

## VISITOR MANAGEMENT FORUM

10 SEPTEMBER 2013

PRESENT: Councillors Alan Mellins (Chairman), Sue Evans (sub for Andrew Jenner), Eileen Quick and Colin Rayner.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Claire Stretton.

Officers: Harjit Hunjan, Steph James, Gail Kenyon, Tanya Leftwich and Julia White.

Representing the Visitor Industry:

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Esther Brienza     | SL6 Street Food                               |
| Judith Diment      | Stanley Spencer Gallery                       |
| Chris French       | French Brothers                               |
| Steve Harris       | Fringilla Boats                               |
| Sue Kemp           | Legoland Windsor Resort                       |
| Marie-Anne Leonard | Art on the Street                             |
| Jim McGill         | Maidenhead Golf Club                          |
| Lee Page           | Smokey Joes Roadhouse                         |
| Claire Pearce      | Moor Hall Conference Centre                   |
| Karl Phipp         | Legoland Windsor Resort                       |
| Richard Poad       | Maidenhead Heritage Centre                    |
| Sally Radford      | Maidenhead Chambers of<br>Commerce            |
| Paul Rutherford    | Norden Farm                                   |
| Erika Seekings     | U Want Taxis                                  |
| Hilary Thompson    | Windsor Welcome Tourist Guides<br>Association |
| Sally Worman       | Norden Farm                                   |
| Jane Wright        | Nicholsons Centre                             |
| Don Yates          | French Brothers                               |

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Jenner, Paul Roach (Windsor Town Manager), Barbara Askew (Guild of Registered Tourist Guides), Amanda Bryett (Windsor Tourist Guides), Laura Comley-Smith (Professional Tourist Guide), Louise Martin (Runnymede-on-Thames), John Seear (Orchard Poyle), Jutta Staude (Sir Christopher Wren Hotel), Anne Taylor (Windsor & Eton Society), Christine Taylor (Royal Collection Trust), Brigita Vaskelyte (Harte & Garter Hotel), Janet Walker (Eton College)

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mellins declared an interest in the agenda as he had a long-term commercial interest in tourism as he had worked in tourism for the past forty years and ran a business based in Maidenhead.

## MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2013 were approved.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### DISCUSSION ITEM – WHAT DO MAIDENHEAD BUSINESSES WANT FROM THE VISITOR MANAGEMENT FORUM AND VISITOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Chairman asked everyone present what they would like to see from the Visitor Management Forum and the Visitor Management Team – the following suggestions were noted:

- Marie-Anne Leonard (Art on the Street) informed the Forum that she would like signs publicising events in the Royal Borough to be approved by the Council rather than refused. It was noted that the Planning Infrastructure and Regeneration Manager and the Maidenhead Town Manager would work towards achieving this goal.
- Erika Seekings (U Want Taxis) stated that she believed the signposting into town to be very disappointing to which Claire Pearce (Moor Hall Conference Centre) disagreed.
- Marie-Anne Leonard suggested everyone used the 'Enjoy Maidenhead' webpage to advertise up and coming events.
- The Maidenhead Town Manager suggested that a summer edition door drop or a quarterly drop could be a possibility if funding could be sourced.

The Visitor Manager, Julia White, explained that she needed, ASAP, key dates for the next year to go into the Visitor Guide – it was requested that all event information be emailed to her at [Julia.White@rbwm.gov.uk](mailto:Julia.White@rbwm.gov.uk)

The Visitor Manager also requested that all Maidenhead businesses present emailed her their Twitter account details so she could link them into the website.

### PARTNERSHIP FOR THE REJUVENATION OF MAIDENHEAD – AN UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL APPROACH TO REDEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN MAIDENHEAD INCLUDING YORK ROAD, CHAPEL ARCHES AND WATERWAYS PROJECT

Gail Kenyon, Planning Infrastructure and Regeneration Manager, gave Members a presentation on Maidenhead Regeneration. A copy of the presentation would be emailed out with the minutes.

The presentation covered the following:

- ❖ Redevelopment projects in Maidenhead Town Centre.
- ❖ The Opportunity Areas in Maidenhead:
  - High Street / York Stream.
  - Broadway.

- York Road.
- West Street.
- Railway Station.
- Stafferton Way.
- ❖ Maidenhead Waterways.
- ❖ The Maidenhead Team – strategic partners.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were noted:

- The Maidenhead Area Action Plan had been adopted in September 2011.
- The Council was doing an extensive exercise on land management within the Royal Borough and would be talking to land owners and stakeholders in the area.
- The Kings Triangle development had been refused at the planning panel and the site was looking to be offloaded.
- That PRoM was one of the main strategic partners in Maidenhead.
- Any information / advice / wishes to help promote Maidenhead to make it more cohesive were requested to be made to the Visitor Manager, the Planning Infrastructure and Regeneration Manager or the Maidenhead Town Manager.

The Chairman thanked the Planning Infrastructure and Regeneration Manager for her presentation.

### PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE USE OF THE DESBOROUGH SUITE, MAIDENHEAD

Councillor Claire Stretton informed Members that most of the time the Desborough Suite in the Town Hall, Maidenhead could be found empty. It was noted that whilst the Council could build a brand new culture facility at high cost the Desborough Suite was already in place and could be ‘recycled’ to meet the aspirations of the Area Action Plan (AAP).

Councillor Claire Stretton went onto explain that in 2012/13 the Desborough Suite had been unused for 174 days of the year which included 29 Fridays and 29 Saturdays (not concurrently). Members were informed that the requirement was to have 45 square metres publically owned / publically funded per 1000 population. It was noted that the current population was 75,747 which equated to 3400 square metres needed plus an allowance for future growth. Councillor Claire Stretton went onto explain that Norden Farm provided 1800 – 2000 square metres and that the Desborough Suite could top it up. Members were informed that the building could be developed to provide A community entertainment centre which there was clearly a need for. Members were informed that the Desborough Suite currently held 283 sets which was a similar size to the Norden Farm area. Councillor Claire Stretton informed everyone present that an additional seating area could be put into the Desborough Suite to increase its seats to 475.

Councillor Claire Stretton went onto explain that the Council also used the Desborough Suite for public meetings and that a 100 seater space would be

useful for larger meetings. It was suggested that a club room be provided which would be open to the public for events such as Jazz nights on specific days of the week and that it could also have a bar / café available. Members were informed that local artists could also make use of the space which would in turn provide Maidenhead with a complete arts and entertainment centre (Desborough Suite, cinema and Norden Farm).

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were noted:

- The benefits would include becoming an aspiration of the AAP which was recognised and acted upon. It would also bring an unused resource back into use. It would provide a mainstream entertainment venue for residents which would in turn increase the footfall into the Town Centre. It would give people a wider choice. It would protect Norden Farms income stream (the Council funds £100k). It would be a continuation of the theatre based products available in the Desborough Suite (e.g. the Fame Youth Group). It would support community groups more and it would provide a hub for all arts activities.
- Councillor Claire Stretton informed Members that a three year business plan was currently being produced and should be ready for January.
- Proposal documentation was about to be sent out any day now.
- A feasibility study was taking place to ensure it would be appropriate for Maidenhead. Councillor Eileen Quick informed Members that six potential firms had been lined up and that the Council was waiting for their bids to be submitted.
- Members were informed that the proposed additional seating in the Desborough Suite would be retractable but that the balcony would remain a permanent feature.
- It was noted that tribute bands were booked into the Desborough Suite throughout the autumn and that the next event (Elvis event) was sold out.
- It was noted that the potential uses for the Desborough Suite would be explored during the feasibility study.
- Councillor Claire Stretton informed Members that they would likely hear the next update at the end of October / early November.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Claire Stretton for addressing the Forum.

#### NEW VISITOR WEBSITE FOR RBWM

The Visitor Manager, Julia White, explained that the website had two URLs [www.windsor.gov.uk](http://www.windsor.gov.uk) and [www.maidenhead.gov.uk](http://www.maidenhead.gov.uk). It was noted that a decision had been taken to lead with the Windsor URL, as it was a nationally and internationally recognised brand however the site covered all parts of the borough. It was noted that the header on the new webpage was very large and had five rotating images reflecting the major towns of the borough including Ascot & Maidenhead. The images included messages that linked to other sections of the site. Members were informed that the website promoted Maidenhead in the 'what's on' section, Things to Do, Accommodation, Shopping, Food and Drink and Discover the Area sections of the website. The Visitor Manager, explained that the top three events were highlighted on

the date requested and that the calendar listed events up to three months in advance. Members were informed that the Royal Borough Highlights section of the website promoted businesses under the sections of sleep, indulge, pageantry, hidden gems, must sees and entertainment. The Visitor Manager informed Members that there was also a concierge scheme on the website that allowed hotels such as Elva Lodge Hotel in Maidenhead to sell tickets for events in the local area along with a Royal Borough image gallery which included a press area. It was noted that any business in the Royal Borough was welcome to provide images that they would like the press team to use. The Visitor Manager went onto explain that there was also a live Twitter feed from businesses to the site and that in January 2014 the trip advisor reviews would be published to the website.

The Visitor Manager informed Members that the Maidenhead editorial content was due to be refreshed in line with the website revamp and she would welcome feedback. It was noted that the websites could be updated at any time and that new ideas were therefore always welcome.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were noted:

- The Visitor Manager informed Members that she and her team listed as many businesses on the websites as they were aware of.
- Members noted that the cost of a standard listing was £85 and if a business had not paid the fee they would still appear on the website but simply as a basic listing.
- It was noted that [www.windsor.gov.uk](http://www.windsor.gov.uk) was number one on the main search engines.
- The Visitor Manager explained that Brighton and Hove had also had to make the same difficult decision to head the websites up with the most well-known location.
- It was requested that an exhibition be held in the Desborough Suite, Town Hall, Maidenhead to highlight the Maidenhead webpage and help to increase footfall in the Town Centre.
- The Visitor Manager was informed that the keywords on the website should be highlighted, rather than lowlighted, and should be in a different colour to the regular text.
- It was noted that it would not be easy to get the retail and dining trade to participate in the websites.
- The Visitor Manager informed Members that she intended to hold small working groups to help encourage businesses in Maidenhead to engage with the website.
- Members were informed that it would be very difficult to have two separate websites due to funding challenges.

#### ENSURING THE VISITOR ECONOMY IS INCLUDED IN THE NEW THAMES VALLEY BERKSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

The Visitor Manager provided Members with a four sided hand-out on the proposal for the inclusion of the Visitor Industry in the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP Strategy. It was noted that the hand-out aimed to briefly outline the importance of the tourism industry to the economy of Berkshire, its growth potential and how it supported TVB LEP priorities. It was requested that a copy of this document be distributed with the minutes.

The Visitor Manager explained that she had discovered that tourism was not covered in the current strategy and felt that Berkshire missed out when competing nationally.

It was noted that Tim Smith had agreed to look at the proposal and discuss it further.

The Visitor Manager went onto explain that if this proposal was accepted there could be funding associated to it to help fund projects within the Royal Borough.

## BUSINESS UPDATES

Jim McGill (Maidenhead Golf Club) explained that their summer had been good and they had received a lot of interest.

Don Yates (French Brothers) informed Members that this time last year had been all doom and gloom but that this year had been a completely different story. It was noted that a lot of French Brothers customers had been from the Royal Borough and had booked on to the Windsor to Maidenhead trip they offered. Don Yates went onto explain that French Brothers had done a mail drop to 100,000 local homes within the Royal Borough via Royal Mail. It was noted that many of the French Brothers special events had sold out on numerous occasions and that their new website had encouraged ticket sales. Don Yates informed Members that all in all he was very happy with business and thanked everyone who had supported them.

Paul Rutherford (Norden Farm) explained that April and May had been slow months but that Jun and July had been on target. It was noted that August, for Norden Farm, was usually a particularly dreadful month but that they had brought the beach back which had resulted in them having had the best August ever this year. Paul Rutherford congratulated Sally Worman on doing a fabulous job redesigning their brochure that gets distributed every season. It was noted that the full season brochure was due to be distributed at the end of this week. Paul Rutherford informed Members that Norden Farm had also done some mail drops and were already seeing good Christmas sales as a result. Sally Worman added that autumn was also looking good already and informed Members that Norden Farm already had three big names signed up already.

Esther Brienza (SL6 Street Food) informed Members that SL6 Food Fridays, which were new, were already looking good thanks to the support from the Maidenhead Town Manager, Steph James. It was noted that Esther Brienza was really enjoying being located in the top end of the High Street where she had formed great relationships with nearby businesses. Esther Brienza informed Members that she was keen to promote evening trade as she believed Maidenhead was currently seen as a no go area.

Jane Wright (Nicholsons Centre) explained that 2012 had been a good year with regard to footfall figures and whilst 2013 had been challenging the footfall figures were above national average. It was noted that trade on Monday –

Fridays were better than Saturdays for the Nicholsons Centre. Jane Wright informed Members that Cargo had just signed a new lease and would be opening soon.

Erika Seekings (U Want Taxis) informed Members that taxi business had been good. It was noted that Erika Seekings wanted to publicise the service to residents of Maidenhead as she had noticed that there were not a lot of people asking for taxis into Maidenhead, as they were choosing to travel to Marlow, Windsor and Cookham. Erika Seekings explained that she needed business from locals as well as visitors.

Sally Radford (Maidenhead Chamber of Commerce) explained that she had a health clinic where she had found business very difficult over the last few years. It was noted that things had started to improve over the last few months which she hoped would continue.

Steve Harris (Fringilla) informed Members that last year had not been fun for him mainly due to the flooding. It was noted that this year had been better / more fun although they had not achieved a dramatic increase in business. Steve Harris informed Members that they were now back up to 2011 levels.

Hilary Thompson (Windsor Welcome Tourist Guides Association) explained that they had had a good year and that numbers had been up. It was noted that they had received repeat business which was starting to tail off now as it was seasonal work. Hilary Thompson explained that the Halloween events had been enquired about and that they planned to do two walks during the Windsor Festival. It was noted that the Windsor Welcome Tourist Guides Association were looking forward to a good year next year.

Lee Page (Smokey Joes Roadhouse) informed Members that they were receiving 120,000 – 150,000 people through their doors every week. It was noted that the Wednesday student nights had changed and had now doubled in attendance. Lee Page explained that Friday nights were especially hard as people were working hard and not necessarily going out after work. It was noted that Saturday nights were always busy and that he could not complain about business at the moment. Lee Page went onto explain that Smokey Joes had not had many issues in the Town Centre involving their customers even with the low level policing currently in place. It was noted that on occasion Smokey Joes had had to send their security staff down to Kings Street to control the peace which was of a concern to him.

Marie-Anne Leonard (Art on the Street) explained that things were going well and that their 23,000 footfall had increased to 40,000 on event days, with no marketing.

Claire Pearce (Moor Hall Conference Centre) informed Members that business was going well and that they had put business into companies such as Cliveden, French Brothers, etc. It was noted that Moor Hall Conference Centres business was mainly supporting marketing courses in addition to rooms being let to external people such as HSBC, John Lewis, Waitrose and Sainsbury's. It was noted that the forward order book was looking stronger than last year.

Sue Kemp (Legoland Windsor Resort) explained that Legoland had experienced a slow start to the year, similar to 2012 but that once the sun had made an appearance business had picked up. It was noted that the rest of the season was looking very positive for Legoland. Sue Kemp went onto explain that Legoland had decided to open a small area of the park and hotel for Christmas to the general public, which was already proving to be very popular since tickets had gone on sale recently.

The Visitor Manager thanked all industry partners for their continued support.

#### ITEM SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

Members were asked to email any additional item suggestions for future meetings directly to the Visitor Manager, Julia White at [julia.white@rbwm.gov.uk](mailto:julia.white@rbwm.gov.uk)

#### DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chairman informed Members that the Forum would next meet on **Monday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2013** (6.30pm – venue to be confirmed).

The Chairman informed everyone present that in future these meetings would be alternated between Windsor and Maidenhead venues and that there might also be a need to hold a meeting in the South of the Borough.

#### MEETING

The meeting, which began at 6.30pm, ended at 9.10pm.