

Chesham Town Team

Paper for Chesham and Villages Community Board, December 3rd 2020

Background

The Chesham Town Team was initially established in 2012 to oversee the allocation of £10,000 received from the Portas Fund. The aim of this funding was to reinvigorate town centres and increase footfall. The Town Team met a number of times and a small proportion of the funding was allocated.

In 2018, with a new Economic Development Team in place at Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils, the Chesham Town Team was re-established with the following representation, and efforts renewed to allocate the funds still remaining:

- Chesham Town Council
- Buckinghamshire Council
- Clock Tower Traders
- Chesham Connect
- Chesham Renaissance Community Interest Company
- Chiltern Chamber of Commerce
- Elgiva Theatre

With the creation of Buckinghamshire Council, a new Economic Growth Regeneration Team and new Community Boards, an opportunity was presented to review the remit of the Town Team. Recognising that the Town Team included representation from many of the key organisations in Chesham and with a renewed focus on town centres, particularly in light of the impact of COVID 19 and associated lockdowns, it was felt that this remit could be expanded.

Consequently, it was agreed that the Town Team should assume the role of the Chesham and Villages Sub-Group for Economic Development and Regeneration. The Town Team will continue to identify potential priorities, projects and activities for the town centre and will report back to the Community Board on ideas and priorities for funding.

Achievements

Perhaps the greatest achievement lies in the bringing together of representatives from across Chesham to discuss and reach agreement on town centre issues. The Town Team brings together the public, private and voluntary sectors; raising awareness of the roles of each and encouraging engagement and joint-working between partners outside of the meetings. The meetings continue to be fully attended almost two-years after the Town Team's re-establishment and all those involved have shown a desire to drive forward the work of the Town Team under its extended remit.

A more tangible achievement is the successful delivery of a promotional piece for the town. The Visit Chesham leaflet was created by a local designer and aims to encourage people to visit Chesham. The leaflet has been distributed across a wide geographical area, including Buckinghamshire and North West London and is included on the Visit Buckinghamshire and other websites.

The benefits of fully pedestrianising Market Square and the lower end of the High Street have regularly been articulated by the Town Team. Recognising this and in response to the re-opening of the town centres following the first COVID-19 lockdown, a temporary traffic regulation order was introduced for the full pedestrianisation of Market Square.

Ongoing Priorities

The Town Team still has a small amount of Portas funds available, but it is recognised that further funding opportunities will need to be identified for future town centre activities.

Current priorities for the Town Team include:

Pedestrianisation – an immediate priority is improving the look of the pedestrianised Market Square, be this through replacing the current barriers with planters or barrier covers. In the longer term, further consideration is to be given to the full pedestrianisation of the lower end of the High Street.

Supporting businesses impacted by COVID-19 and lockdown – promoting businesses that remain open and those offering click and collect or delivery during lockdown; highlighting available support; identifying common needs and challenges and looking at ways to address these.

Information boards –improving the look and content of the information contained in the board by the tube station would enhance the visitor welcome. Adopting a similar design to the Visit Chesham leaflet and the information boards in Lowndes Park is being considered.

High Street Strategy – Chesham Connect have recently launched a high street strategy, with a focus on promoting the town and its businesses; events and digital engagement. The Town Team has a key potential role in supporting the delivery of this strategy.

Town App – how can technology be used to support businesses and improve the visitor offer? A town app could be one way to share information about local businesses and their offers, whilst improving wayfinding for visitors.

Enhancing the cultural offer – the Elgiva is a significant asset for the town and the theatre manager has a breadth of experience and some fantastic ideas for enhancing the links between the theatre and the town centre. This includes bringing performance to the high street, re-use of empty units etc.

Strategic site redevelopment – discussions are underway on the creation of a Regeneration Group for Chesham. This group would be focused on larger-scale physical regeneration, particularly of sites owned by Buckinghamshire Council. This group would share some common membership with the Town Team and two-way communication between the Regeneration Group and the Town Team will be a priority.