Title of Report:	**Festive Light Upgrade**
Committee Report Submitted To:	**Environmental Services Committee**
Date of Meeting:	**12th April 2022**
For Decision or For Information	**For Decision**

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and enhancing our environment and assets
Outcome	Continued maintenance of Festive Lighting Provision
Lead Officer	Head of Estates

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£198,500 (Year 1)
Included in Current Year Estimates	Yes
Capital/Revenue	Capital
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:

1.0 Upgrade to festive lighting

Since 2015 Council has upgraded and improved the festive lighting systems in Limavady, Ballycastle, Dungiven, Ballykelly and Bushmills. Given the fragility and the extremes of weather to which they are subjected, it is now necessary to consider the older schemes in Ballymoney, Coleraine, Garvagh, Kilrea, Portstewart and Portrush.

Members have also expressed a desire to consider the option to replace traditional trees with artificial trees. This report also asks Members to consider the provision of Christmas trees to smaller rural settlements.

2.0 Background

2.1 In 2013 Ballymoney BC replaced the entire town centre festive lighting display with new features and strings incorporating energy efficient LED bulbs to replace the older traditional incandescent lighting which was no longer fit for purpose. There were also upgrades to the electrical infrastructure. The following year a similar exercise took place in Coleraine, Portrush, Portstewart, Garvagh, Kilrea and Bushmills.

2.2 In the intervening years costs for the maintenance of these systems at these locations has increased as they suffer from the extremes of weather and general wear and tear. Typical issues include breakdown of water tight seals and rusting of metal components. Given their age, condition and increasing problems (including increased complaints), it will be more cost effective to replace the lights rather than continue with ad hoc repair. To keep costs down some of the existing alloy frames which support the various motifs will be retained and their defective lights replaced with new lights.

2.3 As well as considering the upgrade of the lighting systems this proposal also includes improvements to the support infrastructure, electrical supply and considers the replacement of ‘natural’ trees with artificial alternatives.

3.0 Proposals

3.1 The proposal is to carry out this work on a phased basis over 4 years. The attached Table 1A shows the make -up of the estimated costs. Note that some costs (infrastructure and power supplies) must be carried out to meet DFI Roads Service requirements and safety standards. Also attached is a picture of the proposed artificial tree for information.

3.2 Note that the proposed artificial trees are at the ‘upper end’ in terms of quality and appearance comparing favorably to natural trees hence their cost. Cheaper trees are available but as the price comes down so does the quality and resemblance to real trees.

3.3 One of the perceived benefits of artificial trees is their potential to be more sustainable and environmentally friendly. However, the following points should be considered:

a) According to the British Carbon Trust, a natural tree that ends up as firewood has a 3.5kg CO2 footprint. If it ends up decomposing in a waste dump, its' footprint significantly increases to 16kg. The carbon footprint of a comparable artificial tree is larger, reaching 40kg of CO2 so it will be more sustainable if re-utilised for at least 12 years compared to a natural one which ends up being burnt. Other studies indicate that it may take up to 20 years for an artificial tree to match a natural tree.

b) Artificial trees usually travel further which raises their carbon footprint. Re-cycling of these trees generate much more CO2 than burning a natural tree. As they grow natural trees also have the benefit of absorbing CO2.

c) In summary, the 'natural' versus 'artificial' carbon debate has no definitive answer. It will depend on a range of variables, including whether or not natural trees are composted or burnt, age, the source of the artificial tree and the number of years of its' re-use.

3.4 Members may also wish to take this opportunity to consider the ongoing provision of trees to rural communities. Outside of the larger towns on the attached table 1, trees have been supplied to another 30 locations (Table 2). Points to consider include:

a) Given that Council have been supplying trees and lights for many years, it may now be prudent to review this provision. In many locations there was greater community involvement but this appears to have waned in recent years in some areas.

b) Council spend approximately £1000 per location buying, installing, lighting, maintaining and removing these trees

c) In many locations the tree is the only sign that it is Christmas and can look 'lost' in the absence of other festive presentations

d) In many cases the current lighting to the trees is unsatisfactory and does not help their presentation. Should Council wish to continue supplying trees then it will take approximately £1000 per location to upgrade the lights.

3.5 Members may wish to have a review/consultation carried out with residents to ascertain whether or not Council should continue to supply rural trees. This may include:

a) Continue to supply a tree
b) Continue to supply a tree and upgrade the tree lighting

c) Stop supplying a tree but provide a grant to allow communities to provide their own festive offering eg. Christmas party
d) Stop supplying a tree/funding where there is a lack community involvement/interest.

4.0 Options

4.1 Do nothing. Festive lighting continues to degrade. No further investment will result in gaps in existing displays. Ad hoc repairs are becoming uneconomical tying up resource between November and January and will prove more expensive in the long term. Elements of schemes will not be allowed to be erected without work to infrastructure and power supplies. Public complaints continue to rise.

4.2 Upgrade lighting as per attached table over the next 4 years including purchase and installation of artificial trees (see attached image)

4.3 Upgrade lighting as per attached table over next 4 years but do not purchase and install artificial trees (retain natural trees).

4.4 Upgrade lighting as per attached table over the next 4 years including purchase and installation of artificial trees to 4 main town centres only.

4.5 Consider the on-going provision of rural trees.

4.6 Members may have other options

5.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Environmental Services Committee considers festive lighting provision, the potential to use artificial rather than natural trees, provision of trees to rural communities and recommends to Council their preferred options.

Table 1A

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Location	**Year**	**Upgrade Cost**	**Total**	**Artificial Tree**	**Height**	**Total**	**22/23**	**23/24**	**24/25**	**25/26**
Ballymone	2013	35,000	88000	25,000	7.8m	138,000	**138000**			
Coleraine	2014	53,000		25,000	7.8m					
Portrush	2014	18,000	74000	20,000	6m	154,000		**154000**		
Portstewar	2014	18,000		20,000	6m					
Garvagh	2014	14,000		20,000	6m					
Kilrea	2014	24,000		20,000	6m					
Bushmills	2016	6,000	29000	20,000	6m	74,000			**74000**	
Ballycastle	2016	23,000		25,000	7.8m					
Limavady	2017	61,000	76000	25,000	7.8m	141,000				**141000**
Ballykelly	2017	6,000		20,000	6m					
Dungiven	2017	9,000		20,000	6m					
Power Supplies		20,000	20000			20,000	**20000**			
Infrastructure										
Bmoney		16,500	16,500			16,500	**40500**			
Garvagh		16,500	16,500			16,500				
Coleraine		7,500	7,500			7,500				
		327,500	327,500	240,000			**198,500**	**154,000**	**74,000**	**141,000**

Table 1B

	22/23	**23/24**	**24/25**	**25/26**
Option 4.2	**£198,500**	**£154,000**	**£74,000**	**£141,000**
Option 4.3	**£148,500**	**£74,000**	**£29,000**	**£76,000**
Option 4.4	**£198,500**	**£74,000**	**£54,000**	**£101,000**

Table 2

	Location	Population	Tree Supplied by Council
1	Cushendun	131	Yes
2	Cushendall	1,363	Yes
3	Mosside	270	Yes
4	Armoy	1,122	Yes
5	Ballintoy	165	Yes
6	Liscolman	226	Yes
7	Ballyvoy	72	Yes
8	Waterfoot	524	No
9	Rathlin	75	Yes
10	Burnfoot	450	Yes
11	Feeny	690	Yes
12	Magilligan	2,487	Yes
13	Drumsurn	357	Yes
14	Foreglen	285	Yes
15	Greysteel	1,229	Yes
16	Ballybogey	539	Yes
17	Derrykeighan	136	Yes
18	Dervock	714	Yes
19	Stranocum	297	Yes
20	Loughguile	396	Yes
21	Cloughmills	1,309	Yes
22	Dunloy	1,215	Yes
23	Rasharkin	1,114	Yes
24	Bendooragh	622	Yes
25	Balnamore	900	Yes
26	Killyrammer	391	Yes
27	Castlerock	1,287	Yes
28	Windyhall	697	Yes
29	Glebeside	651	Yes
30	Portballintrae	734	Yes