



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **For immediate release**

### **GODALMING TOWN COUNCIL SETS OUT ITS STALL**

On the same night Councillors reluctantly decided that they could no longer support the Town Centre Firework Display, they recommended an ambitious new programme of actions to address some of the issues that residents have told them are most important to them – protecting our environment, community safety and anti-social behaviour, youth provision, supporting local businesses, health, wellbeing and inclusion, engaging with residents and improving the Council's role in planning matters.

At a meeting held on Thursday, 5 September, Members of the Policy & Management Committee recommended a 47 point programme to go to the September meeting of the Full Council. In doing so Cllr Gerry Boyle (Binscombe Ward) said that “already in just 5 short months, this new Council administration has made a start on at least 26 of the 47 points highlighted”.

After the meeting Cllr Paul Follows, Leader of Godalming Town Council said, “This administration, made up of many parties, is working collaboratively to get things done, we are in a hurry to implement our ambitious programme. But whilst nobody wants to be a spoilsport, killjoy or sourpuss, as a responsible Council we must also look at the resources available and ask ourselves “can we do what we want to do with what we have got?” If the answer is no, we have to decide what it is we should do with what we have or whether we spend more to do everything we want to do. This was the choice facing Councillors when they decided not to proceed with this year's firework display in Godalming Town Centre which has consistently made a financial loss.”

A spokesperson for Godalming Town Council said, “The Council organises and supports a range of community events and whilst the level of support and resource provided varies between events, the Council believes that its support or involvement is a positive factor. The Council knows that events in the town play an important part of community life, however, it is equally important that the resource provided by the Town Council is proportionate to the community benefit.

Since 2016, the Council has delivered a firework display on The Bury's field, but unlike events such as Staycation, the Christmas Festival & Lights Switch-On or the Street Festivals that are free for residents to attend and enjoy, and which the Council's proposed programme of actions supports, the fireworks display is not a free event, there is a charge for residents to participate, which excludes many of our hard working families.

There are many challenges in holding a firework display in the town centre with one of the main difficulties being the significant infrastructure required to provide a secure exclusion zone around the firework site to prevent both inadvertent and deliberate incursion within the safety zone. With public safety being the overriding consideration, the staff resource required for this event is greater in both the amount of time and the number of staff involved. Whilst the Town Council does not believe its events should necessarily be viewed on the same profit/loss basis as commercial activities, it should be a reasonable expectation that events that have a revenue stream should at least cover their operating costs. However, although generating income via ticket sales (which last year were the most expensive in the area), concessions fees and sponsorship, over the last three years the town centre firework event has made a loss of £4,826. This loss is paid for by Godalming's Council Tax payers. But that is not the end of the story, organising the fireworks event has a higher staff resourcing impact than any other event (almost twice as much as Staycation) which is a hidden cost of approximately £4,733 per annum in staging the event. So the reality is that since 2016, three, 15 minute firework displays have cost the Council Tax payer in excess of £19,000 in real money and staff time to put on.

Whilst, a decision not to continue with this year's town centre firework event may cause some disappointment, residents still have a choice of other firework displays within the town, plus options for firework and bonfire events in nearby villages, all of which are run as fundraisers in support of community groups.

**Ends**

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