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## Notes of the Town Centre Action Group Meeting held in the New Millenium Chamber on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023 at 6pm

### Present:

Councillor Freddie Tandy – Chair (Mayor of Littlehampton Town Council)  
Councillor Alan Butcher (Chair of the Town Council's Policy and Finance Committee)  
Chloe Brown-Felpts (Littlehampton Town Council, Strategy Project Officer)  
Sofia Chittenden (Littlehampton Town Council, Communications and Marketing Manager)  
Laura Chrysostomou (Littlehampton Town Council, Clerk)  
Sophie Cullen (Business Representative)  
Kieran Gibbins (Littlehampton Town Council, Events and Town Centre Strategy Manager)  
Richard Groome (Business Representative)  
Georgia Hudson (Sussex Police)  
Damian Merrifield (Sussex Police)  
Miriam Nicholls (Arun District Council, Business Development Manager)  
Councillor Mike Northeast (Littlehampton Town Council)  
Dax O'Connor (Arun District Council, Community Safety Officer)  
Hayley Parkin (Sussex Police)  
Denise Vine (Arun District Council, Group Head Business and Economy)  
Councillor Dr James Walsh KStJ (Vice Chair of Arun District Council's Economy Committee, substituting for Councillor Nash)  
Councillor Christine Wiltshire (Arun District Council ward member)

### Apologies:

Councillor Roger Nash (Chair of Arun District Council's Economy Committee)  
Councillor David Britton (West Sussex County Council divisional member)  
West Sussex County Council Officer  
Mike La Traille (Business Representative)

## 2023 to 2024

### 1. Introduction to the Town Centre Strategy

The Chair introduced the Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan previously circulated to members.

The group gave their feedback on the strategy document, looking at each section individually.

### **Area of coverage**

The area of coverage was raised with concerns that it doesn't cover the seafront/river area of the town. Arts, culture, and hospitality on the seafront isn't included, which is the largest tourism point for Littlehampton. Officers confirmed that although it isn't included, there is a clear relationship between the town centre, seafront, and the riverside and this is reflected by Strategic Objective 5 to improve the interconnectivity between them. However, it is important to keep the focus area as the town centre for the purpose of delivering the actions with identified resources. Arun District Council Officers explained about the seafront regeneration which will provide a focus for the seafront area.

After discussion, the group supported that the seafront and riverside area are important but agreed that the Town Centre Strategy started with retail in the Town Centre and that should be the focus including East Street and Arcade Road. Officers highlighted that the action plan does incorporate the arts and culture, and this would be good to link to the seafront and riverside area.

The group questioned how housing was raised in the strategy and felt that it should be included. There was discussion about concerns over the number of HMOs (house in multiple occupation) in the Town, and the need for more hotels and accommodation. Officers confirmed that this is in the action plan and explained that the Town Council as a statutory consultee does comment on applications through its Planning and Transport Committee. The Chair explained there is now an article 4 in place so all HMO proposals must go through the full planning application process with Arun District Council as the Planning Authority. It was agreed by the group that keeping the residential units above shops is vital as they provide an income to landlords.

### **The Ambition**

A query was raised about the bullet point referring to the Town Centre as being a vibrant place that drives out localised anti-social behaviour, and the order of this because if the anti-social behaviour is removed then it will be vibrant. It was agreed the wording would be revised by Officers.

### **Strategic Objectives**

All members of the group were in support of the strategic objectives.

### **Town Centre Action Group Membership**

It was discussed that an additional two Councillors should be added, one for Arun District Council and one for Littlehampton Town Council to ensure balance. A concern was raised that would result in too many Councillors in the Action Group.

Officers confirmed that any strategic and policy suggestions from the Town Centre Action Group will be fed back to Littlehampton Town Council's Policy and Finance Committee and Arun District Council's Economy Committee for consideration.

## **2. Terms of Reference for the Town Centre Action Group**

It was explained that it was important for members of the TCAG to send the relevant representatives, who would take responsibility for actions either by acting on them themselves or ensuring they were passed on to the relevant people for action. Following this inaugural meeting each organisation should consider who best to put forward to serve on the TCAG.

The group agreed to change the line 'There will be the opportunity for outside organisations to join meetings when invited if they are required to include 'individuals'.

The group agreed to add landlord as well as business representatives to the membership.

## **3. Town Centre Action Plan Session**

The Action Plan was introduced by the Chair after previously being circulated to members of the group. It was then opened for discussion.

Concerns were raised over Sussex Police data as a tool to measure impact, and it was suggested that this is more specific. It was also explained that the data can have peaks and troughs that may skew the assessment of them, for example a current drive to encourage people to report crime will lead to an increase in the levels of crime.

Sussex Police confirmed that they will need to know what to include and how often the reports are required. It was suggested that the data should be crimes that would impact town centre businesses and visitors and provided quarterly/monthly so the data is rolling for 12 months and would provide good comparisons.

Looking at Appendix A, it was raised that the data requires explanation particularly the percentages, but the list was a good range that impacted town centre businesses and visitors and was relevant to the strategy and action plan. The Acting Sargeant is looking at developing a set of reports and this could be reported to the TCAG. It was agreed it would be good to use reports already in existence or about to be created rather than creating new ones.

The group agreed to include an explanation on what the acronym S.M.A.R.T stands for, after concerns raised by the group that not everyone will understand.

## **Town Centre**

Officers introduced the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) project which would see the appointment of a consultant to work with the Town Council to

work with local businesses, landlords and the TCAG to develop the Town Centre. It was confirmed that following a tender exercise there have been eight applications, which are to be shortlisted and interviewed in the coming weeks. Officers suggested that business representatives sit on the interview panel too.

First impressions of the town were discussed by the group, looking at the action point 'Ensure the town is clean and inviting'. There were discussions over the safety of the town centre with some feeling that the town is the safest and cleanest it has ever been and others disagreeing. The group agreed that the gateways into the town centre need to be improved as the first impression of a destination is important and the stigma of a 'rundown' town needs to be erased.

The group suggested flowers near the station would help to make it bright and inviting. It was agreed that the Terminus Road entrance into town could be improved.

The group agreed to change the wording in the action point regarding the former hospital site due to there currently being no proposals in place for the sites.

### **Retail and markets**

An Arun District Council representative confirmed that they already maintain a list of vacant shops which can be shared with the group.

### **Leisure**

The group asked if there is scope for a new restaurant in the High Street. The group discussed this and confirmed that two new restaurants have opened, however it would be nice to encourage more possibly by helping with promoting the current businesses.

It was agreed by the group to change the action point focusing on leisure and hotels in the town centre to say 'To bring more leisure, hotel facilities and restaurants into the town' as it shouldn't just focus on the centre.

### **Events**

The wording of the action point was discussed as it was raised that town centre events don't bring people into the town to make use of accommodation. It was explained by Officers that the Action Plan focuses on events in the Town Centre, but the Town Council does deliver a broader events programme which includes events such as Stage by the Sea. Both the Town and District Council work to deliver tourism initiatives for the Town too.

The group raised concerns over the lack of arts and culture in the town. Officers explained that once the seafront regeneration work is complete there will be more arts and culture. Setting up an Arts Forum for the whole of the town to encourage this, is an action point within the plan.

A member of the group shared that Chichester are looking to have an outreach post for festivals. The Chair stated he would try to find out more about this.

## **Transport**

Arun District Council confirmed that the application for permanent pedestrianisation of Pier Road has been rejected and it isn't possible to apply for a seasonal one. West Sussex County Council confirmed that the project must have the agreement of the County Councillor for the local divisional ward in order to go forward and this has not been forthcoming.

The group showed their disappointment in this and suggested writing to a minister.

The group discussed encouraging cycling and ecofriendly travel, including looking at an electric bike scheme from the station or a nearby area so that both locals and visitors can travel by bike in the town. This was supported by the group and will be added to the action plan.

## **Anti-social Behaviour**

The safety in the town centre was discussed, with members of the group stating that they have never felt so unsafe.

Sussex Police representatives confirmed that they have recently undertaken a day of action in the Town Centre, tackling anti-social behaviour issues in the town and working with Arun District Council to issue letters explaining to shopkeepers their responsibilities in terms of serving alcohol. It was confirmed that they are recruiting PSCO's and will have double the number by early next year. The group suggested that this is publicised to show something is happening and Sussex Police do plan on doing so. Both the Town and District Council's offered to support those communications.

Sussex Police urged the group to encourage people to report crimes as this data is vital in targeting resources appropriately.

The standard of driving by taxi drivers in town was discussed by the group as they are setting a bad example. A previous crackdown scheme called 'Operation Taxi' was discussed as a possibility for the future.

The group raised concerns about the drug dealing issues in the Arcade which is currently being regenerated and will soon have new two businesses, both are children's providers. It was suggested that there is more police presence at the hotpot times to help tackle the issue. Sussex Police highlighted the current drive for drug dealing and other anti-social behaviour to be reported, so that they can get the evidence needed to take further action and get accurate data. This includes shop owners using the DISK scheme.

It was confirmed that the Arun Community Safety Group have decided to make a Local Action Team (LAT) for Littlehampton, involving key organisations and local authorities. This will include a drug and alcohol

support service who will be doing outreach in the town. The focus of the team will be getting feedback on what they can do and getting people out into the town to tackle the issues. They will report to the TCAG with updates and progress.

A member of the group that works outside the town centre said they have only ever experienced one issue and the guests to their business have never mentioned issues on their visits.

The item in the action plan to look at improving CCTV in the town centre was discussed, it was confirmed that Arun District Council can offer match funding for CCTV in the Arcade. It was raised that if more CCTV is required, studies will need to be conducted and a report taken to an Arun District Council committee.

The group questioned if the new UKSPF consultant will look at safety, Officers confirmed that this will not be part of their work.

The group discussed the alleyway between Capital News and Peacocks in the town centre and questioned if there is a way of blocking it off due to it being a large hotspot for crime in the town centre. Due to the length of it, you cannot get a CCTV camera to cover all of it. Officers agreed it could be investigated but there were concerns from the group over the anti-social behaviour just moving down the road to Duke Street and blocking it off means that local people lose use of it. Other options, such as positive activities and the presence of police and wardens should be explored to deter anti-social behaviour rather than close a well-used route.

It was agreed by the group that the organisations included in the group to tackle anti-social behaviour are correct, however it was agreed to change the wording of the 'Police led business wardens' to 'Business Wardens'.

Officers notified the group that Littlehampton Town Council have a community stall as part of the weekly Friday market that they can use on occasional Fridays to create more of a presence, with councillors and partner organisations attending. It was agreed this was a good idea to trial.

### **Marketing and Tourism**

Officers confirmed that this is something that the UKSPF consultant will be working on, giving Littlehampton a destination identity.

## **5. Communications**

It was proposed and agreed that Littlehampton Town Council host a website page which will include information about the progress of the group and minutes.

There will be a separate email address created to ensure clear communication, this will be circulated before the next meeting.

Officers explained that the marketing should be transparent, so the public are aware of the work being done and the group agreed.

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> November at 6pm in the New Millenium Chamber, Manor House, Church Street, BN17 5EW.

The meeting closed at 8pm.

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**Chair**

UNAPPROVED