

# MARCH TOWN COUNCIL

## **Minutes of a Christmas Lights Working Party Meeting held in The Skoulding Suite at March Town Hall on Monday 19 August 2024 at 7.45pm**

|                 |                      |                        |
|-----------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Present:</b> | Chairman             | M Field                |
| Councillors     | M Purser<br>S Court  | G Christy              |
| Members         | R Burry<br>D Fortuna | A Stimpson<br>R Kidger |
|                 | Town Clerk           | S Lemmon               |

### **Apologies:**

No apologies were received.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2024 were circulated and approved and were signed by the Mayor at the main meeting of March Town Council on 5 August 2024.

### **Committee Administration**

The current Chair, Stuart Rayner confirmed his intention to retire as Chairman of the Committee (and joint chief steward). He would no longer attend meetings but would remain involved in the event on the night with setting-up and stewarding etc.

G Christy proposed M Field as the new Chairman. This was seconded by A Stimpson and carried by a vote.

M Purser nominated G Christy to remain as Treasurer to the committee. This was seconded by M Field and carried by a vote of committee members.

The Clerk would remain as Secretary to the committee.

The committee thanked S Rayner for his many years of dedication, hard-work and involvement with the Christmas Lights.

M Field to contact R Burry to check whether she would remain as chief steward, either individually or to share the role.

### **Switch-on Event 2024**

“Switch-on” date confirmed as Friday 29 November 2024.

## **TRRO / Road Closure / Traffic Management**

The Clerk had instructed C Brown Support Services to apply for the TRRO and complete necessary road closure application forms for submission to Cambridgeshire County Council (M Field to be named as 24-hour event emergency contact). Roads traditionally remain closed until 23:00.

C Brown has successfully supported the MAFF event for the past two years, and, as such, would provide the necessary expertise and reliability required for this year's event.

Provisional plans and application received from C Brown on 25.1.24. **The Clerk will touch base with C Brown w/c 19.8.24 to see how matters are progressing vis-à-vis the TRRO.**

Timings of the closure discussed. Clerk to investigate whether Bevills Place could be closed. No – it is residential. It has never been closed off for switch-on. There is no need for it to be closed as the event will be re-located predominantly to Broad Street as per every other year barring 2023. Residents will have to be escorted in and out as per any other year, and most are respectful of the switch-on event. There will always be some that abuse/disrespect the event and restrictions in place, sadly.

## **Lighting / Permissions / Licenses / Compliance / Legal**

1. Clerk to apply for CCC Street Lighting License. Emailed CCC on 17.1.24 explaining current situation in Broad Street and with the new lights. It is hoped that there would be joined-up working and a common-sense approach adopted in view of the project. Reply received on 24.1.24. Comms with Matt (FDC) and Shafir (CCC) on 30.1.24. Clerk emailed Matt & Shafir for updates again on 8.5.24. Matt out of office until 17.5.24. Response from Shafi on 10.5.24 (with new timelines of column installation, energising thereof and accrual by Balfour Beatty and ultimately the lights installation, testing, commissioning and delivery to FDC). Clerk responded to Shafi with information required on 15.5.24.
2. Clerk to contact Balfour Beatty to ascertain whether they will again supervise electrical works since this is the only practical way the Committee can legally access CCC street lighting columns.  
Clerk emailed Brian Crabbe on 17.1.24. Brian has diarised to quote later in the year as it was too early to process on their system. However, he highlighted the fact that the regeneration project would not be able to be used until it had been adopted by CCC. Clerk escalated this urgent issue with Matt Wright at FDC and Shafir at CCC. Clerk emailed Brian on 15.5 to update him on Shafi's response of 10.5.24. Can they now quote for supervision? Clerk to chase. Clerk spoke with M Wright on 1.7.24 and was reassured that whilst Shafi is currently away in Pakistan on account of a family bereavement, everything is in hand and Balfour Beatty will supervise electrical works. Clerk will continue to press for updates/progress. **Clerk spoke with Matt Wright on 16.7.24; he has a meeting with Shafi on 16.7.24 as he is now back from Pakistan. He will set up a meeting to include the Clerk.**
3. Clerk contacted UK Power Networks on 17.1.24 regarding the unmetered supply certificate and advised the dates of the switch-on, and off, and reduced illumination times as per 2023 (4:00-10:30).

(As members will recall, the UMS tariff increased by almost 50% from 1 September 2023).

Clerk chased Rob Smith at E-On on 16.1.24 for the UMS bill. He confirmed this would not be received until March.

2024 certificate received and copy forwarded to the energy supplier. Invoice received on 11.3.24 for payment on 18.3.24.

4. All cross-street wires and wall bolts were tested during 2022. Tests are due bi-annually, so they are required to be tested in 2024 by Glomac. Clerk contacted Peter at Glomac by email on 17.1.24. Tel con with Peter on 12.3. Last tested on Sunday 8 August 2022. TDServices provided the cherry picker, A Stimpson attended along with 2 Glomac employees who tested all 25 brackets in Broad Street and High Street. Peter advised these really need doing every year. Clerk to get availability for A Stimpson and D Fortuna (and cherry picker) for Sundays in August and September 2024 to attend with Glomac once again. Clerk emailed A Stimpson and D Fortuna for availability on 19.3.24 and 29.4.24. Both have confirmed availability, Clerk to update Glomac. Clerk emailed Peter (Glomac) 30.4.24. Visit/inspection arranged for Sunday 15 September 2024 at 06:00 with Alan, Dan and cherry picker. Glomac have quoted £1,854.00 (incl.) for this.
5. Clerk confirmed with FDC (Layna & Isabel) on 17.1.24 that the Market Place car park will be closed all day on 29.11.24 and that the [temporary] toilets in town will be open until 22:00.
6. PAT testing; The Clerk raised the issue of PAT-testing the Christmas lights this year. Even though it was no longer a *strict legal* requirement, it was considered good practise. A Simpson advised that Darren Biggs can assist/quote for this and it would be most practical to carry out the testing in tranches, as and when the lights are put up. It was also recommended that, for convenience, all lights are tested at the same time to monitor more easily. Irrespective of PAT testing, a physical inspection of the lights for wear and tear was always carried out at the time of erection and this is covered in the Method Statement (which forms part of the Christmas Lights Risk Assessment). The associated additional costs would have to be borne through additional fund-raising. **A Simpson confirmed on 22.7.24 that he will contact D Biggs to get a quote. Quote received on 24.7.24. A Stimpson advised there were approximately 100 units that would need testing this year, thereby allowing us to have a better idea of the total cost of the testing (roughly £400 (incl) per annum based solely on the lights we have already, but excluding all the new lights for Broad Street of course). The Clerk received an email from a legal adviser at SLCC on 30.7.24 recommending strongly that, as owner and storer of the towns Christmas lights, PAT testing be carried out annually as a safety precaution, but to refer the matter to our Insurer for further guidance. The Clerk contacted Zurich on 31.7.24. They [Zurich] were reluctant to “give advice” but confirmed that they would expect PAT testing to be carried out annually. As such, this additional cost will have to be met by the Council every year, and it must be borne in mind that there will be many extra lights for Broad Street that will need testing going forward which will significantly increase future costs.**

## Christmas Tree & Decorations

1. Clerk to order a Christmas tree from Elveden Farms. The tree last year was £3,636 (inclusive of VAT and delivery).  
Last year's wonky tree had initially generated much toxicity on social media. However, our little tree became world-famous and put March on the map and gave the town a much-needed boost economically.  
Could we source a wonky/imperfect tree again this year which would become a talking-point/local attraction?  
Elveden emailed for a quote on 17.1.24. Quote received on 13.2.24 - 10% discount this year on last year's price which equates to £2,700.00 & VAT (£540.00) = £3,240.00.  
Accepted on 14.2.24. As per conversation with Dan, Clerk emailed Elveden on 7.5.24 to request delivery of tree on Monday 18.11.24 between 9-10am. No response yet. Clerk to chase again.  
Clerk confirmed with M Wright at FDC on 1.7.24 that the sizing of the new tree pit in Broad Street should be the same size as the existing tree pit on the Market Place. The Clerk advised M Wright on 15.7.24 that the girth measurement quoted was incorrect and advised the correct dimensions so that work could commence on installing the new pit. Clerk & Matt Wright had follow-up conversation on 16.7.24 to confirm the new dimensions.  
**\*Could the Clerk also contact Matt Wright to confirm that the new tree pit will have sockets for the Christmas Lights?**

**G Christy advised that You-Tuber "Trucker Tim" has very kindly offered to provide free collection and delivery of the tree this year. The Clerk will contact Elveden this week to enquire what the price reduction would be if we were arranging our own delivery.**
2. D Fortuna (Doctor Tree) had provided the Committee with a quote for the installation and removal of the Christmas Tree for 2024 once again. The quotation is £600 plus VAT (as per 2023/4). The Clerk confirmed that she had now received the invoice from D Fortuna for installation and removal of the 2023 tree for payment. This was paid on 5.2.24.
3. D Fortuna would slice the trunk of the famous 2023 tree with a view to selling "a slice of local history" at the Christmas Market and potentially from the FACT depot.
4. Works/improvements to Broad Street would not be completed until Autumn 2024.  
The Christmas tree will be located in Broad Street this year.  
There will be new street lighting in town upon completion (funded by FDC).  
FDC representatives attended a meeting of March Town Council in January 2024 to present Atkins' designs for the Christmas lights and decorations in Broad Street.  
Town Councillors resolved for Atkins to deliver the festive lights package (the lights will need to be ordered by mid-February for October delivery and installation).  
The new lighting will all be attached to County Council infrastructure with all new, digital timer switches.  
Clerk spoke to Matt Wright (FDC) on 18.6.24 to discuss the progress of Broad Street and the lighting issues (street lamps, application to CCC for permission and details of the new lights delivery) and would be speaking to Matt again this week.  
Owing to the new road layout, there will no longer be any catenary lights.  
Many of our lights will be not be fit-for-purpose going forward and these can be re-purposed, sold or gifted, as appropriate (M Field, G Christy and D Fortuna to prepare an

inventory of our light stock and identify all those that cannot be used in future). The best time to do this would be immediately prior to putting up the lights in October. R Burry suggested that we could donate some lighting to Outwell and Upwell.

5. Clerk to discuss with FDC/Atkins substitution of feature gnomes/gonks with snowmen if possible and source a copy of the concept design board to share with committee members.  
Issue of vandalism of proposed ground-based festive features raised. Clerk emailed /spoke with M Wright (FDC) on 23.2.24.  
31.1.24 Teams meeting between Christmas Lights Council Sub-Committee (J French, K French, N Spencer [apologies], S Lemmon and FDC and two Atkins representatives to discuss Christmas Lights package.
6. Discussion to be had as to whether the lighting traditionally placed on the shops in Broad Street would be used going forward. These are arguably not be in keeping with the aesthetic of the new lights and may well detract from them. Additionally, it would be far easier going forward not to erect the shop lighting so as to avoid issues with accessing the shops and unpredictable timer switches in the future. It was agreed that the Train and Boat set pieces designed for the bridge would continue to be used, however. D Fortuna, G Christy and Chairman to conduct an audit of the existing decorations. Consider an alternative setting for the Nativity, historically located on the Collingwoods building. The Chair would speak to Tesco Express about siting the Nativity Scene on its roof. M Field had been recommended by a member of staff that they would need to contact Head Office. Alternatively, it could be useful to identify and liaise directly with the landlord\*.  
*\*To do this week.*
7. The Clerk has received another offer of a tree from a member of the public, Wisbech this time, which has grown too big for a garden. It was explained to the potential donor that our tree had already been ordered for this year (and it has to be a certain size and girth to be safely accommodated by the custom pit in any event), but they were thanked sincerely for their thought and generosity.

## **SAG / Event Management Plan / Health & Safety**

1. SAG paperwork to be completed at the earliest opportunity (M Field). The SAG team had been in touch already and a meeting was scheduled for **17 October**. It was raised that SAG had *suggested* hiring security for the event. Chairman to obtain quotes if this was an *essential* requirement. Chairman to update the group on SAG's recommendations and seek quotes. M Field is finalising the report, but otherwise, no further updates. M Field would liaise with G Christy post-meeting re wording for the security tender documentation. *\*NB to Clerk to send completed copy to SJA once complete.*
2. M Purser to complete the application for the Licence to Occupy the Market Place. M Purser will chase this week and update the Clerk prior to the next meeting. Amy Markillie has requested additional information. Clerk to supply copy of our Insurance Certificate. Clerk emailed insurance certificate to MP on 18.6.24. 2.7.24 M Purser confirmed that all documents had been submitted to FDC on 28.6.24. No response had been received from FDC. MP has diarised to chase on 19.7.24. *Clerk received email from FDC Land Team on 19.7.24 to advise that issue of notice would be deferred until after the SAG meeting. Clerk challenged this and*

FDC confirmed a “miscommunication”. The Clerk was relatively satisfied that permission would be forthcoming and our event would not be in jeopardy.

3. The Clerk received an email from the Engineering Dept at FDC on 26.7.24. They [the FDC Assets and Projects Team] will also require us to apply for permits for our lighting contractors/volunteers to use the Market Place when accessing the County Council-owned streetlights. The Clerk contacted G Edwards on 29.7.24 to clarify the position and discuss the application process and logistical issues.
4. Assistant Clerk requested St John Ambulance attendance on 17.1.24. Quote received on 2.8.24. Duly signed and scanned to SJA on 5.8.24. 4 first aiders will attend, but not in an ambulance. They will require a room or gazebo with table and chairs for them to use as a base for treatment. They also need a copy of the SAG/risk assessment as soon as possible. Quote received for £228.80 + VAT on 1.8.24 and accepted by the Clerk.
5. Clerk to request local press advertise the event (which would also satisfy SAG requirement to notify residents of possible noise/nuisance etc)
6. What Three Words app to be used once again in the event of emergencies on the night.
7. The wristbands for lost children would continue and this was better advertised in 2023 (in part due to the 6pm “warm-up” by G Tustin). A banner had been purchased in 2023 advertising the location of Lost Children, First Aid and Information Point.
8. The information point (FACT van) would be located on the Market Place as per the 2023 event.
9. R Burry enquired as to whether it was possible to attend fire marshal training. G Christy to make enquiries with the fire service. Chairman to contact to SAG to ask whether this training was *essential* for stewards. SAG confirmed not essential, stewards to clear the area and call the fire brigade in the event of a fire. EMP to be amended accordingly [done].
10. Those erecting the lights again in 2024 are to review and sign a revised Method Statement and Risk Assessment (to be circulated shortly). Both documents emailed to M Field and G Christy on 23.1.24 for approval. Comments received from G Christy. Chairman to confirm his approval. Further reminder sent on 15 May and 2.7.24. M Field confirmed his approval on 15.7.24 and the Clerk circulated the documents to D Fortuna and A Simpson for comments. A Simpson confirmed approval on 22.7.24. DF confirmed approval on 5.8.24. The Clerk had issued those erecting the lights with the Risk Assessments and Method Statement to read and sign. All were duly signed and returned to the Clerk on 19.8.24.

## **Finance / Fund-Raising / Collections / Sponsorship**

1. March Town Council has committed £20,000 in its 2024/2025 budget for Christmas-related expenditure, representing a reduction of £7,500 p.a. More emphasis must be placed on fund-raising activities going forward.

In previous years a maximum of £7,500 has been paid out to helpers. All payments were subject to recipients signing a receipt acknowledging that they were responsible for their

- own tax and national insurance. (Dan's received by Clerk on 5.2.24). Alan and Nigel's forms handed to Clerk on 18.3.24. The final payout to helpers for 2023 (which included use of the cherry picker) was £6,000 - given that there were no lights in Broad Street etc due to the regeneration works. Octavius' specialist contractor will be erecting the new lights in Broad Street in 2024.
3. Kelly Riddell at Tesco ([UK5657@tesco.com](mailto:UK5657@tesco.com)) confirmed that the weekend of Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 November was available for a collection at the Hostmoor store.
  4. G Christy to liaise with Lidl re the possibility of a collection/bag pack. Sainsbury had failed to respond to any requests in 2023 once again. G Christy confirmed that Lidl's were happy to support and would ask the army cadets whether they can attend. R Burry confirmed that the army cadets were happy to assist with a Lidl's collection. Committee discussed that November would be optimum month for a collection (avoiding Remembrance and the Tesco collection, of course!).
  5. G Christy to purchase new card readers now that the Friends of March Christmas Lights bank account had been set up and Money Laundering Policy and Procedure for Identifying Donors had been drafted. Last year the bank decided at the eleventh hour that it required a Power of Attorney and this did not give the committee enough time to get the application process and authorised in time for the switch-on event. G Christy confirmed a new card reader had been ordered from Lloyds Bank. **The reader has not yet been received.**
  6. Sponsorship opportunities should be explored for 2024. G Christy to lead, with all committee members tasked with exploring any opportunities for funding. G Christy had identified a number of potential sponsors. It is going to be crucial to obtain sufficient sponsorship to cover the costs of the 2024 event. **G Christy will speak to Octavius this week.**
  7. To boost fund-raising activities, a Just Giving page could be set up again this year and QR codes generated (M Field).
  8. It is hoped that the Air Cadets would be able to support with the Tesco collection and stewarding duties at the switch-on once again in 2024. **R Kidger confirmed this on 19.8.24.**
  9. R Burry to liaise with Kelly Summersell to enquire whether the Army Cadets would be able to help this year. R Burry advised that Kelly has now moved on, but she has a new contact for the March branch (Tracy Ranger) and will forward to the Chairman to progress. Chair will call again this week. Tracy Ranger had advised R Burry that they were happy to help at the switch-on event.

## Stewards

1. Steward recruitment continues to be a priority for the event. More stewards must be sourced and available to help on the night to allow the event to run smoothly and safely. Facebook recruitment campaign to commence in the late Spring. M Field has taken over Facebook. Without additional stewards the switch-on event ***cannot*** happen. R Burry

advised that there had been contact via Facebook from a potential committee member/steward. See “Communications / Advertising / Social Media” (below)

2. All stewards will now be DBS checked. This process had commenced in 2023.
3. Stewards to wear high visibility clothing – vests, hats, sashes and lanyards. Waterproof torches had kindly been donated by Wrights Tools in 2023. The illuminated beany hats had worked very well, allowing stewards to be easily identified. M Purser to order hats. Hats ordered.
4. S Rayner advised that the trollies needed repairing and he would arrange this. Chair to chase. M Field had arranged with D Fortuna on 15.7.24 to check the storeroom and take the damaged trollies to S Rayner for repair.
5. The Committee now have approximately 20 radios. These will be tested for efficacy in noisy locations in due course and must all be in full working order prior to the 2024 event. M Purser to explore new ear-piece options following reports of discomfort. New ‘D’ ear-pieces ordered.
6. Skoulding Suite steward refreshments; It was considered that tea and coffee and perhaps some sausage rolls would be enough this year.

## **Entertainment / Fairground / Catering / Refreshments**

1. Clerk contacted Lisa Hedges re fair rides and food stalls (██████████) on 17.1.24 and confirmed the date of the 2024 switch-on.
2. John Whitehead (██████████) confirmed by email on 17.1.24 that he will be available for MC duties at the event once again this year.
3. Duncan Partington (██████████). Duncan and his band are regrettably retiring after 11 years of entertaining at the event.  
Clerk to approach Tom Harlock regarding availability. Emailed on 23.1.24. Quote received on 23.1.24. Decision to be taken by committee to authorise acceptance of the quote which is considerably over-budget on previous year’s entertainment expenditure. Clerk had confirmed booking with Tom 27.2.24 (band only, not the sound and light crew).
4. K Nightingale of 20Twenty Productions to be contacted regarding its involvement in the event as per 2023 (Chairman to liaise). Chair had invited K Nightingale to the meeting on 17.6.24 but she did not attend. M Field had struggled to arrange a time to meet K Nightingale, who was now away for a month. There had been discussions about a World-War-themed projector display on the Town Hall, if funding could be secured. **The Clerk advised that K Nightingale was back in the country so a meeting could be set up to progress this.**
5. The Clerk contacted Derek Rutter (March Lions) regarding provision of a Father Christmas and sleigh on 17.1.24. [Tentative yes]



6. New PPL/PRS licenses for Broad Street [and also West End Park] purchased by Clerk in December 2023. The licence has a start date of 1 November 2018 (and has no expiry date).
7. The Committee resolved that Father Christmas would switch on the lights and the Mayor would be invited to attend the event.
8. Scouts and Cadets to be offered a stall at the switch-on. R Burry had emailed C Elkin and R Kidger (scouts and cadets, respectively). The air cadets will not be requiring a stall. The scouts have asked if they can provide food. RB to liaise with C Elkin to ensure that the scouts have the requisite food safety certificates etc before we can agree to this. **There has ben no response from C Elkin in this regard. M Purser with contact him.**
9. R Phipps mentioned to the committee that he had been advised that no vehicles could be parked on the public realm area of Broad Street. This has implications for the fairground rides etc. Clerk to verify directly with the project team soonest. Clerk contacted FDC project team [Matt] on 18.6.24 to clarify the position. Vehicles not exceeding 7.5 tonnes (7,500kg) could use the public realm area without issue. Any vehicles bigger than this using the paved area we would have to be liable for any repair/damage costs to CCC property. **Chair to contact Lisa this week (w/c 19.8.24) and advise Lisa of the limitations so that fairground rides and attractions could be selected accordingly based on the recommended loading. Site visit to be arranged.**

## **Communications / Advertising / Social Media**

Facebook and social media communication usage/advertising must improve to raise awareness about the event and fund-raising activities, to share information and recruit/attract volunteers/stewards without which, the committee **would not be able to continue** to provide Christmas Lights or a switch-on event in the town. Chairman to review and update the Facebook page and remove all external, non-Christmas light related posts/adverts.

**R Burry had posted on the Christmas Lights Facebook page to ask for stewards to help on 29.11.24, but had used the poster that the Clerk had produced in 2022 which carried the wrong date and would potentially confuse readers. The Clerk would have a Word version of the poster that could be amended with the correct date.**

**The Chair will write a press release raising awareness about the desperate lack of/need for stewards. If more stewards cannot be recruited on a volunteer basis, the event will not be able to go ahead and this would be incredibly sad for the town.**

## **Miscellaneous**

1. The Clerk contacted Lynn McGhee, Branch Manager, of Ridgeons/Huwsgray regarding the loan of steps for the trailer once again (██████). Lynn confirmed on 17.1.24 that we can rely on their continued support in 2024.
2. John Thomas (01945 450555) confirmed they would loan a trailer once again in 2024 for the Market Place.
3. The Christmas Shop Window competition remains suspended for the foreseeable future. The “Best Decorated House” competition is also discontinued due to lack of interest and

rising cost of living/energy prices. It was agreed that the grotto should not be re-instated for 2024.

4. A generous donation of £376.41 had been received from Turner & Son from a collection at the funeral of the late Mick Beer. The Clerk had thanked wife Sue for this kind donation as well as their many years of hard work in connection with March Christmas lights.
5. M Purser suggested that John Dowler wished to join the Committee.

**Date of Next Meeting:**

Monday 16 September 2024 at 7.45pm in The Skoulding Suite at March Town Hall.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8:45pm.

Councillor G Christy ..... 7 October 2024  
Mayor of March.