



**Management Committee Meeting  
Minutes 28<sup>th</sup> January 2009  
Kings Arms in Shepton Mallet**

**PRESENT**

Zena Pollard, Rob Gilderthorp, Alan Stone, Dave Brown,  
Janet Kinison, Chris Inchley, Mike Perry

**APOLOGIES**

Sonia Pike, Guy Braga, Dick Skidmore, Lorraine Pratten, Margaret Robinson.

**MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES**

**Historic Plaques**

Mike reported he'd found a possible printer/engraver for the historic plaques. AS was concerned they could actually manage the work. Mike to check status.

**Youth**

Chris reported that young people are working with the Town Council to install new play equipment in Collett Park for older children, Andrea White had got funding for project £9000 (?). The town Council will match fund this.

The young people had conducted a consultation at Whitstone.

Skateboard/BMX track - funding is in place and MDC, Peter McKenzie, have finally given permission to use land next to skate park for BMX track. Will Dunscombe has done a wonderful job raising money and organising things. Mike has written congratulating him on behalf of S21.

Chris and Mike to liaise about music at the Baptist Church.

**TIC**

The news is not encouraging. Alan commented that MDC don't see tourism as part of their responsibility (but regeneration is). Mendip seem likely to put more into Somerset Tourism Partnership than local TICs. MDC are focussing on tourist numbers not the other functions of the TIC, which helps support and develop the whole community. It provides life and interest on the High Street.

Janet to raise tourism issue with Town Council. Otherwise, it's a waiting game - wait and see.

**Lighting**

It's not the absence of lighting in the alleyways that's the problem – it's the **quality** of lighting.

**Area Regeneration Officer**

Dick Skidmore is very unhappy about the situation with the regeneration officer. We need to write about the importance of keeping a regeneration officer for Shepton. Zena and Mike to write.

**Town Centre**

Need press stories not 'use it or lose it' ones but some positive ones. Mike to discuss with Fran Whelan how we can get weekly mentions in the paper.



### **Rotary Club**

Zena spoke at the Shepton Mallet Rotary Club lunch at Bowlsh House yesterday. They know about Shepton 21 and Time to Plan now!

### **Facelift**

Chris asked if we have anything we can put in to the press about Facelift. Mike to do Press Release.

### **LINKS**

Dave was wondering about the Fosse Way. Some of the paths go to the pubs. He wondered if it would be possible to have boards put up in Shepton with the walks? Guy didn't know about Fosse Way. Dave suggested putting in for a grant. Mike to follow up with Guy.

DB suggested that it would be useful to have a meeting with all involved with LINKS? Mike to find out from Guy who they all are, and perhaps organise a LINKS meeting and invite all cyclists, walkers and riders in the area to reconfirm A A C aims and ambitions

Rob involved in Strawberry Line, and reported they are currently applying for permission for Cheddar to Wells Link. There is to be a sponsored cycle ride from Cheddar to Wells. Mike to ask school for bike riders.

We need to clarify the legal situation with local access. Mike to get information. (Janet Wilson is head of planning at Mendip.)

Much of what we are doing is getting people involved. Rob and Dave to meet to discuss options.

### **CATEC**

The spatial consultation report and the business report are fully complete, ready for the first funding window. It seems that the Sustainable Communities Act could be an opportunity.

### **ATC**

Rob said Air Training Corps want money for tables – about £1000.

### **SOLUTION TO THE RETAIL PROBLEMS OF SHEPTON MALLET (APPENDED)**

Alan went to Wessex Reinvestment Fund and reported that they deal with just these sorts of things. Mike to arrange a meeting with Paul Sander-Jackson, Zena and Alan.

### **TIME TO PLAN**

A detailed response to consultation was prepared. (See website.)

### **NEXT MEETING**

King's Arms, Leg Sq at 5.30 on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> February.



## **Appendix 1**

### **Solution to the retail problems of Shepton Mallet**

Here it is after many years of thought, the solution to the retail problems of Shepton Mallet – stimulated by our conversation on the negative attitude of Shepton High Street retailers last week and a conversation with Lorraine about the shocking level of customer service provided by many shops in the town.

This is a grossly over simplified outline of a potential project which would want a lot of further working on. Some bits maybe scoffed at. However with my retail experience I am convinced that in the right hands there is a real possibility here

### **'Market Square Hero's' Back ground assumptions**

This is based on the understanding that most retail businesses are marginally profitable but not sufficiently so. If they were run better, improved their appearance, marketing, stocking, client care etc and used proper financial controls and planning many could be made into successful businesses.

The biggest problems are that the people who set up shops do not have sufficient or wide enough business experience ( I know from personal experience) nor do they usually have adequate resources to spend enough to get established. A slightly separate but related issue is around business succession. There is a limited market for existing businesses when owners want to retire or pull out for some other reason. In this way we have lost some of our more established and successful retail businesses. There is little likelihood of any one new small business making any significant contribution to increasing the number of shoppers using the town centre.

### **The Suggestion**

The suggestion is that someone of your ilk could get a few local businessmen together, with the limited amount of financial backing it would take to sort the problem out. They would form a company – 'Market Square Hero's' seems a good name. The objective of this company would be to run some shops in Shepton Mallet for a limited timescale to make a profit and to make a real difference to the town.

The company would negotiate with local landlords to take on leases on four to six retail units – preferably in a relatively concentrated area of town. The company would open and run shops in these units. Each unit would house a different shop. A butchers, a green grocers, a toy and model shop, a general / children's clothing shop. The exact choice would be after feasibility was investigated.

For each shop a manager would be appointed. These would be recruited with the emphasis based on young entrepreneurial potential and ambition. These managers would be supported by close financial supervision, joint marketing initiatives and PR support, and training in for themselves and staff in management, merchandising and customer care.

Professional support could be provided for all aspects of the business. Partnerships could be worked out with existing successful local companies as suppliers – for instance with Thorner's for the butchers, maybe Symond's for a convenience store The managers would be expected to help build their businesses with the view that if they are successful a package would be worked out for them to take them over ownership of



the business in a three to five year timescale. However if a manager was not coming up to scratch they could be removed and a new one appointed.

I believe there are plenty of potential managers being trained in the larger retail stores who may relish this chance of independence. The important aim is that the shops would be run profitably by the company so that any financial backing put into the business would not be lost and could possibly show a return – though there may be tax advantages in running a not for profit company.

There could well be some public funding available to support aspects of such an initiative – especially in aspects such as training and marketing. Relief from business rates may be negotiable.

### **The medium term picture**

In five years the aim would be to have produced six viable independent retail businesses in the Town centre with well qualified young entrepreneurs at the helm. If one of the businesses had not come up to scratch then profits from the others would cover any potential loss for the company.

The establishment of six viable retail operations with excellent levels of customer care could well be enough to kick start the town centre. Other businesses may well be encouraged to improve their standards. The company could take the view that this is the end. However it will be that the model is repeatable with further shops.

It would also seem that there could be opportunities to take over established businesses when existing owners are looking to get out. These again could have a young entrepreneurial manager installed and again be run by the company for a period of time with a view to the manager taking on the business.

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