

THE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS IN FELIXSTOWE

REPORT TO THE CIVIC AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE SEPTEMBER 2020

The Lions Club was formed in 1978 by a group of men who could no longer stay in Round Table as the maximum age was forty. They decided to take over the erection of the town's Christmas Lights as their first project, as apparently they had not been lit in the previous two years.

The Lions Club has maintained and erected the lights every year since, although the average age of the team is now closer to seventy than forty !

We give our time for free. We work just about every Thursday morning throughout the year on the lights in our workshop, kindly donated by the Council in the old Deben School in Garrison Lane, maintaining the existing scheme and building new displays.

The cost to the town of Felixstowe must be one of the cheapest in Suffolk (and the UK) for any scheme of this size, because of our free labour. In round numbers the lights cost £10,000 to erect compared to typically £30,000 in comparable towns.

The main provider of funds is the Town Council at £6750 per annum but over the last 40 plus years we have also relied on the town's traders to support us. In recent years this collection has resulted in a total donation of around £3,750. Ideally, as in other towns, the Chamber of Trade or similar body would raise the funds enabling us just to concentrate on erecting the lights but unfortunately we get effectively no support from the Chamber and have to spend our time raising funds from the high street traders and other sponsors.

Unfortunately this year the Covid crisis has meant we cannot have a switch-on ceremony on Saturday 28th November as planned due to the large crowd anticipated. However we are determined to erect the full Christmas Lights scheme. We anticipate a halving of revenue from the traders but with savings in material purchases (due to Covid related scarcity of supplies) and no costs for switch-on day we forecast a loss of £2000 compared to a surplus of £2000 last year, leaving a cash reserve reduced from £4000 to £2000. The reserve is needed for cashflow to buy materials in the first months of the year before the Council grant arrives.

Although our core team consists of highly experienced electricians they no longer have certification to work as electricians as they are all retired and so we employ a professional electrician to examine and test our work before and after erection. Other major costs include the hire of cherry pickers and their insurance, materials to maintain and upgrade the lights, various fees to government departments, the Christmas Tree, and printing costs for the programme.

In summary, we request no increase in funding for 2021 but hope the Council will agree to continue at £6750. We also ask you to bear in mind our workshop and store in the old Deben School Sports Hall will have to move in 2021 or soon after to allow the development of the site. At present we have no idea where we could move to.

David Hedges, Lighting Director

The Lions Club of Felixstowe