

Summary of the 2023 Event

For a second year, the annual Christmas Lights Switch-On took place on a Saturday in line with the Town Council's decision to enter into a partnership for the event.

The inaugural 2022 event had raised significant concerns regarding health and safety, security and first aid provision. These concerns were addressed during the SAG meeting. The event was managed by Stratford upon Avon BID, with the Town Council as a financial contributor.

On the day, a large number of people assembled in upper Bridge Street, which completely overwhelmed any arrangements which had been put in place and led to significant crowding and other health and safety concerns.

At the SAG meeting, to avoid a repeat of such problems in the future, the Council undertook to take on responsibility for organising Health and Safety, security, traffic management, HVM provision and first aid personnel going forward. The Council's H&S Consultant, Richard Lees, subsequently worked closely with BID staff to develop and deliver a robust Event Management Plan for the 2023 event.

Review of the 2023 Switch-On

- **Road Closures** – it was agreed that it should be clear as to when RTC Orders were implemented in the town centre Both Bridge Street and Waterside were closed from 4:00am by LSD Markets under a separate closure, and all other roads from 7:00am. In future the pre-event signage will clearly state the time of the closures accurately in all streets affected.
- **Blue Badge Parking** - The H & S Consultant recommended that there should be no parking within the road closures for Blue Badge vehicles. A car had been badly parked in Wood Street and this caused an obstruction throughout the day as it reduced the available space available in the lower half of the street where it is narrow.
- **BHS Drop Off** – Although concerns had been raised regarding the proposal to use the filter lane near BHS as a taxi drop off, it has been used throughout the event with no issues.
- **HVM** – The use of a vehicle in High Street near to the junction of Ely Street has blocked the view into Chapel Street and the owner of one of the businesses had complained. An alternative would be investigated for next year, but this would probably come at an additional cost.
- **Stage** – The location of the stage had worked well, although its location should be adjusted away from the entrance into the bank. Access to the stage was not where originally planned at the Henley Street end, but as the bank had closed there were no issues getting the Civic Party onto the stage. Numbers on the stage had been limited for safety reasons,

although some of the cast from the Christmas production at the RSC had turned up to promote the theatre show, by offering complimentary tickets. For such a prominent opportunity for the RSC, it would have been good to have receive a facility fee!

- **Screen** – The location of the screen further down Bridge Street had proved a great success, projecting a visual display of Christmas Lights over the years and the switch-on ceremony from the stage. It was unfortunate that the sound levels were not adequate, but this can be addressed.
- **Crowd Control** – no issues. The RB2000 crowd barriers between Bridge Street and High Street to form a walkway had been successful. It was recommended that for a future event that a similar arrangement should be installed outside Lloyds Bank and into Union Street.
- **Carriage Ride** - Although this had worked, once the timings had been changed, a larger crowd had gathered near the stage, so the allotted time in Bridge Street was shorted to avoid potential crushing in the vicinity of the horses.

Taking everything into consideration, the Officers considered the event had passed off without issue bearing in mind the large numbers it attracted. There had been much support shown on social media for the event. There is no doubt that having moved from a Thursday to a Saturday that the Switch-On has become a much larger event than it used to be. And with considerably more funding than before, the expectations of those attending have greatly increased. The Council had been successful in achieving UKSPF funding for additional free accessible entertainment. This had included the large screen which had cost £6,900. This was agreed on the understanding that for any future switch-on, sponsorship would actively be sought to continue offering this for safety reasons.

Having moved away from the Town Hall it would not be practical or possible to accommodate up to 10,000 within the very limited available space in High Street/Sheep Street. The Town Council are contractually committed to providing a Christmas light switch-on which allows for a Christmas market to take place in Bridge Street on the Saturday.

It remains to be seen how much funding will be made available in 2024 from BID, following the election next month. Without this vital funding, the type of event which has now developed will just not happen!

Civic Officer, January 2024