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**Minutes of the Town Centre Action Group Meeting held in the New Millenium Chamber on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at 6pm**

**Present:**

Councillor Freddie Tandy – Chair (Mayor of Littlehampton Town Council)  
Katie King (Arun District Council, Officer)  
Mike La Traille (Business Representative)  
Richard Groome (Business Representative)  
Councillor Christine Wiltshire (Arun District Council ward member)  
Councillor Dr James Walsh  
Councillor Alan Butcher (Chair of the 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 Steel)  
Carrie Reynolds  
Sophie Cullen (Business Representative)  
Elise Bicknell (Littlehampton Town Council, Town Centre Strategy Project Officer)  
Kieran Gibbins (Littlehampton Town Council, Events and Town Centre Strategy Project Officer)  
Councillor George O'Neill (Substituting for Councillor Northeast)  
Miriam Nicholls (Arun District Council, Business Development Manager)

**Apologies:**

Councillor David Britton  
Greg Ockwell  
Denise Vine (Arun District Council, Group Head Business and Economy)

**2023 to 2024**

**1. Introductions**

The Chair introduced himself to the group. The group continued around the table, introducing themselves and their role individually.

## **2. Introduction to Matthews Associates**

### **Matthews Associates Team**

Simon Matthews introduced himself to the group and discussed how it's great to see a team ready and willing to work on the town. Matthews Associates hire is solely funded by the governments UK Shared Prosperity Fund. He went on to show the group a document by Revo that discusses that as a town we are not alone. Simon discussed his role and shared that he had once been a shop owner himself and has a lot of understanding and sympathy for retailers at this time. Simon used his presentation to introduce the rest of his team. Sandra will be focusing on the tourism side of things and how we can connect the seafront and the High Street. Ben is a chartered surveyor who will be working on finding the landlords and agents of empty units. Simon shared with the group that they can see the challenges, but they can also see a very good core with potential for good things to be built from in Littlehampton.

### **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 is to maximize and support the businesses to make Littlehampton a successful and sort place to be. This will be done through creating an empowered business forum, and invites will go out for an initial meeting soon.

The second key area explained to the group involves tracking down landlords. It was highlighted that these landlords could be anywhere, which means they need to be engaged and they will need to find out how well they know Littlehampton. Simon told the group that landlords need to understand that they wont get the rent that they used to.

The third key area shared with the group was to support the action plan and take it forward alongside the Town Centre team at Littlehampton Town Council. The team will prioritise and section the actions between each other.

Simon went on to say that the fourth key area is to develop a destination identity for the town. He told the group that West and East Sussex have teamed up and will be putting an LVEP application in to attract more tourism.

### **Next Steps**

The conversation moved on to outline what the next steps would be for Matthews Associates. The first step was for them to attend the Town Centre Action Group Meeting. The next things Simon stated were to do project research and scoping, targeted interviews with businesses, partners and stakeholders, town Action Plan review and prioritization, build a data base of landlords and agents. He then went on to discuss with the group the importance of doing an open meeting for traders and businesses to attend, here they will be able to get to know Matthews Associates and understand that we need to work collectively to improve the town. The group was told that there will also be an open meeting for landlords and agents to try and

engage them with the town. All of this will be achieved by the next Town Centre Action Group meeting in early March.

### **Questions**

Simon Matthews addressed the group and asked if anyone had any questions. It was raised how long Matthews Associates are hired for, they confirmed that the funding is for 18 months. It was also raised how important it is to have a group of businesses represented by the businesses at the TCAG, Matthews Associates responded that this type of group is needed to help understand retail needs and would hopefully include hospitality so that they can talk to everyone. Simon added that the business group is to communicate with the business reps, who will then bring the information to the TCAG so as not to undermine it. This started a discussion in the group that communication with traders is very important at this time. Simon responded by saying that this is absolutely true, but the way this is done will never be right for everyone. They went on to agree that communication should be done through different formats.

The importance of visitors as well as residents was brought up because there are people already in the town willing to spend there. The negativity online was discussed and officers explained that there will always be negative comments online because unfortunately that is the nature of social media, however we can lessen these as once they see things they like there will be more positivity on there. It was also noted that the public realm work will become a positive when we start to get more shops in there. It will be a slow process but as soon as we get wins we should tell people and celebrate them.

The group and the Chair thanked Simon for coming and for his presentation. The Chair moved the group onto the next part of the agenda.

### **3. Action Plan**

It was explained that to keep everyone up to date on the Town Centre Strategy, LTC have created tables for each updated action.

#### **Town Centre**

The group proceeded to read through the tables to themselves, the first being Town Centre. It was decided that LTC should do a press release for business representatives so that they can say the good things they would like to express about the group. The group noted that a newsletter would be going out from LTC and it was suggested that the newsletter should be sent out from the Town Centre Action Group, this was discussed and agreed within the group.

#### **Retail and Markets**

Retail and Markets was raised with it being stated that there needs to be a banking hub set up in the town centre and the Chair noted that the Councillors Business Plan

will be working on this. The group discussed that shop front grants need to be used more and that Matthews Associates would work with landlords in an attempt to increase the use of this and improve the upper stories 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 were raised and officers explained that discretion on business rates is up to the government not the councils. Matthews Associates added that this often gets confused because the bill appears to come from ADC, but is only collected by them not paid to them. It was resolved that this should be fed back to the trade associations in order to stop the confusion.

## **Events**

The group read through the table and officers stated that once the events budget is agreed we can speak to businesses about what they would like to see from events, this can be discussed in the open meeting in January. A town wide celebration was suggested, and businesses representatives said that businesses should join in with this.

## **Transport**

The group read through the table and it was questioned if it was possible to make Pier Road one way as that was the original plan. It was noted that a traffic light system would be beneficial in that area. The Chair answered this question and said that it will be revisited based on what West Sussex County Council come back with.

## **Anti-social Behavior**

The group moved onto the next table which was anti-social behavior. Sussex Police representatives addressed the group as they read through the tables, they stated that things are happening longer term however they need evidence of things because it's a process. An operation to get more high vis police in the town is going ahead. The next update was that they have addressed two groups as the main issues in the town. The Community Wardens and Arun Youth Project are working with youths in the town to understand what they need in order to move them away from that area. Concerns were raised as to how do we share with people what is being done so that they know what is happening. Sussex Police said that they are trying to put things out more on social media. The group discussed that people need to stop reporting on social media, and report to the police. The group went on to discuss the DISC scheme and that more businesses need to sign up as it's free for them and helps build much more evidence. CR pointed out that more businesses in the town need to be signed up to the disc scheme, it's free to them and builds up much more evidence. Matthews Associates asked whether independent shops are suffering from theft. Sussex Police representatives replied that it is happening, but it hasn't been reported enough. The group agreed and discussed that traders have been reminded of licensing in terms of selling vapes and alcohol.

The Chair moved the group onto the CCTV section of Anti-social Behavior. Officers explained that the Kamsons landlord are attempting to get a quote for CCTV in the

arcade, and that the menu and the arcade will allow police to have access to their CCTV.

### **Marketing and Tourism**

The group opened this section by discussing the range of restaurants that we have in the Town Centre. Matthews Associates shared with the group that restaurants are afraid to advertise on platforms because of the damage that a bad review can do. He explained that we should work on an initiative that will get people to leave them good reviews. Officers shared with the group the 'Grow Digital West Sussex' initiative and how it would be a good answer to this. ADC officers went on to talk about a networking breakfast club that is run in Bognor Regis where over 30 businesses take part. The group asked if this has ever been tried in Littlehampton and it was resolved that it had been, however it turned into a social and then dissolved after ADC had to take a step back from it. It was discussed that businesses pay £250 to enter the group, which is 50% towards running it and 50% towards a booklet that goes to thousands of residents with their business in.

#### **4. Feedback**

The Chair asked the group if they had any further questions. To which nothing was asked.

#### **5. Next Meeting Date**

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

The meeting closed at 8pm.

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**Chair**