

CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL
COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

COMMITTEE:	Community Committee		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	29 January 2025 7.00 pm	LOCATION	Town Hall
REPORT FROM	Rachel McCarthy, Town Centre and Events Manager		
AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE	12 Congleton Christmas Switch-on Report		
Background	<p>Christmas Lights Switch-on is an annual event by Congleton Town Council; the event has followed a similar format for the last four years. The purpose of this report is to outline the challenges faced by CTC staff during the 2025 Christmas Switch-On event, and to provide context for the proposed changes for the 2026 event.</p> <p>Format of the event held in '25.</p> <p>Road closures have been in effect on Mill Street, Swan Bank, High Street, the Moody Street entrance off High Street, and the upper entrance to Market Street. These arrangements have been in place for the past three years.</p> <p>The event operated from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm. Market stalls were located within the pedestrian area, along Swan Bank and High Street.</p> <p>The main stage was positioned at the lower end of Moody Street, with a community stage at the top of Swan Bank showcasing performances from local schools and choirs.</p> <p>Street entertainment included stilt walkers, a giant “Elf on the Shelf,” Stormtroopers, and comedy elves. The Town Hall was open throughout the event and hosted a children’s zone, including Santa’s grotto.</p>		
The Plan	<p>1. Christmas Lights</p> <p>Decorating the Town: The Town Council owns the lights to decorate the town. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three across street road catenary lights, (‘Merry Christmas Congleton’ light needs to be repaired) • 24 lamp-post lights with two different designs • Icicle lighting for the pedestrian area and Little Street • Lights for the front of the Town Hall • Main large Christmas Tree Lights <p>The colour scheme is silver and gold. The lights are all LED. The pedestrian area's icicle lighting requires replacement, and the four trees within the pedestrian area for the 2026 Christmas season. Rachel is currently obtaining quotes for</p>		

300m of lighting and the trees.

In addition to the festive lighting, local shops are encouraged to purchase small Christmas trees to be installed above their premises. This scheme operates similarly to the hanging baskets programme. Participating businesses cover the cost of the tree, provide the lighting and electricity supply, and pay an additional £10 fee to CTC for installation and removal. Typically, approximately 90 trees are installed above shops each year.

For 2026, a revised approach to the installation of Christmas trees within the town centre is being explored. The current use of small individual trees is highly time-consuming, as each requires separate lighting installation for individual businesses. In addition, updated health and safety requirements mean ladders can no longer be used, as in previous years.

For the 2025 event, installation and removal were undertaken using a cherry picker supplied by PME Maintenance, at a cost of £800 for installation and £800 for removal.

To address these issues, the option of using artificial pre-lit trees is being investigated, either through hire or purchase from a specialist supplier. This would significantly reduce installation and de-rig time, eliminate the need for working at height, and improve operational efficiency.

Artificial pre-lit trees would also provide a consistent, high-quality appearance across the town centre and offer a more sustainable solution through reuse over multiple years.

Further details, including cost comparisons, will be reported once supplier options have been fully assessed.

[. Festive - Christmas Trees - Plantscape festive display providers](#)

2. Main Tree - PME Maintenance Ltd has provided the tree, as per the Christmas contract, which is due for renewal this year.

3. Switch-on Event 2026

- The proposed date for the 2026 Christmas Lights Switch-on is Friday 27 November, with the lights scheduled to be illuminated at 6:00pm.
- Revised road closures are proposed for 2026 to improve traffic flow and reduce disruption. Mill Street and Swan Bank will remain open. Closures will include the lower section of Canal Street from the Chapel Street junction, Lawton Street up to the junction with Bank Street (near Congleton Oatcakes), and Kinsey Street.
- The main stage will again be located at the bottom of Moody Street, as this location has proven successful. A community stage will be

	<p>positioned at the bottom of the Canal Street entrance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Santa’s grotto will be located in the Town Hall, alongside the children’s zone, following the success of this arrangement in previous years. Children’s fairground rides will be situated in the Fairground car park. • The pedestrian area will not host CTC-organised stalls in 2026 due to previous conflicts with four local businesses. A varied programme of street and stage entertainment will be booked. • The traditional lantern parade will continue to form a key part of the event. Congleton Community Projects will again deliver lantern-making workshops throughout November, with CTC supporting accessible workshops through ticketing via TicketSource and use of the Town Hall as a venue. The parade remains highly successful and well attended. <p>4. Christmas Window Dressing Competition - 1st, 2nd and 3rd certificates awarded with small cash prizes of £30, £20 and £10; other businesses were allocated certificates of Highly Commended and Commended.</p> <p>The Christmas Team for 2025 was made up of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CTC staff x 10 • Councillors x 7 • Volunteers x 14 • Rotary x 6
<p>Problems</p>	<p>Unfortunately, the 2025 event involved a number of difficult and, at times, unsafe situations for staff, largely due to conflict with local businesses and members of the public. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two businesses located within the pedestrianised area raised concerns with CTC staff regarding stall placement. Five members of staff were approached on this matter. The business owners felt stalls were obstructing their businesses’ frontages. Staff interactions continued, and it became challenging in nature. • In addition, two businesses on the High Street, which had not booked or paid for designated gazebo spaces, expressed concerns to three CTC staff members. These were related to the proximity of a fairground ride located approximately 20 feet away and the impact on the outlook from their premises. There was no obstruction to access or frontage, and the attraction was generating increased footfall and family engagement in the area. The basis for these concerns was not fully clear. • Following the conclusion of the event, while staff were undertaking litter picking and maintaining road closures to ensure public safety during stall breakdown, a serious incident occurred. A vehicle unlawfully entered the closed road, deliberately moved traffic cones, and drove towards a member of staff, who had to jump out of the way to avoid being struck. The driver

	<p>then proceeded to verbally abuse another staff member. This incident posed a significant risk to staff safety.</p> <p>We are sharing these incidents to ensure a full understanding of the pressures and risks faced by CTC staff during the 2025 event. The proposed changes to road closures for the 2026 Christmas Switch-On are intended to reduce conflict, improve safety, and create a more controlled environment for staff, businesses, and the public alike.</p> <p>We hope this provides clarity on the reasoning behind the proposed changes and helps foster understanding of the operational challenges involved in delivering large-scale town centre events safely.</p> <p>The Congleton Lights Switch-on typically attracts several thousand visitors to the town centre, supporting local businesses and providing an evening of low-cost entertainment for families. The success of the event relies on the cooperation of the whole community, with businesses, residents, and organisers working together and demonstrating a spirit of compromise.</p>
<p>Financial</p>	<p>The event is funded by the Town Council, which sets aside a budget for the event. Further funding can be obtained through sponsorship and funds from the sales of the shop front trees. The spend to date for the Lights Switch on event is £14,255. The Town Council has a budget of £6,000, which is put towards the event, and the remainder is raised through sponsorship of £3,800 stall fees and Christmas trees.</p>
<p>Equality and Diversity</p>	<p>We aim to make the event accessible, with quiet zones, accessible toilets, and a live-stream of the main stage available inside the Town Hall, plus an inclusive area inside The Space. Work will continue with the Equal Access Advisory group to make improvements.</p>
<p>Decision Requested</p>	<p>To note the report and agree to the changes proposed above for the 2026 event.</p>