



How to contact us

Write to: Manor House, Church Street,
Littlehampton, West Sussex, BN17 5EW

Email: lrc@littlehampton-tc.gov.uk

Call: 01903 732063

Find us online: www.littlehampton-tc.gov.uk

Minutes of the Town Centre Action Group Meeting held in the New Millenium Chamber on Tuesday 14 November 2023 at 6pm

Present:

Councillor Freddie Tandy – Chair (Mayor of Littlehampton Town Council)
Katie King (Arun District Council, Economic Development & Regeneration Officer)
Mike La Traille (Business Representative, Pier Road Coffee and Art)
Richard Groome (Business Representative, East Beach Guest House)
Councillor Christine Wiltshire (Arun District Council)
Councillor Dr James Walsh (Arun District Council)
Councillor Alan Butcher (Chair of Littlehampton Town Council's Policy and Finance Committee)
Laura Chrysostomou (Littlehampton Town Council, Town Clerk)
Sofia Chittenden (Littlehampton Town Council, Communications and Marketing Manager)
Simon Matthews (Matthews Associates, Consultant)
Georgia Hudson (Sussex Police)
Hayley Parkin (Sussex Police)
Damian Merrifield (Sussex Police)
Carrie Reynolds (Arun District Council, Communities & Wellbeing Manager)
Sophie Cullen (Business Representative, L Guess)
Elise Bicknell (Littlehampton Town Council, Town Centre Strategy Project Officer)
Kieran Gibbins (Littlehampton Town Council, Events and Town Centre Strategy Manager)
Councillor George O'Neill (Littlehampton Town Council, Substituting for Councillor Northeast)
Miriam Nicholls (Arun District Council, Business Development Manager)

Apologies:

Councillor David Britton (West Sussex County Council)
Greg Ockwell (West Sussex County Council, Programme Delivery Manager)
Denise Vine (Arun District Council, Group Head Business and Economy)
Simon Armstrong Barnes (Landlord Arcade)

2023 to 2024

1. Introductions

Introductions were made and roles and responsibilities were discussed.

2. Introduction to Matthews Associates

Matthews Associates Team

Simon Matthews introduced himself and Matthews Associates to the wider group. Simon explained that Matthews Associates have been contracted through a grant from the governments' UK Shared Prosperity Fund. It was explained via a presentation that the issues and challenges experienced by Littlehampton are not unique to the town and are being faced nationwide. Simon discussed his role and experience as a retailer and expressed his empathy for the town's retailers at this time. The wider team's roles and responsibilities were also discussed with a colleague focusing on tourism related matters specifically connecting the seafront to the town centre. Another team member, a chartered surveyor, would focus on identifying the landlords and agents of empty units and leading on developing communication channels between them and the Town Centre Action Group (TCAG). It was highlighted that whilst Littlehampton faces some obvious challenges there is huge potential in the town and its assets must be utilised.

Four Key Areas of Development

The presentation then moved on to the four key areas of development that Matthews Associates will be working on. The first focussed on maximising and supporting the businesses to make Littlehampton a successful and sort after location. This can be achieved by creating an empowered business forum made up of local retailers. An initial meeting will take place early in the new year and all retailers will be invited.

The second area of focus involved researching and contacting landlords. It was highlighted that a lot of the landlords likely don't live in the immediate area and therefore may not be aware of the scale of investment recently made in the town centre. It was explained that it could be that landlords do not realise that by reducing rents they could attract tenants. Landlords would be asked to consider letting units at a lower rate temporarily to benefit short term or start-up businesses and to reduce shop vacancy.

The third key area involves supporting the action plan and taking it forward alongside the Town Centre team at Littlehampton Town Council. This work would be implemented through close liaison between all partner agencies, regular meetings, monitoring, and evaluation of the action plan.

The final area of focus involves developing a destination identity for the town. Matthews Associates informed the group that West and East Sussex have teamed up to submit an LVEP (Local Visitor Economy Partnership) application to attract more tourism locally.

Next Steps

The conversation moved on to outline what the next steps would be for Matthews Associates. This included attendance at the Town Centre Action Group Meetings, conducting project research, targeted interviews with businesses, partners and

stakeholders, review and prioritisation of the Action Plan and building a database of landlords and agents. Matthews Associates emphasised the importance of doing an open meeting for retailers to attend, so they could better understand the work being undertaken and collectively explore actions that improve the retail experience in the town. It was suggested that an open meeting for landlords and agents would be beneficial to try and engage them with the town. The target date to achieve all of this would be early March before the next meeting of the TCAG takes place.

Questions

It was asked how long Matthews Associates had been employed for, and it was confirmed that the funding would cover a period of 18 months, up to March 2025. The consultant was asked how important it was to have a group of business representatives at the TCAG. The consultant confirmed that this type of group is needed to help understand retail needs. It was also explained that the business representatives would need to regularly communicate with other traders and report any concerns, questions, or suggestions back to the TCAG to see regular progress. This started a discussion in the group that emphasised the importance of regular communication with retailers at this time. The group agreed that communication needs to be through different formats.

The equal importance of both visitors and residents was discussed as was the increased negativity on social media. It was agreed that this had a detrimental effect on prospective visitors to the town as this could well be the first thing they see. There was optimism amongst the group that feedback on social media would be more positive once there is notable progress on various elements of the strategy. There was a need for “ambassadors” to “talk up the town”. It was also suggested by the consultant that the public realm work will be received more positively once the number of vacant units decreases in the town.

The consultant was thanked for their presentation.

3. Action Plan

It was explained that to keep everyone updated with the progress of the Town Centre Strategy, officers have created a table of actions undertaken in the last period as a basis for reporting to the TCAG each meeting. The table includes a column to highlight any communication outputs relating to actions taken that would support positive and engaging messaging to visitors and shoppers.

Town Centre

It was suggested that Littlehampton Town Council should write a press release for business representatives so the positive impact of the TCAG could be communicated to the wider audience. The group noted that a newsletter would be developed and distributed by the Town Council. It was suggested and agreed that the newsletter should be sent out on behalf of the Town Centre Action Group to

emphasise that the actions and subsequent progress of the TCAG has been a collective effort.

Retail and Markets

The issues of surrounding retail and markets was raised with it being stated that there needs to be a banking hub set up in the town centre. This was noted by the Chair, and it was explained that the Council's Business Plan included this as a goal. The group discussed the lack of take up of the District Council's shopfront grants. Matthews Associates would work with landlords to increase the use of this and improve the upper storeys of shops. The group went on to discuss the possibility of Pier Road being a better place for restaurants rather than the High Street. Restaurants business rates had been raised and Officers explained that discretion on business rates is the remit of the Government and not local Councils. The consultant explained that this often gets confused because the bill appears to come from the District Council but is only collected by them and not paid directly to them. It was resolved that this should be fed back to retailers to prevent further confusion.

Events

Officers stated that LTC was developing an events programme as part of the budget setting process, and they would be looking to discuss this with businesses at the open meeting in January. The meeting would look to review the events delivered and their impact which would feed into ideas for future events and how they can be delivered collaboratively. A town wide celebration was suggested, and business representatives agreed that businesses should join in with this.

Transport

It was noted that a traffic light system would be beneficial in that area. The Chair answered this question and explained that it will be revisited based on the feedback West Sussex County Council provide.

Anti-social Behaviour

Sussex Police representatives addressed the group and stated that an operation to get more higher police visibility in the town is going ahead. West Sussex has been given 30 additional PCSOs. The Police have tackled issues caused by two known groups in the town. The Community Wardens and Arun Youth Project are working with young people in the town to understand what is required to discourage large crowds from gathering in the area. Concerns were raised as to how to best share progress, so residents are aware of what is happening. Sussex Police said that they are trying to communicate more regularly on social media. The group agreed that the public need to remember to report to the Police and not on social media channels. The District Council explained data is needed to build up a picture of exactly what is happening to inform what the long-term solution might be. The group went on to discuss the DISC reporting scheme used by retailers and it was agreed that more businesses need to sign up to the scheme as it's free to use and the quickest

process of reporting crime in the area as it feeds directly into the police. The consultant asked whether independent shops are suffering from theft. Sussex Police representatives confirmed this, but prosecutions cannot be made without residents and business owners reporting crimes. It was confirmed that traders have been reminded of licensing in terms of selling vapes and alcohol.

Officers explained that the Kamsons landlord is attempting to get a quote for CCTV in the arcade.

Marketing and Tourism

The group opened this section by discussing the range of restaurants operating in the Town Centre. The consultant explained that it has been evidenced that restaurants are afraid to advertise on platforms because of the damage that a bad review can cause their business. It was suggested that the group work collectively on an initiative to encourage people to leave positive reviews and what could be done to help businesses to understand the digital environment and benefit of reviews. Officers shared with the group the 'Grow Digital West Sussex' initiative and how it would be a good resource to support this. Grow Digital can deliver workshops for three or four businesses. ADC Officers discussed a networking breakfast club that is run in Bognor Regis where over 30 businesses take part. It was explained that businesses pay £250 annually to be a part of the club, the cost of which is split 50% towards running it and 50% towards an advertising booklet that is dispatched to thousands of local residents. A similar group had been started in Littlehampton, however, take up was low and the aims of the club were not being met and as a result the club dissolved.

4. Feedback from businesses and landlords

None.

5. Next Meeting Date

Tuesday 5 March at 18:00 in the New Millenium Chamber, Manor House, Church Street, BN17 5EW.

The meeting closed at 20:00.

Chair