

Report No. 1

Report to Malmesbury Town Council 26th July 2016

Wiltshire Market Towns Forum Networking Event, 14th July 2016.

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To inform Council of information and ideas presented at the Wiltshire Market Towns Forum Networking Event held at Corsham Town Hall on Thursday 14th July 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 and Cllr Gavin Grant 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 four presentations at the event, as below.

- 3.2 **Gavin Eddy**, Director of the Frome Independent Market (www.thefromeindependent.org.uk/). Gavin presented on the Independent Market which helped Frome secure The Great Town Award 2016.

Gavin set up the Frome Independent Market in 2009, initially with it occupying up Catherine's Hill in the Town with 18 stalls. In 2012 the Market proposed to Mendip Council to close the market place and through roads to traffic Sundays in October, November and December. The Market now runs from March to Christmas every Sunday with 250 stalls. 10,000 people now visit, 80% of whom are from outside Frome and who combine the visit with exploring the town. Accompanying is a Park and Ride system and accessibility to coach tours. It is now "More Than A Market" – a community event together with music and events and children's facilities. Success factors were (a) find a gap in the market (holding it on Sunday), (b) form a distinctive brand, (c) sustainable, (d) owned and run by the community, (e) advertised widely as a destination e.g. Bath and Bristol (f) on a Sunday does not compete with existing shops.

- 3.3 **Dave Martin**, Chief Executive of Corsham Town Council, presented on the Corsham Area Framework (www.wiltshire.gov.uk/wiltshire_2026_corsham_display_boards.pdf).

The Corsham Area Framework is a vision to shape future development in the Corsham Community Area of 20,000 people. The work is paid for by Swindon and Wiltshire Local Area Partnership. Needs identified by the framework study were (a) better linking of the town with the wider area, (b) a new focus on central Corsham and not a new retail centre away from the High Street, (c) a West Corsham business development area.

- 3.4 **Chris Jones**, Director of Chris Jones Regeneration (www.chrisjonesregeneration.co.uk/).

Chris spoke principally about a multiply-funded £3.6M regeneration project in Holyhead. The regenerators asked "What will this town look like in 10 years' time?" and a principle emerged of "heritage-led investment." The goals were (a) preserve and enhance the character of the town, (b) up-style empty and tired premises and get them back into use, including improved fascias and signage, (c) increase the opportunities for training in heritage skills, including

increasing conservation management and property maintenance skills amongst local building contractors, (e) increase community involvement in the town and its regeneration. Gains seen have been an increase in jobs, considerable inward investment, and a retail vacancy rate falling from 19% to 10%.

- 3.5 **John Parmiter**, Director of Future High Streets talked about getting private sector investment into the high street through a strategy called Town Centre Investment Management (www.towncentreinvestment.com/).

A central question is "Why will people come here in 15 years?" in the face of a) changing retail behaviour (e.g. online purchasing), b) overcapacity in high streets with many underproductive shops in too-small units with a poor retail offering, c) the desire for large retailers to have large retail premises. Rethinking is needed to recognise that the future high street will be a place to live, enjoy leisure, learn and interact with local services. Town Centre Investment Management is a spatial re-organising of the town centre, based on planned areas for different offerings, including food and beverage, not the haphazard arrangement currently seen. This is achievable if a town body knows who the freeholders of premises, and can make them an offer that to re-organise businesses will be a development opportunity and reduce vacancies. The challenge to town councils is "Do you know who are the freehold owners of and investors in your high street?"

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 Members may wish to note this report.

Cllr John Gundry
18th July 2016