

ASHBOURNE TOWN TEAM

SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC MEETING 26 NOVEMBER 2019 ASHBOURNE TOWN HALL

With thanks to Ashbourne Town Council for the use of the Town Hall.

NOTE: These minutes are intended to summarise the essence of the meeting discussions – they do not cover everything said and have been ordered for ease of reading rather than in strict order of speaking.

Purpose of the meeting: to discuss the concept of a Town Team and to assess whether the town is supportive.

Overall conclusion: it was agreed that the Town Team should be properly constituted and carry out an agenda as per the presentation and opening address.

Attendees: estimated at around 100 business owners, residents and councillors (town, district and county)

Opening address and presentation: given by Anne Wright (AW) of Young Ideas. AW welcomed the attendees and talked through the presentation slides¹ concentrating on the four big issues of traffic, parking, empty shops and marketing, and then opened the meeting to discussion. She made clear that herself and the others who had set up the meeting (including Sally Montegue, Avanti, Optimum & Channel Design) were not trying to take charge and run things - they saw themselves as the catalyst for change and hoped that they would inspire others to join in and even take over leadership.

Traffic

Councillor Simon Spencer of Derbyshire Country Council spoke about traffic issues and the work he is doing to get funding for a bypass approved. He welcomes the creation of the Town Team and promised that he would make his officers available to assist the Town Team on traffic matters and to evaluate any proposals put forward. He noted as well that it would not be practical for him to provide this assistance to individual approaches from town residents or informal groups – it would have to be a properly constituted group. He thinks the town has reached critical status on traffic with crumbling roads and the negative impact on buildings and businesses. He noted that the reason for so much HGV traffic is the quarries which are a major economic benefit to Derbyshire and the country. He was adamant that a weight limit would not help as the HGV currently have nowhere else to go and any weight limit application would interfere with the bypass proposal. His team is working on a detailed proposal which he expected to have ready for consultation by the middle of 2020. £1m funding has been allocated for this. He estimates that once approved a bypass could be built and running within two years at a cost of around £15m to £20m. He noted as well that work is being done on traffic flow improvements, for example more double yellow lines at difficult junctions.

¹ The slides are available on the steering group page of the website <https://www.ashbournetownteam.co.uk> and are not further described here. Anyone reading these minutes who did not attend the meeting should also read the slides.

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Alan Matkin (AM) from Avanti caught the mood of the town by saying that whilst we all want a bypass realistically it would take at least five to seven years and if we had to wait that long the town centre would be dead.

A couple of hauliers present made the point that there was no realistic alternative for many journeys other than to travel through Ashbourne.

A local resident attendee noted that he was the former strategic traffic director for Manchester City and spoke briefly to offer his support to the traffic project group and to the Town Team concept.

Councillor Purdy of DDDC noted that everyone at the council is in agreement that pollution levels are unacceptable. There is ongoing testing for NOx and there are various discussion groups with the hauliers and others to work out a way forward.

The conclusion on traffic was that the Town Team will put forward a paper with suggestions for how the traffic situation can be improved and Simon Spencer and his officers will meet with the Town Team to discuss it. However Simon noted that he will not promote anything that reduces the chance of a bypass.

Parking

AW noted that she had had the embarrassment of an interrupted business event when the guests all had to rush out to move their cars, due to Shawcroft having a time limit of 4 hours. She suggested £1 all day on Sundays.

Darren Archer (DA) noted that the law says that parking charges must be set according to the needs of the local economy and that DDDC is wrong under the law when they say that charges have to be identical across the DDDC region.

AM noted that it is problematic when traffic wardens chase easy targets such as slight overstays in car parks and do not address the real problems caused by parking on yellow lines. Someone else suggested that parking enforcement fines could be used to reduce parking charges. Another person suggested that we shouldn't want to make it too easy to park in the centre and other options such as park & ride should be explored.

It was noted that the number of tickets issued in Shawcroft in April to October had fallen by 16,000 compared to the previous year when charges were lower and that gross parking revenues in the same period had fallen by £9,500. It was also pointed out that the car parks were very badly signposted.

Councillor Purdy of DDDC noted that he does not agree with the views of the town that high parking charges are causing reduced footfall for the shops. He said £1 on Sundays could not be done. He also did not agree with DA's comments about the parking policy being wrong in law but said he would check with the officers. He agreed that technology could be improved around means to pay

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but said there was no money available to do so. He would commit to reviewing the Town Team proposals although he would not be able to do so until next year.

The conclusion was that the Town Team will put forward a paper with suggestions for improving the parking situation and DDDC will review it.

Other discussions

There were a lot of contributions from attendees.

Several people spoke with general support for the town team proposals, with one person noting that the plans were similar to those of the Ashbourne Partnership back in 1999 and another noting that the Team will need a clear brand and vision.

QEGS and the arts festival gave their support to using some of the empty shop windows to showcase the town.

It was noted that there is a group working on reopening a town cinema. Someone else noted that the main road roundabouts should be improved and perhaps the Shrovetide statue should be moved there. More could be made of the Tissington trail and we should have more events to get people into the town. The visitor centre should be improved.

Several people said that they would be prepared to make donations to fund the projects. And there was a view that grant funding would be available.

On structure there was brief discussion as to whether Ash-Com could be used rather than setting up another new structure. Comments were made that we must not accept any money or donations until the legal position and constitution were clear and care would be needed to reduce the risks of paying tax on donations.

Conclusion

A show of hands gave clear support to the proposals that the Town Team should be properly constituted and carry out an agenda as per the presentation and opening address. Everyone was asked to complete a contact details form and 82 of these were received. Anne and the retailers team will take the project forward until they have enough other support to stand back. There needs to be a variety of stakeholders on the leadership team / steering group, not just retailers.