

Minutes

Folkestone Town Centre Working Group

Held at:	Remote meeting
Date	Wednesday, 9 December 2020
Present	Councillors Danny Brook (Chairman), Laura Davison, David Monk, Tim Prater, Douglas Wade and David Wimble
Apologies for Absence	None
Officers Present:	Kate Clark (Case Officer - Committee Services), Ewan Green (Director of Place), Mrs Jess Harman (Community Safety Specialist) and Lorraine Smith (Economic Development Officer)
Others Present:	None

30. **Declarations of interest**

Councillor Laura Davison made a voluntary announcement as she is a ward councillor for Folkestone Town Centre.

Councillor Tim Prater made a voluntary announcement as his business works with the Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) which is referred to in the Place Plan item.

Both councillors remained in the meeting taking part in discussions.

31. **Minutes and Actions**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 August 2020 were agreed with no further actions required.

32. **Update on Reopening High Streets Safely - RHSS**

Members received a presentation slide and the following aspects were highlighted:

(Councillor David Wimble joined the meeting)

- The business toolkit document has been updated.
- The local business safety measures video had been well received by business owners.
- Community support officers to ensure businesses are trading safely. These have been in post since mid-November and have visited all businesses in the town centre. Regular updates on rules and legislation are provided. These actions have made a big difference and other local councils have been impressed with the work carried out by Folkestone & Hythe District Council.
- Assisted restrictions grant. A total of 188 applications have been received for the District out of a possible 400 plus businesses in the Folkestone area alone. As Tier 3 restrictions would probably continue, members felt it important that grants roll on and assurance was given that this would continue. Members asked to be provided with comparison figures of Lockdown 1, Lockdown 2 and Tier 3 grants issued
- The Reopening High Streets Safely fund is still open. However, there are specific purposes the fund can be used for as it comes from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

33. **Community Safety discussion**

An update was provided to members from the Community Safety Specialist.

- Anti-social behaviour - complaints have increased significantly although this is seen as a national trend.
- Homelessness – the last snapshot street count showed 12 . Endeavours are made successfully to help people into temporary or permanent accommodation, this has resulted in 10 taken off the streets. It is important that homeless people engage with the council and partners, members were assured that the homeless are never targeted, the aim is to help and provide support where possible.
- New Homeless persons into the area – this can be caused by local or family connections; other local authorities placing in our area; or possibly the draw of a seaside town.
- County lines – Up to five county lines active at present within the district which try to recruit children and vulnerable adults. This topic is raised weekly at the Community Safety Unit (CSU) meetings which include up to 35 partnerships including Kent Police. Support and guidance is offered to the vulnerable, drawn into gangs, who are usually from dysfunctional families rather than from the Care system or those who are homeless.

34. **Place Plan**

The Director of Place introduced this item and started by saying that 'We Made That' had been appointed as the lead engagement for the Place Plan in the Town Centre. This company came across as extremely engaged and innovative in their approach.

It was suggested that the scope of commission and submission from We Made That as part of the procurement process is circulated to the Working Group.

Members turned their attention to the former Debenhams building, now renamed as Folca. This is the first key project and a quick turnaround on development is needed to mitigate ongoing costs. Interest has been received and a plan will be developed in the next three to four months.

It was noted that a Regeneration and Development Lead Specialist had been recently appointed to concentrate on Folca and other town centre projects.

(Councillor David Monk left the meeting and did not return)

35. High Street Fund and FHDC led projects update

The Economic Development Senior Specialist showed the final presentation slide which detailed the High Street funding awarded, applications received and the Council led projects.

Members looked at Vegan Veganism, it's first market held recently, with a further date scheduled in December. This will then be reviewed in March 2021 with a view to it being a permanent fixture. Members felt advertising is key for this to raise the profile and visitor numbers.

It was noted that some benches had been removed in Guidlhall Street, namely the three benches near the ATM, these had been subject to vandalism. It is hoped that this will dissuade anti-social behaviour and as part of the place plan and improve the public realm.

Members asked about the current situation with the local CCG, they were advised medical practices are in the process of a business case approval. A more detailed description to be forthcoming.

The ward member for Hythe asked if there are any plans or projects for Hythe High Street, however, it was noted that at present, the main focus is on Folkestone.

The Chairman advised the group that further regular meetings to be scheduled for 2021.

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