

MINUTES OF TOWN CENTRE HERITAGE TASK GROUP

20 SEPTEMBER 2017

PRESENT:

Councillors Miss Lawrence (Chair), Mrs Avis, Mrs Bragg, Gillias, Sandison, Mrs Simpson-Vince, Srivastava and Ms Watson-Merret.

OFFICERS:

Michael Beirne (Town Centre and Tourism Team Leader) and Veronika Beckova (Democratic Services Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Aftab Gaffar (Managing Director, Rugby First), Amber Merrick-Potter (Events Manager, St Andrew's Church) and Dr Rex Pogson (Open Door Programme, St Andrew's Church)

15. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2017 were approved and signed by the Chair.

16. ST ANDREW'S GARDENS: REFLECTION, RECREATION AND RENEWAL AT THE HEART OF THE TOWN

The task group received a presentation from Amber Merrick-Potter (Events Manager, St Andrew's Church) and Dr Rex Pogson (Open Door Programme, St Andrew's Church) concerning the St Andrew's Church and Garden.

During the presentation, the following points were made:

- Amber Merrick-Potter has been in post as the new Events Manager at St Andrew's Church for three months.
- St Andrew's Church is a key part of Rugby's heritage, the town's oldest building with unique architecture and a rich history.
- New lighting has been installed to illuminate the church ceiling.
- The Events Manager is in contact with the Arts Development Officer at the Rugby Art Gallery and Museum with regards to displaying public art collections at St Andrew's and working with Coventry Cathedral on how to bring their Centenary Arts Festival to Rugby.
- St Andrew's will be applying for arts funding from the Council to support a community, culture and heritage programme which will be based around 1918, suffrage and WWI. Part of the programme will also be celebrating Woodbine Willie's life. It will also be a throughout the year project tying in with some of the annual events already taking place in the Town Centre.
- Working with the Warwickshire County Council, the Rugby Borough Council and a range of partners, the church aims to develop St Andrew's Gardens as a space for Reflection, Recreation and Renewal at the Heart of the Town. Phase One is focusing on:

- positive impact
- increased accessibility and uses
- creating space for performance, participation and peace
- The Spacehive campaign will launch in two weeks.

Dr Rex Pogson (Open Door Programme, St Andrew's Church) has attended the meeting and shared the following with the task group:

- About 18 months ago, St Andrew's Parish Church Council made the decision to have a double aimed/parallel approach to make the most of the church. For the church, the obvious purpose is to make the space holy for those who want it to be holy and a quiet space for those who want quiet. The parallel aim is to have a venue with a programme.
- Five times as many people use the church in the week (approx. 500) than attend a Sunday service (approx. 130).
- The church is very appreciative of the partnerships that it had so far with the borough, Rugby First and others. Partnership is key if the church is to become a community space and is to be successful.
- The area between the garden and the road is usable for a whole range of things if adapted and modernised without doing anything too drastic. It could be used for anything from drama, music, lectures in the summer right through to dropping in an ice ring or bring in anything movable.
- The railings are a sensitive issue. If there is no immediate decision for the Town Centre under the Public Realm Strategy, there is very little point in taking on such a sensitive issue. The railings were removed during the war which was followed by a campaign to have the railings reinstated.
- The Church House was sold with some of the money being used by the church for three posts carrying out community work in the church but also for lighting, sound, etc. The posts and the works are being 50% funded by others.

St Andrew's Church Memorial Garden

- The plan is to use the memorial garden for events, projects and linking it to heritage.
- Lighting in the garden and illuminating the tower is being considered as part of the plan.
- The church is also looking into commissioning a piece of public art for the garden.

During the discussion, the following questions were raised:

What is being in terms of community engagement? Is the Diocese on board?

The church is currently carrying out a community consultation which will go on for a number of months. The congregation, anyone who visits the church for an event or a service and local residents will be part of the consultation.

Preliminary discussions have taken place with the Diocese. The Diocesan Advisory Committee is much more forward looking than in past.

A link to the consultation will be emailed to councillors.

The following additional points were made:

- Historically, St Andrew's has been a focal part in the town of Rugby.
- People are now used to the church being there not only for religious purpose but also a community one.

17. RUGBY FIRST LIMITED AND LINKS TO TOWN CENTRE EVENTS

The task group received a verbal report from the Managing Director at Rugby First concerning the Town Centre programme of events and general introduction:

Rugby First

- A limited company formed in 2005 which operates independently of the borough council and manages the Town Centre Business Improvement District.
- The third mandate was agreed by majority of Town Centre businesses in 2015 and will last for five years. The key aims of the business plan are:
 - BID Rangers
 - Town Centre CCTV
 - Cleaning Service
 - Marketing, Promotions and Events

Marketing, Promotion and Events

Rugby First in partnership with businesses, Rugby Borough Council and other organisations deliver an exciting programme of high quality marketing, promotions and events. These have proved extremely effective in increasing Town Centre footfall, spend, raising the profile of Rugby and local businesses. They have also attracted new customers and businesses to the town. Rugby First wants to build on the legacy of the Rugby World Cup by establishing Rugby as a tourist venue and highlighting Rugby's unique selling points.

When Aftab Gaffar took over Rugby First as the new Managing Director in 2006, there weren't many events taking place in Rugby. It was quickly identified within Rugby First that more events need to take place in the Town Centre. Over 15 events are delivered annually. Most events are a joint effort and without the support of the Council and other partners would not be possible. These included:

- St George's Day – at a weekend, brings in about 2,000 people
- Rugby Bikefest – YouTube videos filmed by bikers of their rides from the A5 truck stop to the Town Centre
- Rugby Festival of Culture – two-week festival in its 7th year packed with activities happening in the Town Centre (covered under a separate agenda item)
- Rugby Food and Drink Festival – festival in its 4th year, 30 – 40 stalls. This year the top end of Regent Street will be closed to accommodate the increase in stalls.
- Christmas Light Switch on – one of the biggest events in the calendar, brings in between 8,000 to 10,000 people. The stage name can make a big difference to the number of people on the day. A customer survey was

carried out a few weeks ago asking the customers what Town Centre events they know about. The Christmas Light Switch on came out on the top and the Food and Drink Festival came in second.

The following ad-hoc events have been held in the Town Centre over the years and are available to view online:

- Family Fun Days
- Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II
- The Queen's 90th Birthday Celebration
- Godiva Festival
- Fashion Show
- Olympic Torch Relay
- Planting Scheme to help Rugby in Bloom
- Walking With The Wounded
- WWI Centenary – Rugby Remembers

The Town Centre events do not directly promote heritage. In the past two years, within the Rugby Festival of Culture, an objective has been to encourage people to walk around the town. In terms of ideas, it was identified that Rugby has a lot of beautiful buildings. Some other towns illuminate their key buildings to highlight them. This is something that Rugby First is looking into as part of the Public Realm Strategy. The company that supplies the Christmas lights in Rugby has recently moved into illuminating buildings. This a great way to highlight some of the town's heritage.

During the discussion, the following questions were raised:

An event on a Sunday is no benefit to the shops as hardly any are open.

The Christmas Lights Switch on is on a Sunday and getting the businesses to open on this day is a struggle. Rugby First did a survey with the businesses in reference with moving the Christmas Lights Switch to a Sunday evening or a Saturday. Over 90% of businesses came back stating that they would like for this event to remain on a Sunday. For events held when shops are open, it does not necessary mean that customers will come into the shop as they may have only come into the town for that particular event. The restaurants, coffee shops and pubs may do well but the majority of businesses don't do well during events. This is something that has been looked into extensively by Rugby First.

Why are there no Christmas lights at Regent Place when there are power points under the Rupert Brooke statue?

Christmas lights at Regent Place were considered as part of the last review. There are no power points. To get power to all the trees by other means was going to be a very expensive. At that time, the budget only allowed for the replacement of the lights already in place.

The following additional comments were made:

- There are at least two iconic buildings in the Town Centre: St Andrew's Church with its steeple and Rugby School Chapel. If illuminated, they would be a beacon for Rugby.
- 'Looking up in Rugby' is a positive message to people out there. Rugby is picking up and moving forward.
- The Town Guides do a brilliant job at making people look up at building when they walk around.

18. SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK ON THE FESTIVAL OF CULTURE 2017

A summary of feedback on the Festival of Culture 2017 was provided by Chris Stanley, Unlimited Communications. Chris Stanley was unable to attend the meeting. The summary was presented by the chair of the task group and is attached at Annex 1 to the minutes.

During consideration, the following points were made:

- Comments were made by residents who paid a parking fee but were not able to use the play area in Caldecott Park. Caldecott Park is closed off at certain times for theatre events. The signage informing residents about the dates and times when the park will be closed needs to be improved.
- Draycote Water and Coombe Abbey have the biggest visitor numbers in the borough. It's important that the St Andrew's Church programme and the Festival of Culture booklet are made available at both locations.
- Discussions have taken place at various meetings with regards to a unique selling point for Rugby (the game, engineering, etc). A suggestion was made to start each year with breaking a Guinness Book of Records for passing a rugby ball. A focal point is needed to bring people into the town.

Heritage Open Days 2017

Coventry's Heritage Open Days booklet had a pull out and return form asking visitors for their feedback in order to evaluate this year's events and to inform future planning. This is an idea to consider for future years.

19. PLAQUE SCHEMES

Prior to the meeting, members were asked to look at a commemorative plaque guide published by English Heritage. The section of the guidance covers aims, selection process and criteria.

The guidance is available at <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/content/publications/ehcharity/celebrating-people-and-place/commemorative-plaques-guidance-pt1.pdf>

Members of the task group have now experienced the blue plaque trail and the following points were made at the meeting:

- The plaques display the Rugby First logo.
- The trail map is not easy to follow.

- The trail does not start at the visitor centre.
- The signage for the blue plaque trail start is not there.
- Some blue plaques are located very high or very low. Others are so overgrown that they are not visible or are located in such places that they are difficult to find.

The understanding from the guidance is that further plaques can be added to the already existing ones and public can be involved in nominations.

During the consideration, the following questions were raised:

Who currently pays for the plaques? When was the last addition? Who has overall control?

Cllr Gillias was the last person to add a blue plaque to the scheme during his mayoral year. On this occasion, Cllr Gillias funded the plaque himself. This plaque is not included in the trail.

There are no specific criteria in place for Rugby's Blue Plaques scheme.

When the scheme was introduced first, it was supported by a one off budget.

The following ideas/thoughts were shared by members of the task group:

- review the title
- clear policy criteria
- set up a selection group
- once a year selection process
- time frame for nominations
- support for nominations
- public involvement
- council budget or sponsorship
- colour codes for the different heritage (history, engineering and sport)
- promotion of the scheme via social media and websites
- mobile phone app to bring history alive
- access to information and key facts to give a meaning to each plaque
- elevation of a particular plaque when appropriate
- spread of plaques rather than too many in one area
- integrate the blue plaque trail with the walk of fame
- competition to design a new plaque template (rugby ball shape?)
- research other towns with a successful model in place
- finding a way to make the scheme interesting and exciting
- consider the product and what people actually want to see
- consider the overall package

The Managing Director of Rugby First has recommended that the whole scheme is revisited, all current plaques are removed from their locations and repositioned so that they create three different trails. It was considered important to involve the young generation. The plaques should be modernised so that they can be scanned and a badge or a token can be awarded at the Visitor Centre for completion of the

trail. It could also be incorporated into the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

20. RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

The Town Centre and Tourism Team Leader informed the group that no further responses to the consultation were received.

21. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the task group's next meeting be held at 5.30pm on Wednesday 25 October where:

- an invitation will be extended to a software company to talk to the group about technology ideas for the scheme; and
- a draft review report will also be presented by the Town Centre and Tourism Team Leader for the task group to finalise the document and draw up recommendations before submission to Overview and Scrutiny.

CHAIR

Rugby Festival of Culture 2017 Debrief



Event Overview

Dates: 24 June to 16 July 2017

Location: Rugby town centre

Audience: ABC1 (local and within 30 minutes-drive time)

Funding: Rugby First, Rugby Borough Council, Sponsorship and advertising

Delivered by: Festival steering group, local businesses, groups and organisations

Facts and Figures

- * Over 10,000 people attended the festival
- * Over 100 events
- * 22 town centre venues/locations utilised
- * Town centre footfall up
- * Over 50 groups, businesses and organisations involved
- * 27,000 festival guides distributed
- * Increased footfall through Rugby Visitor Centre
- * Festival extended by a week to accommodate 'Festival on the Close'
- * Festival marketing used the new 'Rugby Town' Brand

A few quotes...

"In terms of the festival itself, I remain really, really impressed with what the town is doing and we must surely be the envy of other towns in the midlands. No town in Warwickshire has such a diverse, interesting and long festival as Rugby and I think it is a fantastic way to generate revenue for the town, increase footfall and attract new and existing visitors to the area."

"The Reluctant Dragon had an overall attendance of 472 people, that was 85% of all available tickets sold! It was an incredible festival for us, it was our most popular event EVER. We also got truly fantastic comments."

"We had a great show. We sold out with 82 people. Capacity was 75. Bacco Lounge LOVED it and we are now taking Hansel and Gretel to other Lounges across the UK. First stop Cappo Lounge, Mansfield. The performer has been asked to do a regular Cabaret session in the Bacco Lounge, Rugby."

"The rest of the sessions were amazing. Ran out of chairs one day so people had to sit on the grass. Sister Act also went down well, not sure how you will follow that."

"We had an amazing response to the Art Exhibition in St Andrew's with over 600 people voting in the competition."

"The Phil event was extremely well attended, and I would guess at an audience of 400 plus which is tremendous."

What worked

- * Launch event at Rugby School and improved working relationship
- * FREE live Alfresco music in St Andrew's gardens proved very popular
- * Increased use of social media to promote the festival (key to festival success)
- * Volunteers superb and well received (but need more)

Room for improvement

- * An index of events (to be included on-line)
- * Development of fringe festival/listing to be considered (for events outside of town centre)
- * Customer experience and house-keeping (at some events) to be improved
- * Guides to be distributed to accommodation providers/attractions
- * Need to create more of a 'Festival Feel' in the town centre (banners, bollard covers, window dressing, flags etc)
- * Potential to have a nominated charity and involve a uniformed organisation
- * Improved programming (to help avoid potential clashes as the festival grows)

Moving forward...Rugby Festival of Culture 2018

- * Provisional dates for the 2018 festival are Friday 29 June to Sunday 15 July

