

Cost of Christmas is a 'bit deer' in Ratho and Currie



Christmas is a great time for kindling community spirit around a brightly lit Christmas tree put up in a central location in a neighbourhood. At least that's what they think in Ratho and Currie where they are trying to get this organised.

But there is a snag.

And as usual, it appears that the snag is money. However it is not the cost of the tree itself, but the cost to be charged by the council simply to light it up.

The council has estimated that it would cost around £1000 to £1500 per tree to run a supply to light just one tree. In Currie they want to use the living tree next to Currie Library, so the cost of lighting the tree along with the electricity connection (guesstimated by the council at £300) would total around £2000.

We admit that the council has a budget and it has to cut corners, but this all seems a bit too dear (or is that deer).

The Edinburgh Reporter spoke to Allister McKillop of the Currie Community Council who has been trying to get a Christmas tree to light up Currie for some time.

Mr McKillop said: "As a small community we are trying to foster a real sense of belonging and one of our original goals as a relatively newly elected council was to get a Currie Christmas Tree. Sadly, what I thought would be a relatively easy process has turned into a bit of a nightmare. We have never had lights in Currie so it's time!

“When the council quoted these ridiculous amounts I honestly thought they had misunderstood our request. All we want are lights to brighten up and create a focus point during the festive season. We have plans in place for a candlelit choir led procession as the first in numerous local events all centered around our lovely library building. Bringing schools, churches and other community groups together both as a fund raising opportunity but more importantly to help bring the various groups together in a common goal.

“We are not asking for a tree or assistance from the council in setting up the lights, only that they provide direct access to electric power and the lights themselves. Our community are happy to do the actual work. We will use a live tree for environmental reasons.

“Being a cash poor community council asking us to pay for a service offered to others in Edinburgh for free seems totally irresponsible and unfair.

“We are currently in contact with our local Round Table and various local business to see if we can raise funds but this is a huge amount of money, especially for what is (for the lucky few) a free service.

“The council must recognise that Edinburgh encompasses more than just its core and from discussion with other local communities we all feel hard done by. This extends further than the Christmas tree to transport, local amenities, road safety and various other issues that other residents can take for granted.

“Sadly it would appear Christmas spirit will not extend to Currie this year. Luckily the Round Table organise a Santa. We are not asking for the world just the ability to light up at least ONE tree to create a hub, a centre to allow local group activities and bring a little magic to Currie in December. Is this to much to ask? Apparently yes.

“I made a promise at my first meeting as Chair, in November 2013, that Currie would have a Christmas tree in 2014 and would love to make my wish come true!”

Undaunted by the council's estimates on the cost, Mr McKillop has since confirmed to The Edinburgh Reporter that the community council are planning to go ahead with their plans for a candlelit procession (with LED candles) at the beginning of December when they also hope to light up the tree at the Library – using batteries!

In Ratho the primary school children have really wanted a tree with lights for some time. There used to be a tree in the village but it was vandalised. A couple of years ago Ratho Primary Parent Council got together to try and put up a tree for the children in the village. They got a donation of £50 from the community council which, together with some help from Scotmid, allowed them to buy a tree with some lights which was then put up in the beer garden at The Bridge Inn who kindly supplied the electricity. A switching on ceremony was held with carol singing and the warm fuzzy feeling that developed from the community getting together meant that they tried to do the same thing again the following year.

They wanted to put up a tree somewhere more prominent in Ratho and chose the space outside the pharmacy, but despite discussions with the council beginning in August 2013 about the electricity supply, they could not get it organised in time. So last year a larger tree donated by Hopetoun Estate was put up once more at The Bridge Inn.

Undeterred, the group behind the tree have engaged the assistance of their local councillor Bill Henderson in getting an electricity supply organised for this year, particularly to find out how much it might cost and then do some fundraising.

Again they planned to use the grassy patch outside the pharmacy, but the council decided that the area was not big

enough for a tree, either a temporary or a live one. The council encouraged the parent group to put up semi-permanent lights on the existing trees instead. Having agreed to do this, the group then asked what would be needed. The council advised that the cost of providing the power supply from a streetlight would be about £300.

But last month the council reassessed their position and advised that the amount would actually be £1500 per tree.

Neil Langhorn chair of the parent council said: "There is no way that we can raise this amount of money in time and there's a serious question about whether it would be value for money or indeed a priority. The children cannot understand why some parts of the city have lights installed at the expense of the council but not Ratho?"

"It is too late to raise funds for this year even if we wanted to, and probably too late to arrange something else. It therefore looks like the children (and other residents) of Ratho will be without a Christmas tree or lights again this year."



Councillor Bill Henderson said: " There are three trees which would mean a potential cost of £4,500 and this doesn't include the electricity feed. This was guessed at about £300 but I suspect that this is a vast underestimate if my experience is Currie is anything to go by. There, I was quoted £1,000 for the 'considerable' distance of 16 metres. Needless to say the community would find it difficult to raise in excess of £5,000 and questions are being asked as to why other areas get trees & lights provided free. I have asked for more information on this but so far I haven't had a response."