

Newport {Shropshire} Town Team

Neighbourhood Planning Workshop Notes

14th January 2014

The 'town team' dedicated a majority of its scheduled business meeting on 14th January 2014 to a Neighbourhood Planning workshop.

Participants were divided into four groups each with a specific focus on one of the following areas:

- (i) Quality & Mix of Shops & Services;
- (ii) Built Environment & Heritage;
- (iii) Stewardship / Maintenance;
- (iv) Newport's Visitor Economy

Respective groups were asked to discuss their focus area and then answer the following six questions:

1. How do traders and business operators visualise Newport town centre in 10 years and in 25 years?
2. What needs to be done to achieve your vision for Newport town centre?
3. What are the threats / obstacles to achieving your vision?
4. How can traders / businesses / landlords contribute to delivering our vision?
5. Who else needs to contribute to delivering our vision?
6. What priority (H/M/L) would you give to objectives / tasks identified by your group?

Feedback from the groups was as follows:-

1. Quality & Mix of Shops & Services

Yellow Group focused on Quality and Mix of Shops and Services in Newport and consisted of –Emma and Maria from Daisy Chain, Julie and Sandra from What Women Want, Hannah from The Cook Shop, Barrie from Nova News, Kerry from Honeycomb and Sarah from ????

Under the main heading we came up with several ideas that we felt could make a difference to the quality and mix of shops and services within Newport.

Q1 How do traders and business operators visualise Newport town centre in 10 and 25 years?

- Better choice of individual shops and restaurants making it a quaint shopping destination with diversity and choice.
- Improved car parking that remains free
- Improved local transport that encouraged people to leave their cars at home.

Q2 what needs to be done to achieve your vision for Newport town centre?

- Keep retail units along the high street as 'retail only' making use of first floor office space (quite often unused) for services such as solicitors, insurance brokers, dentist etc. This would give way to more shops being available for small individual interesting shops and eateries to be developed, making the high street a more attractive prospect for shoppers thus keeping them in the town.
- Rate relief for charity shops should be abolished so they are on an equal footing with other traders when it comes to choosing prime locations within the town.
- Fewer hair salons within the town but they collectively employed the same amount of people – leaving us with a select few larger salons instead of several small salons.
- Increase the amount of car parking within the town – maybe allow the car park at the guildhall to be used by traders?
- Create a Park and Ride scheme that would encourage shoppers to park out of town.
- Create more benches/seating areas along the high street.

Q3 what are the threats/obstacles to achieving your vision?

- Inappropriate out of town development that would take shoppers away from the town centre.
- Lack of car parking spaces.
- High rent and rates making it difficult for small traders to sustain an income.

- Lack of signage on the outskirts of the town, telling people that we have FREE parking and good range of shops.

Q4 How can traders/businesses/landlords contribute to delivering our vision?

- Landlords should be encouraged to become more involved in the Town Team including them with the importance of making our town a successful and viable one.
- Regulate rents to keep them manageable.
- Improve the indoor market by encouraging traders to be open for the full two days trading and better promotion of the market to increase footfall – more stalls = more customers!
- Make space for the monthly farmers market within the market hall with again better promotion.
- Endeavour to enlist Adams Grammar’s help in encouraging students not to use New Street Car Park – maybe parking at Longford and having a shuttle bus to get them into school?

Q5 who else needs to contribute to delivering our vision?

- Telford and Wrekin could provide more funding.
- Market Company need to invest more time and money into reviving the market and make it the hub of the town.
- Any large conglomerate that develops on the outskirts of town should commit to on-going funding that goes towards the town centres development.

Q6 what priority would you give to objectives/tasks identified by your group?

We felt that all of the objectives that we came up with had an equal high priority in continuing to develop Newport town centre into a thriving market town.

2. Built Environment & Heritage

- ❖ Heritage viewed as very important – need to advertise to newcomers, e.g. such as plaques on buildings “Charles Dickens stayed here”
- ❖ University Town – foster relationships with Harper Adams University – potential Saturday use of Market Hall
- ❖ Future Vision: need to maintain the heritage and keep what we have got – signage needs to complement the town
- ❖ Vision for 10 / 25 years: “A thriving market town with heritage sites and famous visitors” with a thriving market and a balance

- ❖ 10/15 years: market should be cherished by the town – needs promotion and better maintenance, also better signage to the market
- ❖ Farmers market relocated to use the Saturday Market Hall
- ❖ Need a community advertising board
- ❖ More diversity and better use of market hall on Saturday mornings
- ❖ Town Fund: How can traders and landlords work together
- ❖ Maintenance of buildings and ‘enforcement’ (upkeep?) of heritage to be in keeping with aspirations for the town
- ❖ Need a balance between chain stores and independents
- ❖ Family friendly pubs with meals from 6.00 – 8.00 pm
- ❖ No soft play area available = must be affordable / free
- ❖ Benches!!! (need for carefully located street furniture including seating, litter bins, cycle facilities, etc.)
- ❖ Community Hub – start-up units and something to bring people through the high street – cultural & leisure opportunities
- ❖ Trees and greenery – similar to Denmark or warmer European countries

- ❖ To achieve the vision:
 - Focus on the market
 - Liaise with the markets management
 - Opportunities for new traders due to retirements

- ❖ Actions to achieve the vision:
 - Keep current (organisational?) structures
 - Improvements to nightclub building
 - Maintenance of buildings
 - Enforcement around shop fronts and signage
 - Improve the market hall
 - Better promotions of the market
 - Develop a town community fund
 - Maximise the on-line presence of Newport
 - Communicate / promote heritage to attract visitors

- ❖ Threats to achieving the vision:
 - 👉 Lack of funding
 - 👉 Failure to engage landlords
 - 👉 Lack of cohesion
 - 👉 Out-of-town developments
 - 👉 Internet competition

- ❖ Who needs to contribute?
 - ✓ NTC/NTT/NRP/chamber plus....
 - ✓ History Society (= very good)
 - ✓ Newport in Bloom
 - ✓ Landlords – form a group
 - ✓ Maintenance team
 - ✓ Churches
 - ✓ Business & community networking
 - ✓ Market Trading Company
 - ✓ Shrewsbury & Newport canal trust

3. Stewardship / Maintenance

- ❖ Visualising Newport in 10/25 years' time?
- ❖ So the high street will not exist as we know it now!
- ❖ Landlords to take more responsibility – believed that Newport has highest rates in the county
- ❖ Older properties – therefore need more maintenance across Newport
- ❖ Stewardship & maintenance standards should impact positively on customers – not depend on local trader contributions

What needs to be done to achieve the vision?

- ❖ More maintenance – maintain existing uniqueness of the town
- ❖ Heritage to be kept
- ❖ Develop the heritage, beauty
- ❖ Local community need to engage (often perceived as a commuter / dormitory town with selective engagement) – promoting ‘civic pride’

What are the threats / obstacles to achieving the vision?

- ❖ Risk that Newport will become less of a community and more of a commuter town
- ❖ Business rates
- ❖ Out of town shopping centres – must resist edge-of-town retail developments unless carefully assessed and found to be complementary to the town centre
- ❖ Need controlled parking in the high street (i.e. urgently need traffic wardens)
- ❖ Parking should remain ‘free’ – key to attracting new visitors / customers

How can traders / landlords contribute?

- ❖ Keep rates affordable - landlords to keep a longer-term investment interest in their properties / town
- ❖ Higher percentage of landlords to take responsibility for maintaining their properties

Who else needs to contribute to delivering the town centre vision?

- ❖ Town council, local authority, multi-nationals must make a proportionate input
- ❖ Greater role for the housing associations and for the local community

What priority would you give to objectives / tasks identified?

- ❖ Maintaining the heritage of the town is the highest priority (ref examples at Ironbridge & Shrewsbury)
- ❖ Rolling parking system – needs a traffic warden, possibly fund through business rates
- ❖ More maintenance to repair the picturesque aspects of Newport

- ❖ 'Face' of Newport should be the high street

4. Newport's Visitor Economy

Prologue: *"local people should be treated as visitors"* – under-pinned by a shop local philosophy

Visualising Newport in 10/25 years' time?

- ❖ Residential: housing estates, public house / social, religious community, with adequate doctors, dentists & health support
- ❖ Thriving Community: parking sorted out, USPs defining key attractions, healthy & balanced local economy
- ❖ Convenience Stores: little & often, e.g.s Metros, Express/ co-op locals
- ❖ Campaigns: Mary Portas, Shop local, town teams

- ❖ Ideal / Visions:
 - Unique
 - Independent traders working closely with large retail operators
 - Quality – high value produce

What needs to be done to achieve the vision?

- ❖ Funding:
 - Grants
 - Structure maintenance
 - Business investors

- ❖ Control:
 - Town planning authority
 - Input from town members and the general public

❖ Support

- Town team support to/for other retailers
- Government via tax relief
- Grants

❖ Marketing

- Promotion of shops, history, culture
- Throughout the region (get name known in Telford, Shrewsbury, Stafford, Bridgnorth, Eccleshall)
- Set realistic goals & visions
- Define Newport's identity

What are the threats / obstacles to achieving the vision?

❖ Money

- Investors
- Economy

❖ Reluctance to Change

❖ Property development

- Housing taking over?
- Need quality business premises to deliver quality services & products

❖ Lack of vision

❖ Apathy – someone else's job

How can traders / landlords contribute?

❖ Lack of apathy

- ❖ Direct action & individual / collective contributions – now, not tomorrow
- ❖ People to inspire confidence, be positive – risk becomes less scary
- ❖ Collaboration / Support (need to know & understand each other) / Friends not competitors
- ❖ Control Neighbourhood Plan – accommodation required but consider carefully best locations

Who else needs to contribute to delivering the town centre vision?

- ❖ Everybody!!!
- ❖ Access & information to locate groups, plans, actions
- ❖ Promote “Pride in Town”

What priority would you give to objectives / tasks identified?

- ❖ A bit of a ‘Chicken & Egg’ conundrum
- ❖ Mix of good shops vs visitors (probably both as high priorities)
- ❖ Potential for conflict between Visitor Economy Partnership & heritage (i.e. locals want parking spaces & want amenities that do not require heritage, keep local local too!!)
- ❖ Possibility of crushing other existing businesses (needs balance of all aspects)
- ❖ Define vision then use input from Q4 & Q5, then market
- ❖ Careful to avoid procrastination
- ❖ Money at Q3 is a low priority (i.e. focus on outcomes, and don’t constrain by over emphasis on funding)

END