

Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Committee

Date:	6 July 2021
Title:	TCWG: Market Town Co-Ordinator Update
Contact Officer:	Becky Reid, Market Town Co-ordinator

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an overview of the current focus of work and action taken since 25 May 2021.

Update

2. **Town Centre vibrancy & vitality: Town Centre Working Group (TCWG)**

Last met 23 June 2021.

- 2.1. The TCWG has completed their evaluation of Thame Town Centre against good practice guidelines from the High Street Task Force. What was clear was how well Thame is doing against their various benchmarks/self-assessment tools. The actions we did identify are:
 - 2.1.1. Develop clear KPIs to monitor Thame's performance so that we can identify trends that may indicate things are deteriorating, before they get too far, so that we can quickly work to support improvement. This ties in with a target the group already has and has moved it to the top of our priority list.
 - 2.1.2. The need for a Town Centre vision/strategy that is created in partnership with Businesses and Residents. This will hopefully encourage and enable businesses to get more involved in joint initiatives that will keep Thame vibrant into the future. This is something we hope will be achieved through the review of the Neighbourhood Plan or will be a follow on to this process. We will be led by its progress.
 - 2.1.3. Out of this vision create a clear action plan to achieve it that has set targets over the following term of the NP. If Thame Town Council moves towards developing a Corporate Strategy the hope is that it will feed into this as well, so we have some real joined up thinking.
 - 2.1.4. Explore ideas such as landlord's forum, retail forum, business events programme, independents forum as possible way to build business community/ networks.
 - 2.1.5. Visitor Economy Working Group membership to be expanded by invite where appropriate.
 - 2.1.6. Continue to develop Thame visual identity through branding/revamp of leaflets.
- 2.2. Thame Businesses Awards idea to be piloted in January 2022 as part of a week celebrating Thame's independent businesses. Meeting to take place in September to start the process of scoping this and gauging business appetite for it. In partnership with Thame.net and Thame Rewards club.
- 2.3. Temporary additional seating has been explored in Montesson Square. The idea, initially brought by a Rotary Club member was further explored based on the understanding that Rotary would source funding and be able to move the tables when fairs were in town. Whilst it would be possible to implement this idea based on these requirements being met, as the work has progressed it has become clear that this is no longer achievable by Rotary, so the idea has been shelved. It has however raised the issue of Montesson Square being re-developed to provide more public space in the town centre. This was identified as an action in the Miller 'Vibrancy and Vitality' study. The idea will be scoped in line with, and possibly as part of NP2 consultations.

3. **Partnership work with 21stCT**

- 3.1. 21stCT Constitution is being updated by the MTCO. This work has been on hold but should be done within the next month.
- 3.2. Thame Art Crawl applications are now closed, and artists are being connected to Venues. The event will be launched on social media in July.
- 3.3. Taste of Thame plans to launch in 2022 and a team of people are meeting to discuss this and start taking action to make the event a reality.
- 3.4. Meetings to resume at quarterly intervals over the year, with working groups meeting more regularly as needed.
- 3.5. Work to update the Shopping Guides has been explored recently with the decision taken to implement these at the start of 2022. This will include the development of a new side to promote what's on and how to get involved in your community.
- 3.6. Website updates continue to be completed slowly as capacity allows.

4. **Other MTCO work**

- 4.1. Work to develop a monthly 'Volunteering Opportunities' event – to help promote all current opportunities across Thame is being developed in partnership with Thame.net. This will take place on a morning in the Coffee House 2 out of every 3 months and then as an evening event at Racquets on the 3rd month, alongside 1 annual volunteers fair on a Saturday.
- 4.2. Project to update Blue Plaques flyer has started with Cllr Bretherton and Cllr Dyer. Thame Outer Circuit Waymarkers are still in development.
- 4.3. The Market Town Coordinator, alongside other businesses in Thame (What's Cooking, Newitts and The Book House) and Chris Hurdman from the market, appeared on BBC Oxford's David Prever's Breakfast Club on 23/6/21 (listen back at 7.18am and 8.18am) to talk about how Thame is bucking the trend. There was not enough time give to talk about all elements we would like to have spoken about, but it was certainly a positive showcase of both Thame and Thame Town Council.
- 4.4. A suite of feather flags to identify 'Venues' around town as part of events such as Taste of Thame, Thame Art Crawl and Thame Town Music Festival are being produced.
- 4.5. Have proposed some amendments and an addition to Thame Inner Circuit following a walk to test the route. The addition includes a route that avoids The Phoenix Trail and Cuttlebrook when people may be less able / keen to walk these parts of the route due to it being too wet and muddy, or a dark winters evening.
- 4.6. Statistics:
 - Monthly Business Newsletter: 229 subscribers, up from 228 at last report.
 - Weekly Town Council Newsletter: 990 subscribers.
 - Town Council Facebook page: 1251 followers up from 1212 at last report.

5. **Visitor Economy Working Group (VEWG)**

- 5.1. Over 30 leaflet holders have/are being distributed around Thame and the surrounding areas, as well as leaflets themselves being distributed to venues with their own leaflet holders. These aim to encourage staycationers to the town, benefiting the local economy.

6. **Public Arts Working Group (PAWG)**

- 6.1. Shortlisting and interviews for a Public Artist have taken place with the successful appointment of Nicola Henshaw as the lead artist on our 'Art Leading Wayfinding' project. This will see an improvement to signage that helps explore the heritage and history of Thame, at the same time as helping to encourage people to walk to various locations in the town rather than always getting in their cars. There is an initial start to this work in July to help Nicola get to grips with the town (although she does know Thame a little already), with work starting in earnest in September 2021 and hopefully implemented early 2022.

7. Thame Markets

7.1. Market continues to be supported to run safely.

7.2. World Village Market attended successfully in May.

8. SODC

8.1. SODC marketing materials to encourage a safe return to the Highstreet have been distributed. A booklet is being produced by them to be distributed to those still nervous about coming back to the town center.

Action Required:

To note this report.