

**Runcorn Town Team Minutes
Wednesday 25th September 2013
6pm Old Police Station, Mersey Road**

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Town Team	
Cllr Norman Plumpton Walsh	HBC Mersey Ward Cllr
Cllr John Gerrard	HBC Mersey Ward Cllr
Cllr Pauline Sinnott	HBC Mersey Ward Cllr
Cllr Ron Hignett	HBC Physical Environment Portfolio Holder
Wesley Rourke	Operational Director Economy, Enterprise and Property
Gary Shaw	Trader
Graham Wallace	Runcorn Locks Restoration Society
John Egan	Market Trader
Ann Turner Culverhouse	Resident
Brian Lunt	Trader
Tony Collacott	Wat Phra Singh
Claire Bradbury	Power in Partnership
Guest Speaker	
Sandra Hannan	Halton Community Partnership
Halton Borough Council Officers	
Jennifer Carr	Regeneration Officer
Sara Munikwa	Regeneration Manager
Gill Watson	Community Development Officer

Apologies

Town Team	
Syd Broxton	T H Brown Trust
Gary Buckles	PCSO
Si Swanick	Resident
Neil McLoughlin	Market Trader
Alison Gleave	Halton Voluntary Action / resident
Maria Tarn	Hazlehurst Craft Studios
Rev Vicki Schofield	St Michael & All Angels

1. Introductions

Chair, Councillor Norman Plumpton Walsh (NPW) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes from previous meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

3. Runcorn Christmas Festival, Sandra Hannan

Sandra Hannan (SH) explained that plans are continuing for the Christmas Festival. The group has reviewed costs and they would like to approach the Town Team to ask for £550 funding to cover the cost associated with:-

- Road Closure
- Erection and dismantling of market stalls.

The Christmas Festival group has also discussed the desire to have a Christmas tree. They feel the organisation of this sits more with the Town Team. They have permission for a tree to be sited outside Co-op and Iceland. The indicative costs for supply, erection and disposal are £1,000 and the Festival group would be happy to purchase the tree on the Town Team's behalf. SH has spoken to Ian Goodall at HBC who organises the Christmas lights and there may be capacity for the Council to cover the electrical costs associated with the tree.

Gary Shaw (GS) suggested that a location closer to Church Street would be more suitable due to the activities planned and it being a higher profile location which may reduce the risk of vandalism. He suggested the bus station as a possible location as the CCTV cameras would be able to monitor the tree.

SH explained the location by the Co-op has the power connection already in place.

Sara Munikwa (SM) identified that extra money would be needed to source the tree lights and a suitable location needs to be looked into.

Wesley Rourke (WR) asked for delegated authority for HBC to report back to the Town Team to decide on the most suitable location as well as reviewing the costs and management issues. Suggested an allocation of £2000 to the Christmas Festival which is cover requested costs and potentially those associated with the Christmas tree.

Cllr Pauline Sinnott (PS) asked that the Town Team is notified by email of the decision.

Action: HBC to review potential for Christmas tree, including location and costs involved.

Both John Egan (JE) and Councillor Ron Hignett (RH) asked why the Council hire Christmas lights rather than buy.

WR explained this is an area new to him and his team after taking responsibility on recently for these activities. Believe the reason will be economies of scale. This will be reviewed next Christmas.

Action: HBC to review sourcing of Christmas lights in 2014 and feedback to Town Team.

4. High Street Innovation Fund

4.1 Discussion of Grant Applications

4.1.1 Commercial Property Renewal Grant

Two applications were received, see the below table for a summary.

Property	Proposed Works
Wat Phra Singh, 88 High Street	Signage, replacement windows and potential roof repair
Wild Rows, 28 Church Street	Signage

Discussion regarding the applications followed:

Wat Phra Singh (88 High Street): TC declared an interested and left the room.

Old signage from the Waterloo pub is still in place, asking for costs associated with new signs, scaffolding and window replacement. Provisional sums have been included for potential repair work to the cobble roof once as this can only be inspected once the scaffolding is erected.

PS expressed how happy she is to see a building of this nature being kept and used.

Jenny Carr (JC) confirmed that the building is not in the Team's focus area, therefore a discussed followed as to whether the application should be considered. It was discussed that due to its high profile location (main route to/from train station, can be seen from the bridge approach to Runcorn Old Town and adjacent to the Bridgewater Canal) it should be considered for grant aid.

Ann Turner Culverhouse (ATC) asked why a temple requires signage and why is the word 'temple' not included in the proposed wording.

Councillor John Gerrard (JG) stated that if he saw the proposed signage 'Wat Phra Singh UK' he would be intrigued. It may be possible at a later date for directional signage to and around the town centre to the temple.

NPW emphasised that the application is unique and this must be kept in mind.

Claire Bradbury (CB) expressed her concern that the building is not in the focus area. Graham Wallace (GW) highlighted the High Street address.

WR outlined the reasons for and against. It is just outside of the focus area and other applicants have been turned down for this reason. However, this is an applicant unique in its nature and location. It is a gateway site to the town in a prominent location and the High Street Innovation Fund (HSIF) is to be used to increase the value of the town centre.

JG believes people may consider the building still a pub with the current signage.

GS highlighted that at the last meeting, TC explained how the temple attracts over 200 people from all over the country to its events.

PS asked if the scaffolding costs can be reduced.

JC explained that if grant is awarded, TC will be working with the appointed contractors for signage and windows to try and reduce this cost. The Town Team reimburse actual costs up to the limit of the grant allocation. Therefore if the costs reduce then so will the grant awarded.

RH suggested some of the contingency funds could be used to fund finger posts in the town centre.

Action: HBC to review costs associated with replacement signage in town centre and feedback at the next Town Team meeting.

There were no objections to approval of grant. **Approved grant offer: £3,569.58 subject to confirmation of provisional sums and actual scaffolding costs.**

Wild Rowes Pet Shop (28 Church Street) – has submitted a business start-up grant application. The team agreed it was good to see a premises being taken so quickly after Hallmark left.

Approved grant of £750 subject to third business start-up grant also being approved.

Action: JC to notify applicant of Town Team’s decisions as above.

4.1.2 Business Start-Up Grant

One application was received, see below table for summary.

Property	Business	Proposed Works
28 Church Street	Wild Rowes	Vacant premises to be converted to pet shop. Application is for internal works to premises including stud wall and decoration. Some removable items such as tills and shelving also listed.

PS welcomed the application but expressed concerns regarding the removable items applied for.

NW believes the Team should focus on investment in the property which helps the business start-up locate in a property and not fund removable items unless it is an exceptional circumstance.

TC asked what would be behind the stud wall included in the application. JC confirmed this is proposed to be storage space.

GW asked about health and safety with the stud wall. SM highlighted that a fire safety inspection as well as building control regulations would need to be satisfied.

WR reminded the Team they need to be fair and remember decisions made when reviewing other applications, some of which had removable items turned down. Need to think about the purpose of the High Street Innovation Fund. What happens if the business leaves the property? Expenditure in the building will see the investment remain.

NPW recommended grant be awarded for the structural works and not the removable items, subject to a third quote being received. **Grant award of £2378.**

Action: JC to notify applicant of Town Team's decision.

4.2 Progress Made

4.2.1 Update for live grants

JC updated on grants awarded at the previous meetings

The Style Factory was temporarily relocated to Granville Street by HBC whilst structural work was carried out at 71 High Street. Subsequently, the Style Factory has decided not to move back into 71 High Street. The grant paid to date is mainly for decorating costs, fortunately no grant has been paid relating to removable items.

Grants Paid - Sweet Memories, Mr Dykes (incidentally his property is now occupied), Taylors Hair & Beauty and Sefton Developments. Mr Dykes has not claimed for the painting of the property therefore £175 is going back into the pot.

The replacement roof on 62/64 Church Street has not yet started. Awaiting a start date.

Outstanding grants which work has not yet begun – Booze Buster

4.2.2 Market initiatives

JC updated on the market initiatives

- The branded minibus is now running and will be for the next 12 months.
- Cotton bags have been handed out to:-

- Market traders.
- Council's events team for Party in the Park at Castlefields and the upcoming Vintage Rally.
- Gary Shaw has been given 200 to give to local shops.
- Trying to give them out to various sources over time to target different people.
- HBC believe they have found some additional money to pay for the plastic bags, however, we will need to go through the Council's procurement process to confirm costs involved. The order number will be significantly increased to try and make the bags affordable for the traders to buy and make the scheme self-funding.

JE asked if the wording on the mural could be made to stand out more.

Action: HBC to review and see if wording can be made bolder.

ATC asked if successful events held in Widnes could also be done for Runcorn to attract more people. She also raised the questions as to whether the stalls could be turned round so instead of facing the centre of the road, they would face the shops.

GS stated that the first Tuesday market one of the biggest complaints was the shops were ignored. It was proposed that the stalls be should be turned around to face the shops but it was knocked back.

SM explained emergency access is needed along Church Street which the current layout provides. The idea will be looked at by HBC.

Action: HBC to review market layout.

JE also asked for clarification as to when the road block on Church Street can be opened on market days to allow traders access to take down stalls.

Action: SM to report time back to JE.

4.3 Proposed new initiatives

NPW shared two proposals for High Street Innovation Fund based on ideas suggested by Town Team members.

4.3.1 Tackling empty shop fronts.

NPW explained contact has been made with City Dressing who do mock shop fronts for vacant premises, improving their appearance to help acquire a tenant.

RH asked that any designs are not made to look like shops, instead they should be used as an opportunity to promote local businesses and jobs.

PS supported this and used Halton Lea as an example.

NPW suggested an allocation of £3,000 from the contingency money as this should allow the appearance of a few properties to be improved.

This initiative was subsequently approved.

Action: HBC to begin working up the detail for this initiative.

4.3.2 Public Art

NPW explained there is already £6k in the budget for a new mural. As the existing mural on Camden Building is so highly thought of and a second mural has been done on the container it is felt that this money would be better spent on a programme of public art in the town centre.

The proposed programme would complement the Christmas festival with events in spring, summer and autumn consisting of:-

- Youth theatre production in the Old Town at Easter. Similar to the recent performance at Halton Castle and be organised by the same people
- A summer initiative by Hazlehurst craft studios to bring colour to the Town Centre working with local schools, businesses and community groups.
- A dance production again in the Old Town in Autumn linking older groups and local schools, similar to the CO3 event held last year.

The Council's Arts Development Team has been consulted and believes this could all be done within the £6000 budget and are confident match funding could be attracted from other sources.

Opportunity to attract new and different people to the town centre.

CB confirmed that Merseylink, the preferred bidder for the Mersey gateway, are already speaking to people regarding a mural.

Action: HBC to begin working up the detail for this initiative.

CB asked if more seating in the town centre could be considered. Her mum has emailed David Parr regarding this as visits to the town centre can be tiring, especially for the elderly and those with reduced mobility. More seating would make their visits easier and more enjoyable.

WR agreed BC will look at existing locations and prices and feedback at next meeting.

Action: HBC to review seating in the town centre

4.4 HSIF Profile

Following approvals at this meeting, the current profile (25/09/2013) is (see over page)

Initiative	Allocated (£)	Committed (£)	Remaining (£)
Environmental Improvements	9,300	3,300	6,000
<i>Grot spots</i>	<i>2,000</i>	<i>2,000</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Public art</i>	<i>6,000</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>6,000</i>
<i>Graffiti removal</i>	<i>1,000</i>	<i>1,000</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Bench relocation</i>	<i>300</i>	<i>300</i>	<i>0</i>
Signage	1,000	0	1,000
Commercial Property Renewal Grant	50,000	25,755	24,245
Business Start Up Grant	25,000	8,478	16,522
Market Support	5,000	4,375	625
Fake shop fronts	3,000	0	3,000
Contingency	4,700	200	4,500
Christmas Festival	2,000	0	2,000
Total	100,000	42,107	57,893

5.0 AOB

5.1 Wat Phra Singh

Halton Housing Trust did not confirm they would like to remain on the Town Team, therefore, as discussed at the previous Town Team meeting, Wat Phra Singh was invited to have a representative sit on the Team. This was accepted.

5.2 Weekly News article

Simon Charlesworth has written a letter to the Weekly News to support the town centre following the article 'Old Town second worst for vacant shops' (19-9-13). NPW shared this with the Team and welcomed his positive attitude towards the Town and the need for the press to focus on the positive changes taking place.

5.3 General issues

GS raised the issues of

- Discarded cigarette butts
- Overgrown plant pots
- Advertising pillars are very out of date

Action: HBC to take back

6.0 Date of next meeting

The next meetings will be held at 6pm on Thursday 28th November 2014. Venue TBC.