

TOWN CENTRES WORKING PARTY MINUTES

Minutes of a Meeting held at E-Space North, Wisbech Road, Littleport on Wednesday, 26th March 2014 at 2.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Tom Kerby (Chairman)
Councillor David Ambrose Smith
Councillor Sheila Friend-Smith MBE
Councillor James Palmer

OTHERS

City of Ely Councillor Lis Every
City of Ely Councillor John Yates
Tracey Harding – Team Leader Tourism & Town Centre Services
Darren Hill – Business Development Manager
Doug Perkins – Economic Development Officer
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer

19. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

20. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Fred Brown and Rosemary Aitchison.

21. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

22. **MINUTES**

It was resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th September 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

23. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

24. **ELY CITY CENTRE WORKSHOP SUMMARY AND ACTION PLAN**

The Working Party considered a report, reference N255, previously circulated, on the Ely City Centre Workshop summary and action plan.

Councillor Sheila Friend-Smith joined the meeting at this point, 2:03pm.

The Economic Development Officer advised the Working Party that the Council was looking to build on relationships with retailers, businesses and organisations within Ely. A number of retail visits had been undertaken with the ideas these generated being used as the basis for a city centre workshop. Around 60 people had attended from across the city centre. A presentation was given by English Heritage, after which groups of eight people discussed ideas on promotions and communications and the town centre environment. The strongest ideas from this were pulled out and used for the Action Plan. The workshop looked at the short-term deliverable ideas for the next 12 months, with the potential to come together again in the future to look at the longer term. Some of the ideas that came out of the workshop included new signage, a coach drop-off point and retailer information packs. These were potential 'quick wins' and could provide a good opportunity to raise the profile of the city centre forum and working party agenda. These ideas had been discussed with the City Centre Forum and Ely Perspective before going to their respective committees for endorsement.

Councillor Tom Kerby had been pleasantly surprised at the number of people who had attended the workshop. The Council had to make sure that the ideas were progressed to deliver what the town centre wanted. This had been a good event and more could be held in the future. This could help stimulate more buy-in from the traders and more working together.

The Team Leader Tourism & Town Centre Services revealed that events would be held in the town centre on Eel Day, so retailers could get more involved. The Town Centre Bulletin created awareness of new events, as did the visitor guide which listed the annual events. The retailers were also being asked to take part in a trial to open on Sundays. Costs for the new signage would be obtained but as there was only a small sum available it would only be possible to roll this out to other places if further money became available. Councillor David Ambrose Smith would like to see something similar in Littleport, which could be funded through Section 106 contributions.

Councillor Lis Every noted that a lot of events went on in the city and retailers wanted to be involved. The City Council were looking to support annual events but they needed to be pulled together.

Councillor Sheila Friend-Smith informed the Working Party of the work of the Friends of Jubilee Gardens and the dancing event they would be staging. She noted that the Isle of Ely Festival had not been included in the programme of events. The Festival would be launched and promoted through postcards and leaflets, showing that the Festival covered every part of the district.

A recent walkabout of the city centre showed that the majority of shopfronts lacked maintenance. This was the responsibility of the landlords, not the tenants. Councillor Lis Every stated that the City Council were looking to

group places to identify the people responsible. The Cathedral had been approached about the toilets near Sacrist Gate due to their poor condition. This needed to be addressed as it could affect tourism.

Councillor James Palmer noted that Soham had the same problem with shopfronts. This was an important issue, as the town centres depended on the shops' upkeep. Councillor Palmer requested, for equality, that Littleport and Soham Councils be written to about the Ely signage plans to see if they wished to do something along similar lines. Something should also be done about the use and emptying of dog bins, and this needed to be publicised. Councillor John Yates thought that the Councils had some control over signage but questioned why not for shopfronts. There could be economies of scale if the signage scheme included both Littleport and Soham.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith wanted the recycling centres removed from Littleport Main Street car park, as they were in a poor state and unsightly. The Chairman offered to approach the Council's Waste Strategy Team Leader about that issue.

Councillor James Palmer queried whether the suggested coach drop-off point would be additional to those already provided. He would prefer to see all drop-offs made in the city centre on the market square. Councillor John Yates cautioned that the Council had to be careful about the impact on the city centre because of the traffic implications and the impact on the ideas for Fore Hill.

It was resolved:

That the contents of the Ely City Centre Action Plan be endorsed.

25. **LITTLEPORT RETAIL VISITS FEEDBACK AND NEXT STEPS**

The Team Leader Tourism & Town Centre Services gave a presentation on retail visits to Littleport and the feedback they had generated. The Working Party were advised that ten visits had taken place, the same number as Ely. There had been genuine interest and no negativity. Feedback from the visits highlighted that the town had declined over time with low footfall during the day, most footfall was due to the elderly, young mothers and unemployed people, but it was better after 3:00pm when families and workers came into the Main Street for top-up shopping and takeaways. Overall the appearance of the town centre was not too bad but could be improved and the mix of shops was poor. Anti-Social behaviour had decreased, though Councillor David Ambrose Smith stated that this was now increasing. The Co-Op was the hub of the town and was very important. There was a lack of events in the town but there was some interest in staging some. The Littleport Life magazine was very good, was self-supporting through advertisements, but was a huge undertaking.

The new housing being built in the town gave huge potential and opportunities to raise the profile of the High Street. There were a lot of strong groups in the

town with a focus on their own agenda. There was also a lack of knowledge about Littleport's heritage. There had been no market for some time but there was some interest in holding one.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith was disappointed that there was no trader involvement in the Christmas Fair. There was some work going on to try to bring the various groups together.

Councillor James Palmer hoped the new school would help the town centre as pupils would walk through the town.

There were a number of possible Action Plan initiatives:

- A summer event
- Expansion of the Christmas event
- The introduction of a market
- Develop the @littleport twitter account
- Provide a Residents Pack
- Create a business group.

Councillor James Palmer left the meeting at this point, 3:02pm.

It was hoped that a new business group could help develop ideas and lead, with the help of the District Council.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith stated that Littleport Parish Council held approximately £58,000 of Section 106 money available for town centre improvement projects. Something should be put in Littleport Life to explain what was going on with the town centre agenda. The different groups should be brought together and their relationship cemented later.

It was suggested that the presentation be given to Littleport Parish Council and people involved from outside be invited. It could also be presented to the retailers or all parties at a forum. The Team Leader Tourism & Town Centre Services thought it best to do a separate presentation to the Parish Councillors.

26. **TOWN TEAM UPDATES**

Ely

Work was ongoing to build a wider working party and increase the number of volunteers.

Everything should be brought under one umbrella.

Website work was continuing and Ely Ace should soon be launched.

Littleport

A web domain for Littleport had been set up, though it was time consuming and thoughts had to be given to how best to use the web to support the town.

There was a food bank in Littleport that was being well used.

The meeting closed at 3:23pm.