

FILE NOTES

Public Meeting to discuss Tourism Issues at The Public Offices Christchurch Road, Ringwood held on 9th June 2010

Present: Cllr Jeremy Heron (in the Chair)
Terry Simpson (Town Clerk)
30 Members of the Public

Jeremy Heron introduced himself and referred to the report considered by the Town Council to discuss Tourism issues in the town. He apologised that the Town Council discussion appeared to suggest that the tourism association had ceased to exist and he acknowledged that it still operated within the town.

He also referred to the Gateway Project, which would enable all three tiers of Local Government, namely the County, District and Town Councils, to be located in one new building on the Furlong car park, and for a joint information desk to be provided, within that new building. It was also intended that the Visitor Information Centre provision would be incorporated into the building, together with new public conveniences.

Whilst the Town was often referred to as the Gateway to the National Park, the Town Council believed that Ringwood itself, also had a number of tourist attractions, which should be marketed for the benefit of the Town.

The proposed Gateway Project, which Jeremy Heron personally supported, had been supported in principle by all three tiers of Local Government. A planning application would be submitted and at that stage, displays of the proposals would be made available within the Town. The land on the corner of the Furlong Car Park had been identified for this type of development and the consultation would not relate to whether or not the development should proceed, but whether or not the size, scale and appearance of the building was appropriate.

Representatives of the existing Tourism Association explained that it was not well known, as it had very few members and had problems in engendering support from within the Town. A number of speakers identified areas in other parts of Europe that had developed Tourism initiatives and referred to the differences between those areas and Ringwood. In most cases the town and the facilities were less attractive than those referred to by speakers.

Tony Climpson the Tourism and Economic Development Officer of the District Council, explained that the spend per head on tourism initiatives in England, was significantly less than other parts of Great Britain and other parts of Europe. There was a lack of resources, and it was unlikely that any of the public authorities would be able to increase their funding in the foreseeable future. He emphasised that if Ringwood wanted to move tourism forward, as the District had been trying to do for 25 years, all parts of the community needed to work together. It was imperative for traders and the tourism industry to work and pull together rather than disagree on

process and outputs. Ringwood had a number of attractions that would appeal to visitors, but they could only be marketed through a joint effort.

In response to several questions, Tony Climpson emphasised that the Government had indicated that there would be no additional public funding to promote tourism. The Government believed that funding should come from business interests, as they would be the ones that benefited from income generated from marketing of tourism.

Several speakers referred to the need to improve signage in the town to encourage visitors to Bournemouth, to take a day trip to Ringwood.

In response Jeremy Heron explained that Town and District Councillors would fight on behalf of the town in relation to signage. However there were a number of different views and it had not been possible to reach agreement even on the style of the signs. Sometimes it was necessary to go forward with one solution on an issue, even if that solution did not fully satisfy everyone individually. The Town Council had allocated a significant amount in its budget for pedestrian signage for a partnership scheme with the County Council. Subject to the County's funding being approved, new pedestrian signs would be provided in the town.

During further discussions, reference was made to the need for free parking for the short term, for more publicity to be prepared and for pedestrianisation of the High Street to be considered. In addition there was an urgent need to sort out the traffic flows in the town and the car park, in order to make the town more attractive for visitors.

Tony Climpson emphasised that, whilst a number of speakers had referred to the Gateway Project, this building would not in itself, attract visitors to the town. The town needed to have a strategy to encourage visitor numbers. He and his staff would be more than willing to assist in this connection. He believed that it was essential for a vibrant group to be established to prepare a strategy for tourism, to encourage day visitors from Bournemouth, the National Park and other areas. In addition to representatives from the tourism industry in the town, the District and Town Councils also should appoint representatives to the new organisation.

Eventually it was agreed that those interested in forming and serving on a new Tourism Association should indicate accordingly on the attendance list. A further meeting could then be arranged to agree a positive way forward to re-invigorate tourism in the town. The Town Council would take the lead in arranging a further meeting and this would be supported by the District Council's Officers.

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