

Community Services and Assets Committee

Officer Report: Christmas Lighting Complaints and Proposed Community Response for 2026

Report of: Clerk / Proper Officer

Purpose: To update Members on complaints received about Christmas lighting in Chigwell Row and to suggest a practical parish wide response for 2026 in the absence of funding for additional Council lighting.

Complaint update

The Council received five very similar letters submitted as formal complaints on behalf of residents of Chigwell Row. The letters requested “modest central” Christmas lighting along the parade of shops, arguing this would support local businesses and address perceived unequal treatment when compared with other areas.

The complaints were logged in the usual way. A response was issued to all complainants within 72 hours. Nothing further has been received since.

Council position and context

The response set out the Council’s position clearly.

Christmas lighting in Epping is not provided or funded by this Parish Council. The response also explained the difference between the overall council tax bill and the parish precept, which is the only element the Parish Council receives and uses to fund parish services and assets.

The Parish Council’s current Christmas lighting at Brook Parade and the tree on Station Green is permanent infrastructure, installed by a previous council at a cost of over £25,000, with annual costs for testing, maintenance and repairs. It was intended as a central display for the benefit of residents across the whole parish, rather than ward by ward. Station Green is parish owned land and is the established focal point for community gatherings and celebrations through the year.

Officers explained that expanding permanent lighting into other locations would require significant capital works, particularly where power supply and associated works are needed and would create ongoing maintenance liabilities. If permanent lighting were installed in both Chigwell Row and Grange Hill, costs could easily be £40,000 or more, plus ongoing annual costs.

Chigwell Row previously had blue and white lamp post lights under a three year lease arrangement set up in 2020/21, costing around £5,000 per year. The Council does not have the budget to lease or purchase additional lighting across Chigwell Row and Grange Hill without a material increase in residents’ contributions and there is no spare funding available given existing commitments, including essential works associated with Victory Hall and the community hub.

Members should also note the difference in scale when considering the business support point raised. Chigwell Row’s retail frontage is small, currently two shops plus a Chinese restaurant and an Indian restaurant. Brook Parade, by comparison, is over twenty shops and a much larger concentration of premises. This does not change the budget position, but it is relevant background.

Budget and fairness for 2026

There is no budget provision for additional Christmas lighting in 2026 beyond maintaining the existing permanent installations and meeting safety and testing requirements. As the Council

cannot fund additional lighting across the parish, officers do not recommend installing Council funded lighting in one ward only.

Proposed community response for 2026

In the absence of Parish funding for new lighting, officers suggest a positive parish wide alternative that helps every ward take part.

Officers propose a Christmas lights and decorations competition for 2026, promoted by ward councillors and supported by officers through Council communications. It would be designed to be friendly, inclusive and low cost with the same categories in each ward so that every part of the parish can be recognised.

A workable set of categories could be best decorated house, best group of homes and best road in each ward. Recognition can be certificates and publicity. Any small prizes, if Members wish, could be donated or sponsored rather than funded by the precept. Officers can support with nominations, publicity and practical guidance, while ward councillors are best placed to encourage participation locally and support judging arrangements.

Recommendation:

That the CSAC committee:

NOTE the complaints and the Council's position

RECOMMENDS to Full Council that it **AGREES** the following.

The introduction of a parish wide Christmas lights and decorations competition for Christmas 2026, led by councillors and supported through Council communications.