



STANDING PROUD: The golden lion in front of the Royal Crescent

Bath braced for flood of visitors at big switch-on

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Thousands of people are expected to descend on the city next week as Hollywood film star Nicolas Cage switches on the Christmas lights.

The event, which has attracted national attention, will take place on Thursday in Milsom Street and will see crowds gathering to get a glimpse of the award-winning actor.

Yesterday a meeting was called to discuss crowd control and traffic management issues in light of the week-end's festive light switch-on in Birmingham, which saw 60 people injured in an event where boy band JLS were not stars.

Avon and Somerset Police and Bath and North East Somerset Council health and safety and traffic officers will be talking about the precautions which would be put in place to deal with the large number of people expected.

The event will begin at 4.30pm with local groups providing the entertainment for the evening.

Among the performers will be conductor Greenville Jones' mixed voice



STAR ATTRACTION: Nicolas Cage

host of guests and local dignitaries and will press the switch at 4.30pm after giving a short speech.

City centre manager Andrew Cooper encouraged visitors and residents to arrive early for the ceremony.

street stores and independent shops located around the city, which provide a shopping experience that's hard to beat.

He also encouraged people to make good use of the city's park-and-ride services to avoid heavy traffic in the city centre and for those using city centre car parks, to do so early in the afternoon.

The park-and-ride buses will run later next Thursday, with the last ones leaving the city centre at 5.30pm.

The switch-on will also mark the opening of the Bath Christmas Market.

This year's lights will be provided for the occasion by a new contractor, Bluebeard Illumination, which has also led on Christmas lighting in Manchester, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Bath artist and wire sculptor Derek Kinzett will also be revealing new festive structures which will take pride of place in Milsom Street.

The four life-size apries will be unveiled on Thursday at the same time as the switch-on.

Cage is already a big fan of Mr Kinzett's work after buying a sculpture from part of his Axolotl Child collection.

First lion to make debut next week

People of Bath will be given the chance to sign their name on one of 100 model lions set to take pride of place in the city next year.

Lions of Bath will be similar to the King Bladud's Pigs project staged last year, which saw more than 100 life-size models take up various positions on the city's streets.

The first of the lions, named Edgar, will be making a preview appearance in Abbey Church Yard next week ahead of the project launch in May.

The fibreglass creature, which has been painted gold, will be in the city centre for the duration of the Christmas market, giving people the chance to sign it.

Residents and visitors will be able to put their signature on the golden model for £1.

Much like the pigs scheme, the lion project will run for six months and will raise money for charity as the models will be sponsored by individuals and businesses and eventually auctioned off.

Next year's public art event will support OffTheRecord, which runs services for young careers aged five to 18 in Bath, the Quartet Foundation, which funds community projects across the west, and the Mayor's Relief Fund, which gives emergency funding to people in need in the city.

Groups to entertain the crowds

Entertainment for the evening will begin at 4.30pm with performances from a variety of Bath groups.

Music students from the City of Bath College will begin by singing a series of Christmas songs with a modern twist.

The songs will include festive favourites such as Winter Wonderland and Fairytale of New York.

Students from the college will also be acting as stewards on the evening, directing visitors to the Christmas market, shops and other city-centre facilities.

Kingswood School's orchestra, which has recently recorded the Beatles single All You Need Is Love for Children in Need with the likes of Alud Jones and Brian May, will also be performing along with Greenville Jones' mixed voice choir The Bath Chorus.

At 6pm children's TV presenter and Heart FM's Toby Anstis will arrive on stage, as he will act as the evening's emcee.

Guests will be on a stage at the bottom of Milsom Street from 6.15pm including the mayor Colin Barrett and chairman of Bath and North East Somerset Council Councillor Bryan Chalkier, who will be giving a short speech ahead of the big switch-on.