

**Runcorn Town Team Minutes  
Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2014  
6pm Boat Club, Victoria Road**

**Attendees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
<b>Town Team</b>	
Cllr Norman Plumpton Walsh	HBC Mersey Ward Cllr
Cllr John Gerrard	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
Tony Collacott	Wat Phra Singh UK
Ann Turner Culverhouse	Resident
Cllr Pauline Sinnott	HBC Mersey Ward Cllr
Alison Gleave	Halton Voluntary Action / resident
Claire Bradbury	Power in Partnership
Syd Broxton	T H Brown Trust
Si Swanick	Resident
Rev Vicki Schofield	St Michael & All Angels
Maria Tarn	Hazlehurst Craft Studios
<b>Halton Borough Council Officers</b>	
Jennifer Carr	Regeneration Officer
Sara Munikwa	Regeneration Manager

**Apologies**

<b>Town Team</b>	
Brian Lunt	Trader
Gary Buckles	PCSO
Neil McLoughlin	Market Trader
<b>Halton Borough Council Officers</b>	
Sara Munikwa	Regeneration Manager

**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. Presentation 'Recommendations for the future of town centres, and how we can go forward in Runcorn' by Cllr Norman Plumpton Walsh

*"As many of you will be aware, I am reading for a postgraduate degree at the University of Chester in Public Policy and Management.*

*For my Public Policy module, I chose to focus on the future of Town Centres. This was a generic look at the current 'state' of town centres following Out of Town Shopping Centres as being the catalyst to many town centres demise over the years.*

*In short, from comparing other towns, here are my findings for a current, but future successful Runcorn Old Town:*

- Runcorn Old Town (like other towns) will need to become more of a 'village' (Stockton Heath) to enable it to be unique from both Widnes and Runcorn Shopping Centre. To this extent it needs to capitalise on its waterways.*
- E and M Commerce now account for around 40% of all sales. This means small town centre shops (like ours) will need to have websites and social media presence to enable both online and in store purchasing. Indeed, a local shop has recently taken to e-commerce, and has seen a sharp rise in their online sales, leading to a prosperous time as compared to the same time last year.*
- 'Show Buying' stores. Some online catalogues (N Brown online) are looking at opening stores where potential customers can view products and then buy online or even via mobile device.*
- Mobile devices influenced £18 billion of store sales in 2013 with £5bn directly on the device (Retail Bulletin, Oct 13)*
- Click and Collect: Tesco trials off-site Click & Collect locations in schools, car parks, libraries and sports centres. Even airport departure lounges aren't past Tesco's reach with psychologists forecasting people are in a shopping mood when going on holiday. Manchester Airport is going to have booths to enable people to order groceries etc to be ready at airport on return flight.*
- Click and Collect still results in footfall too, so maybe make special offers to people who click and collect as well as store buying over and above online savings.*
- Central Business District (CBD) areas will need to become places where people live and work, in offices over shops, as well as new affordable homes. These 'new' communities would require facilities in the centre to both draw them in, but also retain them, whether it be for residential or business utility. The building of the new bridge will be a good time to capitalise.*

- *There will need to be more cafes, coffee shops (all with Wi-Fi) and family friendly food establishments as well as provision for leisure to build on the current Brindley offer.*
- *These family friendly environs imbue a feeling of wellbeing as these spaces are used predominantly as social spaces without the presence of alcohol and the negative connotations thereof.*
- *Town centre access by public or private transport is also key in Halton, especially public transport. This is provided for extremely well locally, but also imperative is that people know they will be able to find parking spaces if they drive. The system of restricting parking on weekdays to three hours, with a no return policy, during core shop opening hours enables 'churn' and ensures more people visit the area. With Halton one of only a few remaining councils not to charge for car parking, limits will have to be applied that will enable fines to be applied to overstayers to act as a deterrence to others.*
- *Encourage and grow the Tuesday Street Market, and maybe shops open later into the evening and end early closing practice to end uncertainty in customers. Other suggestions are maybe artisan markets.*
- *Make the 'high street' an affordable location to encourage already loyal business, but also encourage new customers"*

Discussion followed:

NPW explained he and WR had met with the manager of Runcorn Shopping Centre to discuss how the Old Town can complement and work with the Shopping Centre. They are now looking to support the Old Town Christmas tree for 2014 and ways to work in partnership going forward.

JE explained he feels the market is not promoted well enough.

WR asked that during the review the Town Team recognise where funds for the market fit in with priorities. Need to be more business focused on what the Team have done with the funding to date and its impact. Identify things which have not worked. Other things run alongside markets to help them grow, we need to try and do this. For example Ormskirk market works for a number of reasons.

CB what benefit will free WIFI bring?

GW there are already some shops with Wi-Fi in the Town Centre.

SS believed Wi-Fi is a positive as people who do not have WIFI at home could walk into the town to access the free Wi-Fi. Would hope they use services in the town whilst there. Can walk into area and use it if can't access it at home.

PS challenged the Town Team to look at the viability of WIFI in the Old Town and is it something the Town Team should be looking to support? We are changing the way we shop. Is it for the Town Team to see how it can help the town adapt?

**Action:** For all members to consider whether WIFI would work in Runcorn Old Town – Is it something that will help the Old Town? Will it attract more people? Findings and thoughts to be fed back at next meeting.

#### **4.0 Town Team Review**

Jenni James, Research Office from the Council's Customer Intelligence Unit, was introduced to the group to lead on a review of the Town Team's achievements to date and priorities going forward.

*See attached pinpoint session note*

#### **5.0 Grant Applications**

No applications received; however, a Mr Dodd has been in contact over the past month with JC to discuss the possibility of a start-up grant for a fruit and veg shop he was looking to open on Church Street. Due to delays with the lease he was only able to agree a deal with the landlord on 27<sup>th</sup> January.

Mr Dodd is prepared to wait until the March meeting for his application to be considered but the Town Team discussed possibility of considering an application by email before this date. Approved this approach.

**Action:** JC to speak to Mr Dodd to inform him of the decision and to circulate application to the Town Team when received.

JE asked that the market traders not be asked to move from their regular pitch following a new shop opening. He believes it happened following the opening of the sweet shop and it might happen again due to the location of the 27 Church Street where the fruit and veg shop will be opening and the current location of the fruit and veg stall on a Tuesday.

#### **6.0 Signage**

TC declared an interest and left the room.

NPW has received figures for signage to the Buddhist Temple. Total cost of the signage is £1,573.75, recommend the Town Team fund 50% of the cost utilising the £1000 signage allocation in the HSIF budget. An application will be made by Wat Phra Singh to the Area Forum for match funding.

SB against the request. One of the signs has 'The Brindley' above 'The Buddhist Temple'. To some it may read as the same place. Need definition between the two.

GW asked who is responsible for directional signage. It was confirmed that it is not the Council's responsibility to provide signage to the Temple but it is the authority

which governs its design and location. AG confirmed Halton Voluntary Action paid for their own signage.

JG explained the quote includes pedestrian and highway signage. Could ask for a '&' to be added to the sign or a symbol for the Temple similar to the drama mask for the Brindley.

SS looking at priorities for next year this falls under priority 3 – more promotion and marketing. The temple is unique to Runcorn. The Brindley and the Waterways are here and also need to be promoted. Better signage and promotion for the Temple can also be better for the town.

Town Team approved by majority - £786.87 awarded.

**Action:** TC to be notified of the decision and to ask if the design of the signage can be changed to reflect above discussion

## **7.0 A.O.B.**

### **7.1 Halton Business & Tourism awards**

NPW explained an email had been circulated prior to the meeting regarding the Halton Business and Tourism Awards 2014.

Businesses are encouraged to apply for any category that they think is suitable for them but primarily for those in Runcorn Town Centre, the following are best for consideration: Retailer of the Year, Customer Focus, New Business, and Business of the Year.

The Town Team members were requested to spread the word and encourage local businesses to nominate themselves and others. The link is <http://www.haltonchamber.co.uk/business-services/business-tourism-awards.html>

## **8.0 Next meeting**

The next meeting will be held at **6pm on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2014 venue tbc**

The purpose of the session was to help the Runcorn Town Team reflect on their achievements over the last year and to establish priorities and a way to move forward for the next year. The following report provides a summary of the key themes and then a full summary of the discussion.

## Key themes identified from the group session

### Areas of Success

- It is felt that the Runcorn Town Team is a team that succeeds because of the sense of commitment, drive, working together and a willingness to learn from each other.
- The environmental improvements, grants for businesses and community activities have helped to give a sense of community spirit.

### Priorities for the next year

#### 1. Landmarks / Family Friendly Places

The waterways and the promenade should be made more use of. These are key areas of the town that could embrace a range of family friendly activities that will encourage residents to use and stay in the town centre.

- How can this be encouraged / set up?

#### 2. Funding opportunities

The initial funding is now starting to run short therefore there needs to be a push to source alternative methods of funding from a variety of sources.

- What funding opportunities are available?
- Will successful businesses in Runcorn want to be part of the success and contribute funds / donations?

#### 3. Promotion and Advertising

Promotion and advertising of the town centre is key to attracting more revenue into the area. There should be some form of continuous promotion alongside one off campaigns.

- What methods of promotion and advertising have been used previously and have they worked?
- Look at all types of promotion and advertising from traditional e.g. leaflet drops / newspaper articles / taxis / buses to new opportunities for example Twitter and Facebook
- Are there methods of promotion / advertising / technology that already exist that could be used at little or no cost?
- One method does not suit all. Look at costs / timings against impact?
- What are others doing? Are there examples of best practice e.g. Runcorn Shopping Centre Twitter account?

Other priorities: **4<sup>th</sup>** Keep Looking Forward, **joint 5<sup>th</sup>** Physical Environment and Niche Market, **6<sup>th</sup>** Technology can also be encompassed within the top three priorities. Not losing sight of why the Runcorn Town Team was set up, to keep working on the initiatives that have been a success and to look for new ways to build on that success.

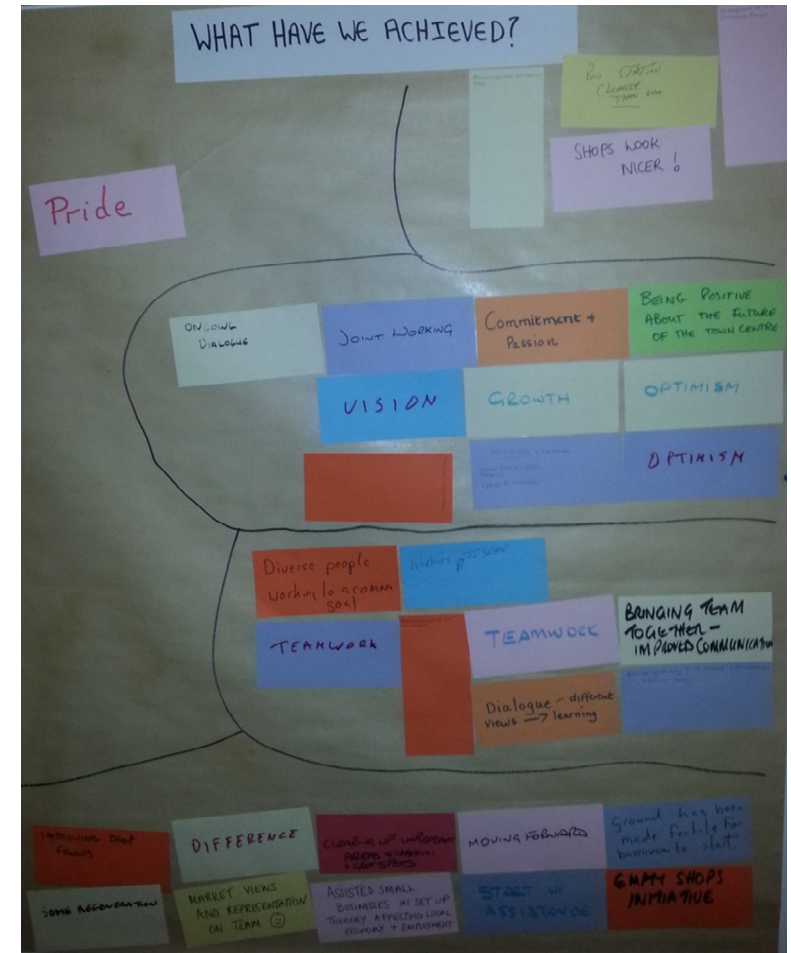
## What has the Runcorn Town Team achieved?

**Environment:** Development of the Christmas fair, Shops look nicer, Bus station cleaner than ever, Return of the Christmas tree, Pride

**Difference:** Improving shop fronts, Some regeneration, Difference, Market views representation on team, Clearing up unpleasant areas i.e. graffiti and grot spots, Assisted small businesses in set up thereby affecting local economy and employment, Moving forward, Start-up assistance, Ground has been made fertile for businesses to start, Empty shops initiative.

**Commitment:** On-going dialogue, Joint working, Commitment and passion, Being positive about the future of the town centre, Optimism, Optimism, Achieved and on-going: shop frontage grants and property renewal, Growth, Vision, Increase in business.

**Team work:** Diverse people working to a common goal, Teamwork, Working together, Teamwork, Bringing team together, improved communication, Good – an opportunity to be involved in the discussions and decision making, Dialogue – difference – views – learning, Good mixture of town team membership.



## What has the Runcorn Town Team achieved? – Summary of main discussion

### Environment

- The overall environment and feel of the town has very much improved. There are two initiatives in particular that have helped to do this  
1. The Christmas Fair and 2. The upkeep of the bus station.
- The Christmas Fair has improved significantly since it first started in 2010. It has grown from a few stalls outside the old police station to a two week event bringing the whole town centre together and now gives a strong sense of community spirit, so much so that it is still a positive talking point at the end of January. The Runcorn Town Team helped this to happen with the provision of funds towards the Christmas tree, road closures and the erecting / dismantling of market stalls.
- Runcorn Town Bus Station is a large bus station in the centre of the town and as a result can be a place for ‘grot spots’ and make the town centre feel unwelcoming. Due to requests and funding from the Runcorn Town Team the graffiti has now been removed and the Council have agreed to complete 4 deep cleans of the bus station this year to help to maintain the cleanliness. This shows that by joining together and asking for things to be done, problems can be addressed.
- Initiatives such as these have helped to increase residents pride in the town and this has in turn increased the pride of the Runcorn Town Team as they feel they have made something happen.

### Difference

- Following on from general environmental improvements is the sense of commitment that the members of the team have for Runcorn Town Centre and that a real difference is being made. The funding for small business set up has been a boost for the local economy by helping independent shops to open. Shop owners have also been given funds to help improve shop fronts again showing a physical positive change within the town centre. Regent Street was highlighted as a particular place of growth - for example the bike shop and hat shop - and that the high street is now starting to follow suit.
- It is also seen as a plus that there is representation from Runcorn Street Market on the group. All members have their views listened to on the group and it is good that the street market is part of that.
- It is felt that for the upcoming regeneration plans for the ‘Old Town’ the town team should be involved in the decisions that are made and that there should be dialogue between all those involved e.g. traders, councillors, residents. With this type of joint working the plans should be accepted more easily.

Email [research@halton.gov.uk](mailto:research@halton.gov.uk) for further information



## **Commitment**

- The overall sense of commitment of the team is seen as a real bonus. When the team was first set up, members felt that they were part of something that saw a positive future for the town. There was a blank canvas of what could or should be achieved and that allowed for ideas and thoughts to be discussed, which led to, for example, the 'Shop front' grant scheme being realised. Then being able to move forward so quickly enabled the team to make an impression on the town centre and to do this before the major development of the town centre has started.
- The decisions that the team make are done so with the common goal of improving the town centre, with the knowledge that a diverse range of views have been expressed and debated and that as a result the decisions are made collectively. This joint working helps the team to move forward in a positive way.
- The continued passion, optimism, vision and reliability of the members of the town team were also discussed. The fact that members of the team and Cllrs continue to attend meetings illustrates the success of the group. In particular, the 'traders' feel included and that Cllrs want to hear their views and are equally supportive of their opinions and ideas.

## **Team Work**

- Linking to the commitment from town team members is that the group work together as a team. The members have, over time, come to understand and learn from each other. This in turn has helped the members to become good at representing business and residents as a group rather than in their own silos or background. The team work that is brought to this group has improved communication with market traders, shop traders, and councillors and provides links that have never existed before.
- It is felt that the Runcorn Town Team is one of a few groups that illustrates with good team work people from a variety of backgrounds can work together and can achieve things. For example signs for Hazlehurst craft studios were part funded under shop front scheme and this has helped them be recognised by passers-by who go on their website and then go to their classes. People need to realise that they need to use or lose the town centre and the town team can help spread this message.
- Town team investment has helped to make a difference to peoples businesses and raised their profile. It has also given an opportunity for individuals to talk through any issues being experienced.

## What should the priorities for the next year be?

**1<sup>st</sup> Landmark:** Develop the promenade area; include café, toilets and info relating to bird population, Waterways, Encourage family friendly leisure

**2<sup>nd</sup> Funding:** More funding, Availability of funding.

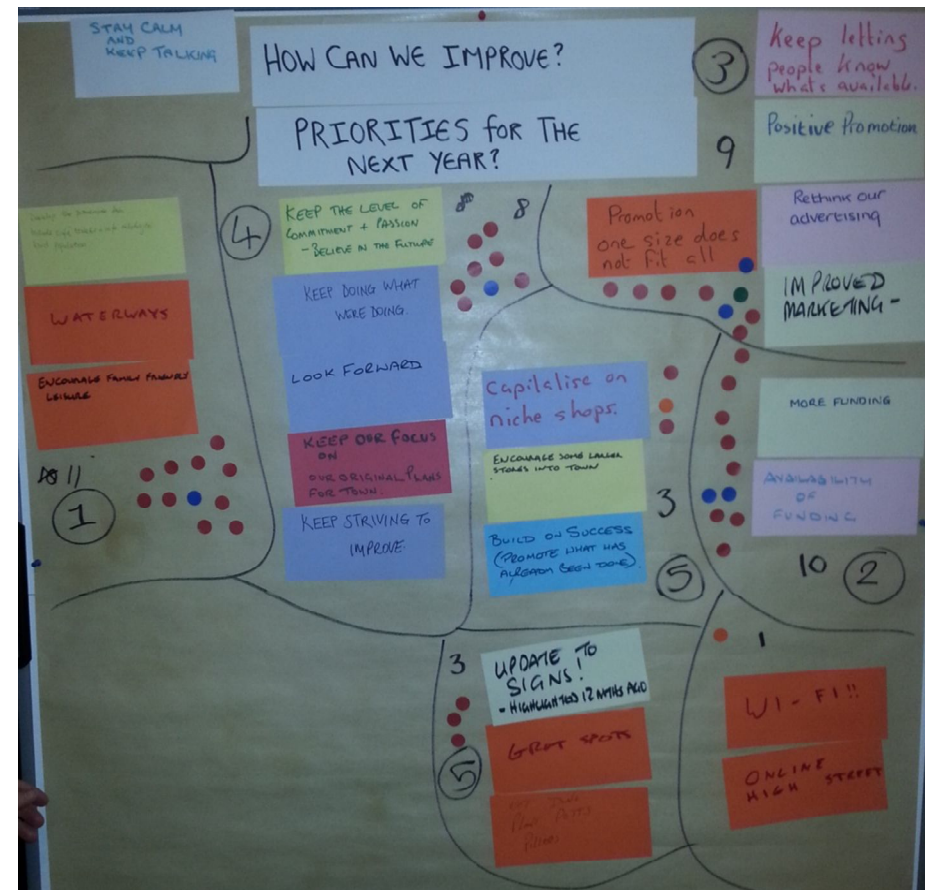
**3<sup>rd</sup> Promotion:** Promotion one size does not fit all, Keep letting people know what is available, Positive promotion, Rethink our advertising, Improved marketing

**4<sup>th</sup> Looking forward:** Keep the level of commitment and passion – believe in the future, Keep doing what we are doing, Look forward, Keep our focus on our original plans for the town, Keep striving to improve

**5<sup>th</sup> Physical Environment:** Update to signs! Highlighted 12 months ago, Grot spots, Not done plant pots / pillars

**5<sup>th</sup> Niche Market:** Capitalise on niche shops, Encourage some larger stores into town, Build on success: promote what has already been done

**6<sup>th</sup> Technology:** Wi-Fi, Online High Street



## What should the priorities for the next year be? – Summary of main discussion

### Landmark:

- It was felt by the group that more attention should be paid to the landmarks of Runcorn Town Centre. For example the promenade area, the waterways and others such as The Brindley could be used to encourage and attract more family friendly activity and business growth. We do not use or take advantage of these areas enough. For example could the promenade area be developed to include a café, nature boards etc.?

### Funding:

- It is felt that it is very important that the team now works together to source and apply for more funding. The initial money that the team had to spend is now running low and without further funding the good work that has been done will not be able to carry on. This is seen as a key area that needs to be investigated by the team. The positive work that has been done so far will hopefully enable Council officers to apply for funds as they can demonstrate a good business case with real life examples of how the team has invested in the growth of Runcorn Town Centre.

### Promotion:

- Another area of importance that the group want to invest in is promotion and advertising. It is felt that promotion of Runcorn Town Centre needs to be continuous and the message needs to be continuous not just a one off campaign. Individual businesses or areas such as 'Regent Street' should also be promoted and marketed to help illustrate all the individual aspects of the town. Continuous promoting and advertising will give confidence to the area and that this in turn will help to encourage new business and attract investment. An article in the local press about the grants scheme was very positive and illustrates that we are doing good work.
- However some advertising has not had the impact that was intended. The advertising on a side of a bus for Runcorn Street Market was seen as a good scheme. However the advertising was limited to a small section of the bus and the bus was only used during school hours. One member of the team suggested that the use of taxi's may be better next time as they drive all around the borough and are not fixed to set routes. It is important to learn from this and move on.

## Looking Forward

- It is important that the town team keeps the 'level of commitment and passion' if it is to carry on as it is now. All members need to stay involved and active so as not to lose the momentum. It is important to understand that mistakes will be made and that not everything may be successful but to learn from this and keep moving forward is key to the team's success.
- It is also important that in moving forward the group does not lose its focus and sticks to agreed plans. For example Runcorn Locks Restoration Society is working with the Association of British Waterways to see the Bridgewater canal connected to the Runcorn canal. It was agreed by the town team that the 'Canal Quarter' was a priority with a focus on canal and boat culture and niche shops, so the team should be promoting this aspect of Runcorn to help with the project.

## Physical Environment:

- Although work has been done to improve the physical environment in the town, there are still improvements to be made or improvements that are taking too long. For example a request for 'updates to signs' was raised 12 months ago yet this still hasn't been done or enough information hasn't been provided as to the processes involved to enable updates to signage. Another area highlighted was the bus station. Although it is cleaner than it was before the road surfaces are very poor.
- The team also need to keep reporting 'Grot spots' and out of date advertising boards / pillars on Church Street to make sure that these are cleaned up or removed. Residents / visitors do not want to see advertising for events that have been and gone. There is also an issue of using the correct advertising, for example not just having banners that can only be seen by traffic. Also relating to this is the upkeep of the plant pots in the town centre. This might seem trivial but it gives a negative impression of the town centre.

## Niche Market:

- The town team needs to encourage more business into the area especially those classed as 'niche market' be they larger stores or small independent shops. This is what makes Runcorn town stand out. The work that is happening at the 'Synergy' building is an excellent example of this as is Frailers Guitar shop which is 'world renowned and attracts people from far and wide'.

## Technology:

- Although this was not seen as a high priority in the first instance, the use of technology and advancing the availability of technology for business and retail is very important. Although this may not be something that is instantly recognisable as an improvement, for example cleaning up grot spots, business and retail do need to keep up to date with technology or the town will be left behind. Being Wi-Fi enabled may not seem important but residents / visitors who use the bar or restaurants will expect to be able to use Wi-Fi in the premises. Bluetooth announcements via mobile phones were also discussed as a way forward.

The point was also made that a lot of trade is now moving online. We should help to support this where possible.

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