

Lighting up the big High Street trees has been taken over from Tenterden Chamber of Commerce by the town council.

That followed the disappearance of all the lights from where they were being stored in 2012, which led to a fundraising drive by the chamber for replacements. Around £15,000 was raised. Last year, the town made national headlines when the chamber tested the new lights in one tree in August. Tenterden was accused of putting up its lights four months early.

TV and radio presenter Penny Smith agreed to switch on the 2013 display after taking part in a television debate on the subject with chamber member Richard Harvey.

Her appearance drew hundreds of people to the town. Ten of the 22 trees were lit last year.

**Pictured: Penny Smith turns on the lights last year**



# Row breaks out as Christmas lights costs split council



**Cllr Mike Carter: 'Let's get the job done once and for all'**



**Cllr Mike Pearson: 'Doing it over three years is reasonable'**

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Town councillors clashed in a furious row over how much to spend on Tenterden's Christmas lights this year.

A proposal that up to £12,000 should go on lighting up all 22 of the High Street big trees was thrown out in favour of spending half that amount on fewer trees.

Cllr Mike Carter, who is also president of Tenterden Chamber of Commerce, accused the council of going back on its word.

"Let's get this job done once and for all," he said. "We are only going to have to pay again next year if we don't."

"We are a very affluent town council. Do it now and get it out of the way - we made a promise to the town to get this done last year and we are going back on our promise."

But highways and amenities committee deputy chairman Cllr Mike Pearson disagreed.

He said. "The promise last year was to do all 22 trees. We did not say it would be this year."

"I am against that because in a few years' time, all the lights will need replacing at the same time."

"Doing it over three years is reasonable. We have nothing budgeted."

Cllr Carter retorted: "I think it is a disgrace that we have not done something decent for the town."

"With the amount of money in our bank account, I think it is a great shame."

Cllr Pearson earlier told the committee that around £6,000 was available this year which the lights sub-committee had recommended spending.

Cllr Robin Wade said that money could be transferred between accounts.

"If this is something we aspire to, we need to just do it," he said.



Cllr Sue Ferguson said that people would travel to the town to see a spectacular lights display.

"How wonderful to get people in the town thinking it is wonderful that the town council has done this," she said. "It is a shame we did not put money in the budget."

Cllr Wade proposed that up to £12,000 be spent this year to put lights in all the trees but that was lost when it went to the vote.

Chamber committee members, who include Cllrs Carter and Ferguson, were not allowed to vote after declaring an interest.

Councillors approved spending up to £6,000 instead.

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