

AT A MEETING- of the -  
**ILLUMINATIONS WORKING GROUP**  
held at the Council House, Walsall on  
**Monday 22 January 2007** at 6.00 p.m.

**PRESENT**

Councillor Towe (Chair)  
Councillor Beeley  
Councillor Beilby  
Councillor Bott  
Councillor Griffiths  
Councillor K.Phillips  
Councillor Sanders (Arboretum Champion)

**ALSO PRESENT**

Mr. W.J. Jones	WJ Jones & Sons Amusements
Mr W. Jones	WJ Jones & Sons Amusements
Mrs. S. Jones	WJ Jones & Sons Amusements
Mr. C. Machin	Arboretum users group
Mr. B. Jenkins	Arboretum users group
Mr. J. Llewellyn	Arboretum users group

**OFFICERS PRESENT**

Tim Challans	Assistant Director for Leisure Culture and Lifelong Learning
Graham Hood	Head of Green Spaces
Chris Gregory	Town Centre Manager
Mike Parrott	Group Co-ordinator Arts & Development
Antonia Pompa	Promotions & Events Manager
Stuart Bentley	Scrutiny Officer

4/2006. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Burley, Ault and Harrison. Apologies were also received on behalf of Mr. P. Gooch.

5/2006. **MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP**

Councillor Phillips suggested that a representative of each Local Neighbourhood Partnership be invited to join the group. She also suggested that Councillor Young be invited to join as she was a daily user of the Arboretum and she felt her input would be valuable. Finally she suggested that a representative from New Deal should be invited to take part.

Councillor Sanders suggested Councillor Harris should be invited to join, as his professional input would be valuable. Councillor Phillips felt that Councillor Harris might have a conflict of interest. Councillor Towe suggested that he could be invited to give his advice rather than being a full member of the panel. Mr. Jenkins agreed that

Councillor Harris could help to move things forward. He also suggested that Councillor Madeley should be invited as he also had a great deal of knowledge with regards to the Arboretum.

Chris Gregory suggested that the newly formed Town Centre Management Partnership could be included.

Councillor Bott suggested that Centro and the Police should be involved in the discussions of the group.

Councillor Sanders also suggested that Youth Opinions Unite, or some such agency, representatives from the primary schools and representatives from the disabled should also be involved.

Tim Challans stated that, although all the suggested names would have a valid input, the numbers of people were growing rapidly and the panel ran the risk of becoming too large and unwieldy. He suggested that the group think about splitting into sub-groups. Antonia Pompa extended this idea by suggesting that 4 sub-groups be formed to address the 4 key objectives outlined in the cabinet report; securing investment, developing the Illuminations, enhancing status, and doubling the economic impact. Councillor Towe asked if this could be arranged and Antonia Pompa replied that it could be.

Councillor Phillips suggested that the next meeting should be a large event where those involved could be invited to split up into the suggested group. There was general agreement that this was a good idea.

Tim Challans stated that there were, however, some decisions that needed to be made at this meeting. Councillor Towe agreed that this was the case.

### AGREED

That a further meeting of the Illuminations Working Group be arranged to include all interested parties and for the meeting to include break-out sessions to address the four key objectives as listed in the report to cabinet – 20 December 2006.

### 5/2006. DATES OF OPENING AND LINKAGE TO THE TOWN

Councillor Towe stated that the group had previously come to an agreement that the Illuminations would open at autumn half-term, 20 October, and run into December.

Mr. Jones pointed out that December generally saw a number of free light displays in towns and cities around the area, which could detract from Walsall Illuminations offer. He also suggested that parking and the state of the foot paths in the Arboretum would also be an issue.

Councillor Phillips suggested that the group defer its decision until it had further input from stakeholders. She also suggested that the linkage to the town centre should be emphasised and the offer expanded.

Councillor Bott stated that travel costs from deprived areas would be a factor and he felt that Christmas would take priority over the Illuminations for people in these areas.

Councillor Sanders emphasised the need to try something different and asked when the officers needed to know by. Antonia Pompa replied that the first events show would be during early February, but the final decision could be left until late February before the major events show in early March. Councillor Sanders suggested that the dates could be set now and the group could discuss travel cost issue at a later date.

Chris Gregory stated that the Christmas lights were likely to be turned on during the third week in November, but an exact date had not yet been fixed. There was some debate about moving the switch-on into December, but there was now a definite opportunity to link the Illuminations with the town. Councillor Towe replied that he thought that link was vital. Chris Gregory added that the partners were keen to improve the link with the Christmas lights.

Councillor Phillips stated that people were willing to pay to visit Christmas markets in all weather conditions, such as Lichfield, Birmingham and Bourton-on-the-Water. Councillor Sanders stated that moving from September to October might even give better weather conditions as September was often a wetter month than October.

Councillor Griffiths stated that the linking with the town during the Christmas period could discourage people visiting the Illuminations as they will move through the lights in the town before being asked to pay at the Illuminations. Therefore, there was a need to look at the pricing policy. He added that there was a need to sell Walsall as a package and moving the Illuminations closer to Christmas could facilitate this.

Mr. Jones suggested that Illumination open the week before half-term in order to be fully up and running by the half-term week.

Councillor Sanders stated that a move to a later opening time would allow primary school children to see the lights much earlier in the evening. Councillor Phillips added that moving out of September would clash less with Blackpool Illuminations and Walsall could offer more. Councillor Griffiths agreed that the traders needed to broaden their offer.

Councillor Towe asked for any suggestions for a closing date. Chris Gregory stated that the usual scheme would see the Christmas lights following the Illuminations. Councillor Towe replied that there was a need for an added impact that an overlap could produce. Tim Challans added that extending the length of the Illuminations may only result in the same numbers attending, over a longer period, which would increase the overheads.

Councillor Sanders stated that the week before Christmas was often very busy so closing a couple of weeks before Christmas might be the better option. He suggested keeping to the 6-7 week opening times as he would prefer the event to be bursting at the seams rather than being half full.

Chris Gregory stated that there could be a negotiation with the town centre partnership if an overlap was planned and suggested that, if possible, items from the Illuminations could be moved into the town after the Illuminations close. Tim Challans added that town lights were expensive, but there was a realisation that the offer had to be improved. Chris Gregory replied that the partnership was working towards generating more money, but this was likely to be a lengthy process.

Antonia Pompa asked about the likelihood of the shops opening later during the Illuminations. Chris Gregory replied that it was not always easy and there was a need to negotiate on an individual basis. Councillor Sanders stated that businesses would have to come up with new ideas to attract business from the Illuminations.

Mr. Jones raised the issue of the street traders outside of the Illuminations. Councillor Towe agreed that the issue needed to be addressed and asked officers if they could clarify the legal position with regards to them. Antonia Pompa stated that any enforcement would need the backing of the police.

Councillor Sanders then mentioned the lottery bid for the Arboretum and suggested that the group could help inform the final content. Graham Hood stated that he could give a short presentation on the bid at the next meeting. Mr. Jenkins stressed that the environmental impact of the Illuminations on the Arboretum needed to be considered.

Councillor Sanders asked whether new technology could make the Illuminations less intrusive and less damaging to the Arboretum. Antonia Pompa replied that the lights were no longer placed in the trees, but she agreed that new technology could produce significant benefits, not least if it could facilitate leaving the structures up all year around, which would save on the costs of putting them up and taking them down each year.

#### AGREED

That the illuminations working group:

- Recommend that the Illuminations open on Saturday 20 October 2007.
- Defer its decision on the closing date for the Illuminations until the next meeting of the group (TBA).
- That officers clarify the legal position of the street traders and what can be done to tackle the issue.
- That Graham Hood presents a short overview of the Arboretum Lottery Bid at the next meeting of the group.

Their being no other business the meeting terminated at 7.15 p.m.