Report No. 3

Report to Malmesbury Town Council 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2016

Wiltshire Market Towns Networking Event, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

1.     Purpose of the report

1.1    To inform Council regarding the Wiltshire Market Towns Networking Event held at Melksham Assembly Rooms on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

2.     Background

2.1    Cllr Poole and I are the designated representatives from the Town Council on the Wiltshire Market Towns Network and we attended the above event. We were accompanied by the Town Clerk and Ms Sarah Wilde from the Town Team.

2.2    The Wiltshire Market Towns Network is organised by Wiltshire Council and meets every three months or so to hear presentations and network on topics related to the life and economic furtherance of Wiltshire's Market Towns.

3.     Presentations

3.1    We heard three presentations, as below.

3.2    **Natalie Luckham** from Naturally Social (www.naturallysocial.co.uk), a social media consultancy based in Wiltshire, spoke about "Optimising Digital Potential": getting the most out of social media.

       Natalie spoke enthusiastically about the marketing possibilities of social media for small towns. Particularly of interest were the following.

       a.    Although virtually everyone has a Smartphone and 60% of the population have Facebook there are further tools such as Twitter and especially Snapchat, which Salisbury City Council has adopted as a marketing tool.

       b.    There are any number of ways that Facebook's "business features" can be configured to attract and retain customers, particularly through its interactive features.

       c.    Idea of setting up a Facebook page and then letting local people build the information there which they will find engaging and will wish to publicise.

       d.    "Monmouthpedia" – is a blogsite detailing maps, walking routes, treasure hunts etc in that town. See https://monmouthpedia.wordpress.com/.

       e.    Video, rather than static pictures, are the coming content for Facebook and web pages.

       f.    A good example of using social media is the Government's Digital Service site https://gds.blog.gov.uk/.

3.3    **Dr Cathy Hart**, Senior Lecturer in Retailing at Loughborough University, spoke about "The Importance of the Customer Experience". Information is available at www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/sbe/research/interestgroups/towncentres/ .

       Dr Hart presented findings from a study at Loughborough University into the Town Centre Customer Experience, defined as "the entire consumer journey undertaken in a town centre including broader social and community elements." The purpose was to identify what factors influence customers to visit, and re-visit, a town centre. Particular points were as follows, all backed up by survey data collected in a number of UK town centres.

a. Shopping destinations were principally 32% town centres, 26% out-of-town supermarkets and 13% online. However the proportion of money spent was largest in supermarkets, then online and town centres the lowest spend.

b. Trends are that leisure and refreshment spend is increasing in town centres but retail spend is decreasing. This is a shift from daytime (retail) use of a town centre to evening (leisure) use.

c. If people shop with friends and or family they will spend on average 50% more than if shopping alone.

d. Retailers see "click and collect" as "a life-saver" for High Streets.

e. The headline result from the research was the definition and description of Functional Touch Points and Experiential Touch Points in determining the customer experience:

   i. Functional Touch Points are defined by the facilities on offer: the retail offering (stores and products), access and parking, convenience of layout and amenities such as shelter and public toilets. Larger towns have better Functional Touch Points than smaller towns.

   ii. Experiential Touch Points are customer service, expectations of savings and bargains, refreshments and entertainment, atmosphere, markets, events and opportunities for social interaction. Smaller towns do better on Experiential Touch Points.

   iii. Adequacy of Functional Touch Points is necessary to <u>meet</u> customers' expectations. Absence of for example parking and toilets will deter customers.

   iv. Experiential Touch Points can differentiate a town centre if they <u>exceed</u> customer expectations. This builds loyalty and decisions to re-visit. They are where smaller towns can compete against larger towns.

3.4 **Helen Corkery,** Project Manager (South) of Living Streets (www.livingstreets.org.uk) spoke about the experience of streets as judged by the people who use them. Living Streets is a charity that has been championing pedestrian matters since the 1920s.

a. Helen described a number of factors which influence people's decision to walk rather than drive:

   i. Positive: Services en route, scenery, seating, crossings, signposting, art, green spaces.

   ii. Negative: width and quality of pavements, clutter (e.g. A-boards), encroachment by parked cars, litter and cleanliness.

b. She referred to the Wiltshire Wayfinding Strategy which defines a strategy for the use of directional signs and studies of large towns in Wiltshire. See www.wiltshire.gov.uk/parkingtransportandstreets/towncyclenetworks/wayfindingstrategy.htm

c. She referred to the economic benefits to towns of increasing pedestrian traffic – you walk past more shops than if you drive – summarised as "the pedestrian pound."

4. <u>Networking Exercise</u>

4.1 **Sue Wilthew**, Chief Executive of Chippenham Town Council, had organised a networking exercise whereby towns partnered with one another to investigate each others' town centre experience. I drew Malmesbury's partner town which was Ludgershall, 16 miles north east of Salisbury and on Wiltshire's eastern border. Serendipitously we were sitting at the same table as the group of Ludgershall town councillors. We agreed we would set up a mutual "mystery shopper" arrangement in the new year.

Cllr John Gundry
17<sup>th</sup> November 2016