

CHEPSTOW CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Minutes of General Meeting

Thursday 6th October 2011, 6.00pm at Chepstow Town Council Offices, The Gate House

PRESENT:

Members:

Melanie Phillips (MP) – President
Griff Rogers (GR)
David Burton (DB)
Steve Sullivan (SS)
Gemma Monday (GM)
Alyson Hunt (AH)
Ben Pugh (BP)
Katie Burton (KB)
Angela Seymour (AS)
Vivienne White (VW)

Police:

PC S Smith
PC P Lewis

Guests:

M Bishop (MB) – Hypnotherapist
J Jenkins (JJ) – BT4C
G Phelps (GP) – Spectrum Internet
P Mills (PM) – Wynndel Properties
R Lunn (RL) – Deacons Florist
L Jones (LJ) – Eden Rose

Town Council representatives:

Cllr H Hodges (CHH) – Mayor of Chepstow
Cllr Marian Lewis (CML)
Cllr A Redhead (CAR)
Cllr M Brady (CMB)

S Bushell (SB) – Town Clerk

MCC Planning Dept

G Ashworth (GA)
S Robertshaw (SR)
Charlotte Westwood (CW)

- Apologies:** Cllr J Sullivan, P Evans, Cllr P Rutter, M Dalley, B Colley-Priest, A & J Griffith, D Cummings, Lia Hind
- Minutes** The minutes of meeting held on 1st September 2011 had been circulated and were approved by DB and AS
- Introduction to New Members and Guests.** Melanie welcomed new members, VW and AS to the Chamber along with existing members and guests, in particular representatives of the Town Council and the local constabulary.
- Matters Arising** None
- Marketing Update – Griff Rogers**
 - Hogging the Bridge** would be taking place on 16th October. Last year the Marketing Group funded the cost of the bands performing, this year funding for these would not be required, however, the Marketing group would be funding the cost of marshals for the main route and also the stage in Beaufort Square. Leaflets providing information to traders about the event would be distributed this week.
 - Chepstow Guide** was well underway and it had been agreed to fund advertisements regarding the 3 free parking Saturdays near Christmas and the extra trains stopping in Chepstow in this publication.
 - Town signs:** There had been several comments received about the poor directional signs to places of interest in Chepstow. A meeting with Mark Lloyd for MCC had taken place and a review of signage was to be undertaken. Consultation with interested parties would be part of the review.
 - Entertainment in Beaufort Square** on Saturdays leading up to Christmas was to be organised.
 - 1 Rifles Freedom of the Town Parade.** SB reported that this will take place on Thursday 17th November. The High Street will be closed between 9.00am – noon. Road Closed Signs had been arranged to detail the reason for the closure. Final details of the event will be given when available and notices distributed to businesses.
 - Christmas Light Switch** will take place on Saturday 26th November. There will be free parking in the car parks on this Saturday.
- Faster Internet and Broadband – Giles Phelps - Spectrum Internet.**
MP explained that this presentation was the first of a number of talks to be given to members about broadband.

GP explained that his company was a nationwide company with 99% of its business coming from outside Wales. The company had been working with the Welsh Government (WG), BT and Open Reach on 'not-spots' in Wales.

He explained that a broadband 'not-spot' is usually the result of the distance a person lives from their local telephone exchange – the further away they are, the weaker the broadband signal becomes. Chepstow is fortunate to be the first town in Monmouthshire to have access to superfast broadband. More cabinets are due to be enabled in December 2011, although some cabinets have been deemed by BT too costly to upgrade at the moment.

Spectrum have been working with businesses to get an equally high speed option and campaigning to help the internet community and deliver broadband without excessive charges. Spectrum is the only Open Reach partner in Wales.

GP explained that Superfast speeds were greater than 10mb/sec, however, some businesses might be better off on their existing ordinary broadband, dependant on the distance from the cabinet, generally if they were more than 1Km from the superfast cabinet.

In the centre of town the cabinet close to Lloyds Bank was not earmarked for enablement for more than a year, however, businesses could ask for re-parenting to the Midland bank cabinet which was enabled. An installation charge might be incurred. GP said he was happy to help local businesses with any queries/problems they might have.

MP thanked GP for coming along to answer business queries on broadband and internet.

7. Shop Signs in Chepstow George Ashworth & Simon Robertshaw – MCC Planning Dept.

GA gave an introduction to the presentation explaining that MCC had fought hard to improve the town centre over the past few years and that vibrant businesses were key to Chepstow conservation area. Recent press coverage regarding the shop front signs on two listed buildings had not covered all that facts. An application for consent for any changes to listed buildings was bound by statute. It was unfortunate that both businesses had been unaware that their buildings were listed before changes were made.

He introduced SR, Conservation Manager for MCC, who gave a presentation on the role of the conservation team in monitoring development and changes within a conservation area in both listed and non-listed buildings. There are detailed policies on signage and Draft Supplementary Plans Guidance (April 2004) available from MCC. In response to queries made at the meeting he explained that

- CADW determined which buildings were listed and appeals can be made to CADW. Any member of the public can request that a building be listed, with the final decision being made by CADW.
- A copy of listed buildings in Chepstow was available in Chepstow Town Council Offices.
- CADW will have informed Freeholders that a building has been listed and they, in turn, have a responsibility to inform tenants that a building is listed.

DB suggested if when commercial rate demands were sent out by MCC, a notice to say a building was listed could be added to this. GA said this could be investigated. GM commented that it was difficult for the general public to read lease agreements and advised anyone who takes out a lease should take the advice of a lawyer, which would in the long run save a considerable amount of time, money and effort.

SR gave details of recent listed building change consent and those still in discussion. Answering a query about several boarded up, empty and rundown properties he reported that notices had been served to renovate buildings and remove boarding and some progress is being made.

SB asked if the walkway in Riflemans Way could be adopted by TC as this was treacherous in icy weather. GA said as this was a public right of way he would discuss it with a Highways colleague.

MP asked why a kiosk in Bank Street had been approved when there were plenty of empty shops that could be used for a food outlet. GA explained that within the central shopping area they had little control on a new build.

CHH suggested that Chepstow needed a consultation Committee. SR reported that conservation area appraisals for all areas were in progress and that the Chepstow area was completed in draft form. Once published, a general consensus of traders and local community pressure could protect features MCC could not legislate against.

MP thanked GA, SR and CW for attending the meeting and answering queries raised.

8. Feedback form recent meetings with MCC – Melanie Phillips

- **Car Park Charges** MP attended a MCC select committee meeting on 26th September to present Chepstow's arguments for a daily 2 hours free parking and free parking all day on Saturdays.. A new review of charges had been presented with the only concessions to the original report issued in January 2011 being, free parking after 5.00pm and not after 6.00pm as originally proposed and the possibility of free parking after 4.00pm, No charging in any car park on Sundays ,varying the way annual parking passes were purchased, however, Caldicot and Usk would retain their free parking .

The decision has been delayed until further consultation has been made. Since the meeting MP had had a meeting with MCC officials who admitted that Chepstow by its unique location had its own particular problems. GM commented that 7 months on and we are still no further ahead.

- **Directional Signs** A total of £170,000 in different pots was available to Monmouthshire for upgrading signs. MCC have appointed a team of consultants who would shortly embark on the first phase of the town visitor signing project. This will consider existing provision, identify gaps, problems, opportunities, carry out consultation and recommend improvements.
- **Vacant Shops** At a meeting with MCC it was agreed that MCC would liaise with landlords of vacant buildings to enable one time access to the shop to display various notices. DB suggested that the Chamber could involve local schools to display copies of their artwork in the windows. Another suggestion was to display images from Wales in Bloom. Once access was agreed, further decisions would be made.

9. AOB

- **Free Press Newspaper:** The Chamber was concerned that with the news of the closure of the Chepstow Office, the local content would be lost. The Free Press had played an important role in raising awareness of important issues in the town.
- **Security in town:** AS raised concerns that shop windows were again being smashed in the town centre. She had been informed that the CCTV cameras were not working at present.
- **St Mary Street Traffic:** DB was concerned about the increased traffic in St Mary's Street between the hours of 10.00 am – 4.00pm. The vans and cars were travelling at a considerable speed and he was concerned that pedestrians could be injured. MP informed the meeting that at an executive meeting it was decided to ask a police representative along to meetings to answers members' queries.
- **Single use carrier bags:** AH asked if retailers had received information from WG concerning the new legislation. Retailers present seem to think they had had something some time ago. She also informed the meeting that although WG would like to retailers to use the money for an environmental community project there was no obligation to do this. DB reported that Country Clutter was donating any profit from charging for bags to the Alzheimer's Society. JJ commented that there was funding available for community solar panels projects from the Climate Change Group so perhaps the money gained from bags would be better spent in another way.

Meeting closed 20.30

Next Meeting Thursday 3rd November 2011 6.00pm