

Christmas Lighting – Proposals for 2007

Summary

1. This report updates Members of the Board on a number of options for Christmas Lighting – related activities for 2007, and also reviews other festive activities proposed and committed for this year. The report also highlights the need for a long term strategy on this issue.

Background

2. Until 2005 a partnership working group with both retail representation and CYC officer support meet annually and implemented a plan to raise funds to ensure the ‘cross-street’ lighting scheme went up around the city. (Streets included in this scheme are: Goodramgate, High Petergate, Colliergate, Davygate, Parliament Street, Coney Street Fossgate and Coney Street). The ‘cross-street’ scheme last happened in this way in 2005 and the cost totalled approximately £51k. (This is excluding a switch on show. The show at the Minster in previous years has cost approximately an additional £20k). As reported last year, over time sponsorship was increasingly hard to secure.

Detailed costs for cross-street lights were presented last year and are repeated again for convenience.

Christmas (cross street) Lights for 2006

Installation/dismantle and hire of the lights for the festive period = £25,662.00

N.B. This figure is based on signing a 3/5 year contract with a 5% increase yearly for the duration of that contract.

Collection, storage, maintenance and delivery to York = £7030.40

N.B. This figure is based on the above 3/5 year contract with a 4% yearly increase for the duration of the contract.

Project Management = £8,000.00

Other costs (i.e. testing, electricity, sponsor boxes) £10,000.00

Total = £50,692.40 – this is excluding a ‘switch on’ show. The show at the Minster in previous years has cost approximately an additional £20,000.

3. As reported to this Board in 2006, in addition to the above officer time, CYC have always funded the following aspects of Christmas Lighting :

Storage of the cross street lights; a real 30ft Christmas Tree in St Helens Square; festive lighting around Newgate Market and Silver Street; pea lights in trees along Parliament Street, St Sampson's Square and Duncombe Place; and street light power supply and insurance. The total cost of this contribution is £8k for storage and £9k for the festive lighting, annually.

Review of 2006 Festive Lighting

4. The report to the Economic Development Board meeting on 14th March 2006 confirmed that the Council was unable to continue its current financial and administrative support for the 'cross street lighting' which has been the main feature of previous Christmas central area decoration. A range of options was discussed, with the favoured ones being to encourage the street traders to take the lead themselves on generating funding for the 'cross-street lighting' and to undertake a sponsorship/funding campaign for a single decorative illumination in the city centre, to be co-ordinated by the City Council.
5. The following streets were successful in 2006 in raising the funds needed to put up their lights – Colliergate, Goodramgate, High Petergate and Fossgate - and the City Centre Office financed the lights around Newgate Market. York Business Pride contributed half the cost per street which we estimate cost approximately £5k per street. Therefore, each street managed to raise approximately £2.5k. In addition to this the Lord Mayor lead a successful campaign in St Helen's Square where retailers all contributed towards a lighting scheme.
6. The cross street lights are currently being stored by CYC – the retailers have all contributed and covered the £800 cost of this for one year. If the retailers do not cover this cost again then CYC will have to pay for the storage or we will need to look at disposing of the lights, which will soon require maintenance and repair (at an additional cost).
7. The proposal for a single decorative illumination in the city centre focused on a "Children's Magic Christmas Tree" which was placed over the fountain in Parliament Street from November 17th 2006 to January 6th 2007. This provided an opportunity to move away from the traditional approach to street decoration over the Christmas period. The Children's Magic Christmas Tree was an opportunity for a specially designed tree, unique to York.
8. The cost of the Children's Magic Christmas Tree was £22k – Approximately £12k was raised through sponsorship and contributions by the public. CYC therefore covered the rest of the cost for the Children's Magic Christmas Tree to the tune of approximately £10k.

The table below shows the breakdown of costs.

Hire of Tree and transport	£12,850.00
Tree installation and maintenance	£8,190.00
TOTAL	£21040.00

Electricity/insurance costs (up to £1k) covered through EDU resources

Other Festive activities

9. It is important to put Christmas lights issues into context. There are a number of other dedicated Christmas related promotions; handled by the Council or the York Tourism Partnership (Formerly First Stop York) which we are already committed to in 2007, and for which Council officer time is required.
 - **Yuletide York** The First Stop York Tourism Partnership annually works on a Christmas Marketing campaign called Yuletide York. A dedicated website and a glossy brochure bring together all Christmas activity including markets, attractions, shopping, events etc. 80,000 copies of the Yuletide York brochure are produced and are distributed through various channels to a national, as well as local audience. The total cost of this campaign is £16k and the First Stop York Executive provides £9K of funding towards this as a specific marketing priority for the city. The rest of the revenue is raised through advertising opportunities within the Yuletide York brochure. This project annually covers its own costs but no profit is generated. This marketing activity is very important to city retailers and attractions putting on special events at Christmas, and offers a great opportunity to showcase the city's specialist Christmas markets as well as the full panoply of York's Christmas offer – including details of church services and children's entertainment. As a result of this ongoing campaign the estimated economic value of Christmas in our City is £37million, this is visitor spend alone and includes shopping, accommodation, eating out etc. Residents spend in the city during this period is in addition to this figure.
 - **St Nicholas Fayre** The St Nicholas Fayre takes place annually and is always the last weekend in November (Thursday–Sunday). It essentially forms the first showpiece event of the Christmas period. Seen as our flagship Christmas Market this event attracts 400 coaches annually and approximately 64,000 visitors and 36,000 residents into the city. It is estimated that the economic value of the St Nicholas Fayre is over £5 million, and is highly valued by retailers. The CYC Markets office are responsible for this event and in 2006 had a budget set to achieve income of £13,180.00. The 2007 target is set at £14,690.00 (29th November–2nd December 2007) and the income contributes towards the overall markets budget.
 - **Coach & Traffic Management** Due to the increased popularity of the St Nicholas Fayre over recent years it has been essential to manage the amount of coach traffic entering the city over this particular weekend in order to avoid the most serious congestion which would

badly damage the City's reputation. Previously handled by the Tourism Team within Economic Development, this year it will transfer to the Markets Budget. Traffic Management has an expenditure of approximately £8k. Income is generated through coach parking charges but will purely cover costs.

- **Ice Rink + other city offers** The Ice Factor has been a major part of our Christmas offer for the last two years, at no net cost to the Council. An independent company called Lunchbox Theatrical Productions organise and deliver the event. For the last two years they have made no or very little profit – it is expected that long term when they begin making a profit they will award CYC a percentage.
- For the first time in 2006 a German Christmas Market was also introduced and it is planned again for 2007. Other Christmas markets include a Farmer's Market and the Children's Christmas Fayre. These enhance the offer to residents and visitors and contribute towards the overall Markets budget.

2007 and the future

10. For 2007 the following activities are long-standing commitments where work has already started and will go ahead: Yuletide York Marketing Campaign, St Nicholas Fayre and other Christmas Markets. The City Centre Office will continue to provide and pay for the Christmas Tree in St Helen's Square, the Pea Lights in Duncombe Place, St Sampson's Square and Parliament Street and the Christmas lights around Newgate Market and Silver Street. See Annex 1 – table showing projects, costs, CYC contributions and 2007 commitments.

Consultation

11. Consultation on the activities listed in para 9 for Christmas 2007 has taken place with the York Tourism Partnership Executive (in drawing up the tourism budget for 2007 – 08). Consultation on Festive lighting options (para 12) took place in 2006, though some of the newer ideas will be discussed further with retailers should the Economic Development Partnership Board recommend such an approach.

Options – Festive lighting

12. Regarding festive lighting, the following options are presented for consideration by the Economic Development Partnership Board (in addition to the lighting commitments in 10 above).
 - Single Decorative Illumination. This could be in Parliament Street as last year, or another site. Costs depend on what is desired but could range between £20k - £45k (based on quotes for various options researched last year).
 - City Wide Cross street lighting scheme. On the basis of previous experience, this would cost approximately £40k - £50k. It is understood that this is the favoured option of many retailers. As discussed in para

2, the Board acknowledged last year that a full sponsorship of £50k is highly unlikely to be secured, but £25k of sponsorship may be a more realistic target if retailers (and York Business Pride?) could raise the remaining £25k.

- 'Best Dressed window' campaign. A competition between retailers to create spectacular Christmas window displays. Minimum costs would apply but it would need a lot of officer time – perhaps the Retail Forum or City Centre Partnership could champion this? The opportunities here are to create good PR with an emphasis on Shopping in York and it could also kick start the retail commitment to late night shopping.
- Christmas Tree campaign. Using many of the existing brackets on shop fronts to create a scheme, similar to the York in Bloom hanging baskets, where each shop can display a small tree with white fairy lights. Minimal costs as retailers would buy into the scheme but officer time could be considerable – suggest that the same organisers of York in Bloom champion?
- Creative Kids Competition. Engaging with schoolchildren of all ages, the winning designs are made into Christmas lights and installed around the town for all to see. Costs are approximately £500 per design + installation. Sponsorship could potentially be easier to find due to the nature of this scheme. Also great PR possibilities, great links with the Children's Fayre. A lot of potential for further activities – also bringing a lot of families into the City Centre to see the work. Could this be a project jointly worked through NYBEP? This would be more a community than a tourism / economic development activity.

In each case CYC officer time is an issue with all of the above options because of the commitments that the Council has already over the festive period in delivering the actions in 9 above.

Comment on the options

13. Correspondence with retailers indicate that their preferred option is cross-street lighting. This is also the most expensive option and with other Council budgets on Christmas-related activity already committed for 2007 there is limited scope for a significant CYC contribution to this. A substantial contribution from retailers and sponsorship would need to be achieved, with the most appropriate lead coming through the City Centre Partnership.
14. A single decorative illumination would cost in the region of £20 - £45k. This would provide a focal point in one part of the city but arguably only limited benefits elsewhere in the city centre. Sponsorship was limited in 2006, and views are sought on the potential benefits of this compared to other projects.
15. As an alternative there are a number of low costs options (Best Dresses Window, Mini trees or Creative Kids competition) which could give much more of a community feel rather than a single showpiece. The issue with these is more about organisation than cost.

16. Opinions of Residents on Christmas lighting are currently being canvassed through the Talkabout survey panel. The result of this survey are due in July.
17. Finally the issue of a long term strategy for Christmas lighting needs to be addressed. As indicated previously it is difficult to switch resources from other areas into Christmas Lights as these activities – as well as the Lights themselves – ideally need a long lead-in period in order to offer the best promotional advantage. Promotional materials highlight tourism events and activities a year or more in advance, for example, so already decisions for 2008 and beyond are needed.

Corporate Priorities

18. The schedule of Christmas 2007 activity already planned meets two corporate objectives:
 - 3.4 Create a vibrant city centre through a proactive partner approach to visitor management and by increasing investment
 - 7.1 Develop a city-wide programme of events and festivals that make the city more vibrant

It will also (in being a draw to encourage visitors and shoppers to visit the city centre during the build up to Christmas) help meet Corporate Aim 3 in the Council Plan, “Strengthen and diversify York’s economy and improve employment opportunities for residents”.

Implications

19. Financial At the moment there is NO provision in CYC budgets for any contribution to Christmas Lights other than the elements listed in Paragraph 3 above. All other CYC ‘Christmas related’ budgets for 2007 are already committed and in many cases are allocated to partnerships (see paragraphs 9 and 10). Other city centre promotional funds are advertising by means of press releases with individual event organisers being responsible for their own promotion.
20. Business Improvement District. As a longer term option the funding of Christmas lights, if seen as a priority by retailers, may well be an issue to be considered in the discussions over the establishment of a future Business Improvement District in the city centre.
21. Human resources: None
22. Equalities: None
23. Legal: The council will carry out a full risk assessment of all Christmas related activities, including events, markets, and lighting or decorative installations.
24. Crime and Disorder: None

25. Information Technology: None
26. Property: None

Risk Management

27. At the moment there is no financial risk management issue to the Council as there are no specific resources for the cross-street lighting (see para 17 above). While there may be risks to the reputation of the city if there are no Christmas Lights, in the wider context there is plenty happening in York in the run up to Christmas 2007 already (see para 9) to mitigate against this. Regarding health and safety related risk assessments, the council will carry out a full risk assessment of any installation, lighting or tree display.

Recommendations

28. The Board is asked to consider and advise on the options outlined in paragraph 12 above and consider potential action in relation to:
- i) The practical options for Christmas 2007
 - ii) Options for 2008 onwards.

Reason: To give a direction to Christmas lighting strategy for York for 2007 and the foreseeable future.

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Specialist Implications Officers: None

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All ✓

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

- ED Board report on York Christmas lights (14 March 2006)
- Report to the Executive on the Children's Magic Christmas Tree, 12 September 2006

These reports are held on file at 20 George Hudson Street

Annexes: Annex 1 - table showing projects, costs, CYC contributions and 2007 commitments