on and off a central stage ending in a finale of switching on the Christmas lights in the town centre. The event usually attracts approximately 4,000 people.
2. As well as members of the public who attend, there are a considerable number of other people involved in the event, including traders, performers, security officers, activity providers, volunteers and Council Officers.
3. The event helps to attract shoppers into the Town Centre who consequently support the shops, restaurants, cafes and businesses, as well as marking the switching on of the festive lights.
4. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Government restrictions currently in place, all public events that the Council would normally run have been cancelled for this year.
5. However, the Council would still like to mark the start of the Christmas festivities in Fareham, on a smaller scale, encouraging people into the town centre, whilst following Government guidelines.

PROPOSAL

6. It is proposed, that a festive market is held in the pedestrianised area of West Street, which is not only a safe space that people can freely walk around, but also a recognised area where most town centre events take place.
7. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, there can be no public lights switch on event. However, the Mayor and Mayoress will switch on the lights on Sunday 22 November at the Henry Cort Performance Podium. A small number of Council officers will be

present to ensure that it runs smoothly and to film the event so that it can be shared online.

8. To help gain an understanding regarding whether traders and businesses would be interested in attending a Christmas market, an electronic survey was distributed to traders who the Council have previously worked with. The results of that survey are as follows:

Question	Result
Would you be likely to attend with a stall this year?	66.7% said yes 33.3% said no (*)
Would you prefer the market to run consecutively from a Friday to a Sunday in early December or one day per week in the lead up to Christmas for 4 weeks?	63.6% said Friday-Sunday 36.4% said one day per week for 4 weeks

(*) Those who responded no had the following concerns.

1) That there shouldn't be any events until a vaccine for Covid-19 is found.

2) The numbers of attendees would be low due to Covid-19 meaning that it wouldn't be financially viable for them to attend.

3) The trader has already committed to attending another Christmas event so would be unable to attend.

9. In light of the feedback received, it is proposed that a Festive Market is held over three consecutive days (Friday to Sunday), from 10.00am to 6.00pm each day.
10. The festive market would consist of a maximum of 20 stalls, based on current Government guidelines and all would be under gazebos. This is around half the number of stalls that attended the Fareham Christmas Lights switch on event in 2019.
11. Having a reduced number of stalls will ensure that social distancing measures can be adhered to. It will allow enough space for people to comfortably and safely move around the stalls in West Street, whilst ensuring shops with outside queuing systems in place also have enough space.
12. Gazebos will be provided, erected and taken down by the Council's Streetscene Team, and will follow a site plan produced by the Leisure and Community Team to ensure that the stalls are located in the correct place.
13. Overnight security will be provided on the Friday night and Saturday night so that the gazebos can remain in place, which will make it easier for the traders to set up on the mornings of Saturday and Sunday. This is also likely to attract more stall holders.
14. In previous years, food and drink concessions have always been popular, and provision to allow for 5 concessions will be made again for this event. Where possible a festive theme, such as; mulled wine, roasted chestnuts and Bratwurst German sausages will be encouraged.

15. All stall holders will be required to agree to the terms and conditions that the Council sets in line with Government advice to reduce the risk of COVID-19, but it is proposed that pitches are offered at no cost as a way of attracting traders to our event.
16. All stall holders will be required to provide public liability insurance and a risk assessment that covers how they will maintain social distancing and what they will do to reduce the risk of COVID-19.
17. There will be no free children's activities such as face painting, as this requires close contact to the face which is not permitted at this time. It would also be extremely difficult to maintain a 2m distance when queues form for popular activities such as this.
18. There will be some on street performances by buskers and local performers, who will be booked by the Leisure and Community Team, and a timetable will be followed. Performers will be required to bring all their own equipment. Ideally all performers will be on their own or in a small group, which will allow them to maintain social distancing.
19. Fareham Shopping Centre are unsure of their plans for Christmas at the present time due to Covid-19 implications. However, they have agreed to keep the Council informed as and when plans are determined, and opportunities to work with the Shopping Centre, as in previous years, will be explored.

PROMOTION AND AWARENESS

20. The event will be promoted on social media, the Council's website, in notice boards and bus shelters, press releases, and Council Connect. Information will also be shared with local community groups and organisations, schools and community centres etc.
21. Leading up to the Christmas event, competitions will run on social media, and be promoted with local businesses.
22. The Leisure and Community Team will work with local businesses where possible. Businesses from the Western end of West Street and High Street will be invited to attend with a stall if they wish to do so. Information about the event will be shared at an early stage and businesses will be encouraged to share any offers, promotions or activities they may be running during the festive season with the Council's Communications Team who will help promote it on the Council's social media pages.

PARKING

23. To help attract visitors into the Town Centre and to the Festive Market, it is proposed that free parking is offered on Friday 4 and Saturday 6 December from 12.00 noon to 6.00pm at the following 'Pay and Display' car parks:
 - Civic Way
 - Ferneham Hall
 - Palmerston Avenue
 - Lysses
 - Bath Lane
 - Holy Trinity
 - Trinity Street

- Osborne Road (West)
- Malthouse Lane

24. Free parking is already offered in outer car parks on a Sunday which includes Lysses, Malthouse Lane, Bath Lane, Holy Trinity, Trinity Street, Osborn Road (West).

25. If free parking is offered at the Pay and Display car parks from 12 noon to 6pm on Friday 4 and Saturday 5 December, the estimated total loss of income would be £5,100, based on the income received for the same weekend in 2019.

26. It is expected that there would be some movement in car park usage over that weekend, and that income from Pay on Foot car parks would also reduce as visitors opt to use the car parks that are free for the day instead. This hasn't been included in the above figure as it is an unknown amount.

27. If all Pay and Display and Pay on Foot car parks were offered free of charge from 12 noon to 6pm over the weekend of the Christmas market, there would be an estimated loss of income of £16,195 based on the income received for the same weekend in 2019. The table below provides a further breakdown.

	Car parks	Full Day	12-6pm
6/7/8 December 2019	Pay & Display	£6,146	£5116
	Pay on Foot	£17,259	£13,637
	Total	£23,405	£16,195

COSTS

28. The cost of providing the event will be £5,000 which will be funded from the European Regional Development Fund for reopening High Streets safely.

29. Regeneration grants to help fund the gap for any loss of parking income would be explored by the Finance Team, but it is important to note, that in the event that a grant is not identified, then the loss of income would be offset against the Parking income.

CONCLUSION

30. Although Covid-19 has meant that many events have had to be cancelled, the Council would still like to encourage footfall into the town centre to help support local businesses and traders, and to recognise Christmas in Fareham.

31. An outdoor festive market will enable social distancing to be maintained more easily with a limited number of stalls, whilst still enabling the public to enjoy the Christmas festivities in Fareham.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Emma Watts, Leisure and Community Manager (Ext.4440) or Becca Bennett, Leisure and Community Officer (Ext. 4593)