

Dorset Council Grant for Market Area Enhancement

Working Group Meeting

Working Group Chairman: Cllr Colin Stevens

Monday 10th March 2025 at 6:05pm

in Woodhouse Gardens

NOTES

In Attendance

Cllr Colin Stevens (Chairman)
Cllr Sheila Chapman
Cllr Alan Cross
Cllr Yvonne Miéville
Roger Carter
Chris Roberts
Alfie Owen (work experience)

Cllr Maggie Putt
Cllr Terry Clarkson
Cllr Hugo Miéville
Nicci Brown
Gail Del Pinto
Oli Hayward (work experience)

Town Clerk

Operations Manager

1. Apologies

Cllr S Hitchings
Mickey Westwood

Cllr L Hitchings
Cllr B Quayle

2. The meeting listened to a presentation from a local resident

Chris Roberts (Ganesh) explained that he has spoken to residents and businesses in the impacted zone, which he considers to be larger than the area the Town Council's Market Manager physically took consultations to.

He feels there is an opportunity to bring them on board with a few adjustments to the proposal. Chris thinks the location of the pedestrianised area is the main issue and feels that some people could be persuaded to be in favour of the scheme if this was changed.

The greatest concern is that there was a lack of consultation because some businesses didn't fully engage and some residents didn't receive the Royal Mail consultation.

Chris explained that some businesses are concerned about disabled access and provided an update on the views from Reeve the Baker, which is an objection to the proposal because of deliveries they have for the bakery.

Roger Carter responded to Chris's comments and noted his interests due to being a resident, a landlord and a shopkeeper in the area. He did agree that deliveries are a compelling argument that the group should consider more fully. Roger went back to the beginning of this project and explained how the view in the Georgian Market Place is impacted by the number of cars parked on the street. The group had wanted to introduce a softer, more attractive setting and is conscious of the desire to introduce weddings to the Corn Exchange.

Noc made the point that this is a trial use of the area and if the trial is successful, we would then look at the investment to make it a permanent area. It is unlikely that the trial period would include movable bollards. If the businesses feel strongly enough that there is a problem with it, they need to come to the table to explain the issues.

Noc also feels they need to look at the overall benefit for the whole town, because it should increase the desirability of people coming to the town and spending time here.

Colin noted that there has been a considerable change in businesses since the original scheme was proposed. A discussion was held on timings of deliveries and how they can be carried out. Rosemary agreed that there should be timings for deliveries to formalise it in the town centre, but this has been attempted many times.

Sheila is of the opinion that doing nothing is not an option and something needs to happen in the town centre to try to improve the situation. Hugo said this is one idea to try to do something and we don't know if it will work or not but we think it is worth trying. He added that this subject is also on the agenda for the Town Assembly on 14th April 2025 to enable further discussion/explanation with local businesses and residents.

Roger mentioned the loss of banks, the impact of online shopping and the challenge to make our town centre this beautiful space we all believe it could be.

Alan talked about the free car park just outside of the town and the Marsh & Ham and said there is disabled parking available. Noc updated members of the public on the recent proposals by the Dorset Council to introduce increased parking charges and overnight charges, which is currently being reviewed. He fears this will have a negative impact on the town and will impact on many residents. Noc also made the point that it is an historic town that was not built for the amount of traffic it receives and there are many aspects, such as the one-way system, that cannot be amended either.

Gail asked about weddings and where the vehicles would go to. There will be the area outside the Town Hall for this purpose.

Alfie said he thought it would work well if Reeve would move out onto the space and it could be used for pop-up food vans and for people to sit outside there. Hugo added that it would be a bookable space. Oli felt this would be supported by people because it is bringing something different into the town. Alfie added that he could introduce a survey at The Blandford School to find out what young people would like to see there.

3. Any other business

A discussion was held on the signage for the town centre and the concept of a shared space. Noc explained that the road through town is a strategic road and therefore a shared space in that area is very difficult to apply for.

4. Date of next meeting

All businesses are due to receive an invitation to the Town Assembly on 14th April 2025 at 6pm in Woodhouse Gardens Pavilion, to discuss the matter further.