

MINUTES OF TOWN CENTRE HERITAGE TASK GROUP

30 AUGUST 2017

PRESENT:

Councillors Mrs Avis, Mrs Bragg, Gillias, Miss Lawrence, Sandison, Mrs Simpson-Vince and Ms Watson-Merret

OFFICERS:

Victoria Gabbittas (Arts, Heritage and Visitor Services Manager), Michael Beirne (Town Centre and Tourism Team Leader), and Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer)

11. MINUTES

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

12. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillor Srivastava.

13. BRIEFING PAPER

As previously agreed by the task group the focus for the meeting was:

- Enhancing access to information and marketing activities for existing initiatives i.e. the Blue Plaque trail, Pathway of Fame and Town Guides;
- An update on responses to the online consultation; and
- A summary of feedback on the Festival of Culture.

Responses to the online consultation

The Town Centre and Tourism Team Leader reported that since the last meeting twelve responses had been received. Copies of these were circulated to members of the task group. In general, the following comments had been made:

- There was positive feedback for town centre events.
- The majority were in support of stronger heritage links to town centre events.
- Some specific suggestions were made, including a classic car day.
- There was support for the use of smartphone and digital technology.
- Many people were unaware of the Blue Plaque trail but made suggestions for new plaques.

During discussion the following points were made:

A link to the consultation questionnaire had appeared on a local Rugby Past and Present Facebook page. Other relevant online groups would be targeted so a link to the consultation could be shared.

The Visitors Centre had hard copies of the questionnaire and staff were actively encouraging visitors to complete it, but so far none of those issued had been returned.

Not everyone prefers to receive information via smartphones and technology and there was still a need for printed material.

Rugby First Limited was listed as a consultee on the review's one-page strategy, and were involved in the funding of the original Blue Plaque scheme, and it was agreed Aftab Gaffar should be invited to attend the next meeting.

Enhancing access to information and marketing activities for existing initiatives

The Town Centre and Tourism Team Leader circulated draft copies of the Rugby Town re-branded versions of the Blue Plaque trail leaflet, the Rugby Town Guides walking tours and the Heritage Open Days.

The task group acknowledged that the text in the Blue Plaque trail leaflet was being revised and updated. The group reviewed the leaflet and gave the following feedback:

- It was pleasing to see the number of local women represented.
- The numbering of the plaques was random and did not reflect a walking route.
- The route should begin at the Visitors Centre.
- On opening the leaflet to view the map the list of plaque begins at 16 rather than the first plaque.
- The text in the boxes for each plaque was too small.
- Should a large print version be made available?
- Different walks or trails could be considered.
- There was a concentration of plaques within a small area and there were other buildings of importance that were not included.
- The plaque tour should focus on the immediate town centre and plaques outside this area could be listed separately.
- To support the local economy visitors should be drawn towards the shopping areas.
- Some ways of identifying the length of the trail, either by distance or time would be helpful.
- There could be a range of walks. Different routes could be created for different areas of interest, such as sport or literature.
- Some form of scale on the map and directional arrows would be useful.
- Plaque 31 (Rugby's Third Station) would be better described as Rugby Junction and the wording could be improved to include a reference to Charles Dickens.
- Plaque 1 (Caldecott Park) should include up-to-date information on the Green Flag award.

The Tourism and Town Centre Team Leader met with the volunteer Town Guides in July and one of the agreed outcomes from the meeting was that a new marketing plan was needed for the walking tours. Other points raised included:

- Guided walks currently take place on Wednesday and Saturday.
- The walks attract varying numbers of people.
- Better promotion was needed. Some ideas included:
- The use of social media
- Targeting specific community groups such as the Women's Institute or Ramblers.

- To install some form of flag or air board to advertise the walks.
- Businesses and hotels could be targeted and specific offers could be linked, such as afternoon tea.

During further discussion the following points were made:

Officers were updating the current range of leaflets and creating one for the Pathway of Fame.

Was there enough information available for visitors on the website, and was information or leaflets made available in local hotels?

Other locations of interest that could be included in promotional literature included:

- The rugby balls installed as part of the Rugby World Cup art project
- The artwork based on Rugby's industrial heritage on the toilet block in North Street.
- The Whittle Sculpture.

A single publication could be produced to include a wider range of town centre heritage information.

A suggestion was made that an area in the centre could be defined as the old market town quarter. This area would contain many heritage assets, including those connected to St Andrew's Church. However, there could be some conflict with the Independent Quarter.

Leaflets and brochures should be positioned close to the entrance within the Visitors Centre.

Members questioned how much information was available for visitors online, and whether more could be done?

It would be useful to track visitor information. This could be collected by the Town Guides on an informal basis, or at the point where people report to join a walking tour.

The Visitors Centre team were actively pursuing opportunities to promote the local visitor attractions. A package was being produced to share with tour operators, who would be invited to a promotional event highlighting what the town can offer.

The location of the coach stands was an issue, and it would be a challenge to attract people visiting Rugby School to come into the town centre.

Improved signage and banners were needed.

The re-development of the museum would address the issue of the town's links to industry and engineering.

A wider range of walking tours, perhaps bespoke, covering other areas of interest such as engineering or education could be introduced. The use of Apps would allow visitors to follow a virtual tour.

Self-guided tours would provide visitors with an opportunity to explore the town while out of hours.

Any form of IT based system would require regular updating, but this would also apply to printed material.

Members of the task group also suggested other people and locations of note that may qualify for a plaque or some form of recognition.

There may be advertising opportunities to promote the town centre through businesses located on the outskirts of the town.

The task group agreed that more information on the use of IT and APPS was needed and this should be included as a topic for a future meeting.

Festival of Culture 2017 Feedback

The organisers of the Festival of Culture had moved their scheduled meeting back to 7 September so it had not been possible to provide a summary of the feedback as originally scheduled. It was agreed this topic would be carried forward to the next meeting.

Feedback would be emailed to members of the task group in advance of the next meeting.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the task group's next meeting be held at 5.30pm on Wednesday 20th September.

Topics for the next meeting would include:

- An update on the consultation questionnaire responses
- A brief summary of the Festival of Culture Feedback
- Plaque Schemes
- Points identified for further discussion, including signage

Members were asked to look at a commemorative plaque guide published by English Heritage. The link to this is copied below. The section of the guidance covering aims, selection process and criteria is attached with the minutes.

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

CHAIR