

CHEPSTOW CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Minutes of General Meeting

Thursday 3rd March 2011, 6.00pm at The Beaufort Hotel

PRESENT:

Members:

Melanie Phillips - President
Griff Rogers
Cllr Jacqui Sullivan
Steve Sullivan
Peter Traynor
David Burton
Michelle Dalley
Andrew & Judy Griffith
Gemma Monday
Mick Merrick
Brian Colley-Priest

Guests:

David Eisenhower
Marc Bishop
Martin Firman
Phil Inskip
Cllr David Dovey
Jim Jenkins
Colin James

1. **Apologies;** Dee Griffith, Richard Cobourne, Jacqui Sullivan, Sian Jones, Paul Rutter. Leah Ashby
2. **Minutes** The minutes of meeting held on 8th November 2011 had been circulated and approved by Brian and Griff
3. **Introduction to New Members and Guests.** Melanie welcomed new members and guests to the meeting and asked that those wishing to give a brief update about their business.
 - **Associated Hypnotherapy** Andrew Griffith informed the meeting that he had now been working with clients at the Ross Herbal and Natural Health Clinic at Ross on Wye with kind permission of Christopher Robbins. Christopher is a herbalist and holds a drop-in clinic on Saturday mornings from 10 to 1.00pm. If any member would like to have a free confidential consultation with Christopher, please let Andrew Griffith know and he will ask the centre to contact the member directly. Andrew is now offering NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) Life Coaching in addition to Hypnotherapy, Iridology and EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques). NLP can improve communication skills and performance; Help connection with other people, improve creativity, change limiting beliefs, boost self-esteem and confidence, enabling one to focus on results.
 - **Best of Chepstow and The Forest of Dean.** Martin Firman introduced himself as the new owner of The Best of Chepstow and the Forest of Dean. He hopes to work with the Chamber and businesses around Chepstow to heighten their profile in the local area.
4. **Marketing Update.** Griff reported that the main issue that the group had been involved in recently was the response to Monmouthshire County Council's Tourist Information Centre review. The group was determined to ensure that Chepstow did not lose what we already had and that face to face contact in the TIC was maintained.

There was a limited amount of monies available for events this year and the group was also seeking help and suggestions as to what events to stage this coming year. Chepstow Marketing was therefore holding an Events Workshop at the Drill Hall on Tuesday March 22nd 7.00pm. Invitations had already been sent out to various community groups and businesses. It was hoped that these groups could work together to make Chepstow a more vibrant place to visit in 2011.

Nikki asked those present forward the information on to anyone they thought would be interested in attending the event. If anyone had any other suggestions on how to promote the event she would be grateful for help and assistance.
5. **Better Trains 4 Chepstow.** Jim Jenkins gave an update on BT4C's success in gaining additional train services at Chepstow starting from the 24th May. From this date, Chepstow will be served by 14 more of the XC trains that go through without stopping. It has taken nearly 5 years of campaigning to get this "concession" but it comes with a threat that unless people use them the services they will be withdrawn after a year. BT4C has campaigned for all these trains to stop at Chepstow, which is perfectly feasible without changing service times anywhere else and at no cost. This would provide the town with a regular hourly schedule a feature sought by the public and a pre-requisite for integration with bus services. Much more needs to be done to bring sense and order to train services at Chepstow.

The additional services do however represent a big improvement in the number of trains to and from Cardiff and Birmingham. They also provide a fairly regular service to and from London Paddington changing trains at Newport. It is therefore important that these improvements can be publicised locally and nationally in the belief that that the better services will make it more attractive for visitors from the Midlands, the London area and from abroad to use the trains to visit this attractive tourist area. With the information received from CrossCountry BT4C have drafted timetables specifically for travel to and from Chepstow to show how these services connect with those of First Great Western and Arriva Trains Wales.

Marketing Strategy

- Chepstow Marketing is arranging a banner to go up in the High Street and has agreed to printing and publishing leaflets.
- Mark Lloyd, Tourism Development Officer Mon CC has provided tourist research results indicating where people visiting Monmouthshire come from and the transport they use. The main target for the rail route we are interested in was the East and West Midlands. Walkers and hill walkers to be the target. He also suggested getting something on www.visitwyvalley.com.
- David Flint has asked Arriva Trains Wales for 1000 copies of a leaflet "Explore Wales by Train and Bus". Mark Youngman, Transport Policy Officer Mon CC is looking into including a suitable entry in a Monmouthshire Guide showing visitors where to go by public transport. He would also approach CrossCountry.
- Other possibilities are with Chepstow Racecourse, could they promote race goers to come by train and arrange extra buses from the station.
- Michelle and Nikki agreed to post news items and new timetable on Towncrier website.
- Gemma Monday agreed to approach St Pierre Hotel to make sure the new train service is included on their website
- Could schools be involved? The benefits of better public transport will affect this age group more than most. Schools, college and hopefully work.
- AONB and other organisations to show Chepstow Rail Station on their brochures and maps! Even better explain how to find out about trains.
- Monmouthshire County Council should become pro-active in providing additional Car Parking at the station. Connecting Buses. Cycle storage. Access for disabled.
- Is there some way those who use the new services through the year could be enlisted to become advocates for its retention?

BT4C will continue to urge our Assembly to deal with the ATW service gaps and the absence of any service between 07.49 and 09.49 to provide the people of Caldicot, Chepstow and Lydney with the hourly service they deserve. BT4C will also be focussing on the costs of providing, or not providing train Services. They believe that more attention needs to be given to the wider view taking account not only of profits to the TOC but the social, economic and environmental costs borne by the community in being deprived services that they are subsidising. Chepstow needs to be prepared with counter arguments when XC proposes to withdraw the service which is outside the scope of their present contract.

Phil Inskip commented that it was only by Jim's persistent campaigning that Chepstow has got such an out of proportion slice of the cake when considering the growth figures; The growth of users, over the last few years, being 90% at Lydney as opposed to 55% at Chepstow. His concern was that he could see that Gloucestershire County Council are belatedly waking up to the possibilities and are actively pursuing various measures such as increasing the 100 or so spaces Free Car Park at Lydney Station, which as he understood it, they are hoping to double in size. They realise they have one year in which to demonstrate the growth (usually three years needed for rail traffic to grow to its stabilized rate) in order to win most of Jim's hard earned gains for Chepstow for themselves. He did not see similar drive and activity at Mon CC. Jim has done the "railway" work and he hoped that Chamber members could now take this forward and sell this unique opportunity of having opened up Birmingham and the Midlands to Chepstow. His ideal would be 'to go on a day out with his wife and see an advert for Chepstow and Chepstow Castle at Birmingham New Street, Tamworth, Derby and Nottingham Railway Stations and in the towns'.

Jacqui informed the meeting that although there were plans to increase the car parking area by the station in the future, this would not be put in action for a few years yet when the Fairfield Mabey redevelopment goes ahead. Jim explained there is an area directly behind Chepstow Station which he believe are disused sidings. It has access from the road leading to Mabey Bridge and would make an ideal temporary car park for approximately twenty vehicles. At the moment the area is overgrown but could be easily cleared and made level.

David Burton asked if local bus times linked with the trains. It was explained that the area by the station was not large enough to allow for buses to turn, however the C5 bus times at Tesco now linked to some of the trains in the middle of the day. It was difficult to link to all trains until there was a regular timetable. David commented that the high increase fuel prices should encourage more people to use the trains.

Melanie thanked Jim and his colleagues for updating the Chamber and congratulated them for their success in gaining extra trains for Chepstow. She was sure she spoke for all members in saying that they will give what support they can in advertising the extra trains available from May 24th. It was agreed that Melanie write with some urgency to MCC to investigate the possibility of providing additional temporary car parking near the railway station.

6. Car Parking Update. The subcommittee had been given to understand that there was a possibility of a trial of 2 free Saturday parking dates at the end of March. To that end Melanie had approached several stores both local and National branches for agreement in providing footfall data for the free parking Saturdays. She had been in correspondence with Kellie Beirne regarding this, but had not had a reply. It now seemed doubtful if these would go ahead. Jacqui explained that the cost of providing free parking was excessive to MCC in the present financial situation. Melanie felt that in talking to retailers and shoppers around the town that attitudes had changed. The consensus now seemed that people were prepared to pay a reasonable charge, however what people objected to was the fact that no change was given and that with the introduction of the new machines people were unable to pass their ticket on to another driver when they had been forced to pay for more time than required due to lack of change being given at the machine. She asked for the opinion of the meeting. Options offered were:

- Retain the present status quo but ask for more parking at the station
- Unite with Monmouth and Abergavenny Chambers to produce a joint policy
- Request that MCC provide figures on the income they receive from overpayment of parking tariffs (no change provided by machines) It was understood that in Hampshire an estimated £50,000 was gained in this way.
- An installation Pelican crossing across the A48 by Tesco.

Jacqui and David Dovey explained that the needs of Monmouth, Abergavenny and Chepstow were different and that no one solution would suit all of Monmouthshire. A pelican crossing was not possible on a Trunk Road, de trunking this road would result in MCC being responsible for the upkeep of the road.

Melanie would arrange another meeting of the subcommittee to discuss this.

7. TIC review update. Jacqui had heard that MCC were pleased with the ideas put forward as responses to this review. Katie had put in an excellent business plan and this along with other suggestion were now be considered and put before a select committee this month and then to Cabinet at the beginning of April. Griff commented that he had had the opportunity to read many of the responses to the review and the communality of topic was that whilst IT was accepted as necessary it should not replace the personal service provided at present.

8. A.O.B.

- **National Census** Nikki had been contacted by the local organiser of the National census and asked if she could distribute leaflets and posters for businesses to display in staff rooms to encourage staff to complete the census. The census will take place on March 27th 2011 and for the first time people will be able to complete this online.
- **Future Meetings** Michelle reported that she had managed to arrange for Barry Watson to come along to talk on Social Media at the next meeting.

Meeting closed 19.15

Next Meeting Thursday 7th April