



Bishop Auckland Town Team

16th February 2017

Notes and Actions

Present: Alan Anderson (Chairman) Clive S. Auld, Pam Bell, Paul Bell, Shaun Bradwell, John Bradwell, Lee Brownson, Nigel Bryson, Renate Davison, Glen Dixon, Fiona Ewing, Liz Fisher, Tom Gibbons, Ann Golighjtly, Susan Graydas, Janet Gregg, Andrew Hall, Peter Heslop, Andrew Hughes, Graham Keenan, Richard Maddison, Steffaq McManners, Janet Miller, Katie Morson, Chris Percival, Josh Raulton, Chris Robinson, Joanna Robinson, Michael Roe, Charles Routledge, Jackie Stonehouse, Lisa M. Turnbull, Amy Walker, Kathryn Watson, Marilyn Weerasinge, Sara Williams, Ann Williams Maughan, and David Anderson

Apologies John Askwith, Peter Daniels, Claire Gibbons, Dr Bob McManners, Chris Myers, Charlie Walton

1. Notes of meeting held on 17th November 2016

Notes of the meeting were agreed

2. Auckland Castle Update

Liz Fisher, Auckland Castle Trust, gave an overview of the establishment of the Trust, its overall aims and projects.

It was noted that Auckland Castle Trust was a charitable not for profit organisation with the aim of transforming Auckland Castle into a tourist destination of international significance. This was the central aim of the £60M project to revive Bishop Auckland for the long term, which would directly provide employment and training opportunities. It would also contribute significantly to the social and economic regeneration of the town and surrounding area.

Liz highlighted the key projects including the following.

- **Auckland Castle**

Work was about to begin on the restoration of the Castle, which would be restored to its original Georgian Gothic opulence.

The Zurbaran paintings, which had first inspired Jonathan Ruffer's interest in the Castle, were currently on display in America which would raise awareness of Bishop Auckland. Whilst in America they paintings would undergo conservation work by specialists.

A Faith Gallery would be constructed to house the first museum in England to explore the history of faith in the British Isles, from prehistory to the present day.

- **Walled Garden and Restaurant**

The Walled Garden was to be restored and a new restaurant built on the main terrace.

When created in the 17th century pioneering techniques were used including heated walls and innovative glass hothouses to grow vegetables, flowers, fruit and particularly pineapples, for the Bishop's guests. Following this tradition, produce grown in the redeveloped garden would be used within the Castle's restaurants.

The Walled Garden Restaurant would be housed in a striking new contemporary structure designed by Japanese architects SANAA.

- **Welcome Building**

Construction of the foundations for the 'Welcome Building' had started.

The Welcome building would be the central reception where visitors would be able to purchase tickets, guide books and seek information on the Castle and other attractions.

- **Mining Art Gallery**

Old Bank Chambers was being transformed into a mining art gallery, which would provide a permanent home for the Gemini Collection of Mining Art, which included works by local artists such as Tom McGuinness and Norman Cornish.

The Mining Art Gallery was planned to be open in the autumn of 2017.

- **No 42 (The Pod)**

No 42, formerly called The Pod, supports local artists by providing a space for them to display and sell their work. The building also has incubator pods on the first floor.

In addition No 42 will be transformed into a temporary museum displaying future plans and some archived items.

The Pod was open Wed – Sat 10.00am – 5.00pm

- **Postchaise / Queens Head**

A boutique hotel would be created from the Postchaise and Queens Head. Consultants had been appointed to evaluate the best way to create the new hotel whilst safeguarding the listed status of the Postchaise.

- **Castles Bar**

It was emphasised that ACT had purchased the building, but not the business, to included in the mix for the future business model to support the regeneration of the town.

The overall aim of the projects was not just to create visitor attractions, but also to create a catalyst for regeneration.

Construction work had been awarded to local contractors. Sixty apprentice positions were to be created in the next 6 months with a view for them holding a qualification in September 2018.

It had been estimated that the combined offer from Auckland Castle Trust and Eleven Arches Trust would attract around half a million visitors a year to Bishop Auckland and the surrounding area.

The Castle was closed to allow construction work to take place. Staff had moved to Vinovium House, occupying three floors, while work was being undertaken as Jonathon Ruffer wanted staff to remain in the town. As well as maintaining a presence in the town staff would also continue to contribute to the local economy.

An events programme was being developed to maintain footfall in Bishop Auckland during the construction phase. This would include hard hat tours of the Castle, Market Place tours and the recreation of the flower festival.

The Food Festival would take place on the Market Place this year as the Castle grounds were not accessible. The opportunity would be taken to open the Spanish Gallery building and St Peters Chapel on the Food Festival weekend to show people the plans.

A temporary haul road would be constructed from Binchester, through the park to the Castle grounds to provide an access for construction vehicles and materials to minimise disruption in the town. The park would be reinstated after construction work had concluded.

It was also noted that a programme of ambassador training was continuing with the aim of Bishop Auckland achieving World Host Destination status. This had been the foundation of the London 2012 Olympics offering a quality visitor welcome and experience. 50 free training places were on offer to local businesses to help them with their customer experience training. Every business obtaining World Host business status would contribute to the town achieving the World Host Destination status.

Drop-in sessions were to be held on the Town Hall from 24th – 28th March to showcase the Castle's projects.

ACT representatives were also visiting businesses to give information about the various projects and answer any queries.

3. Eleven Arches Trust (Kynren) Update

Sara Williams gave an overview of the Eleven Arches Trust and Kynren.

It was noted that the Eleven Arches Trust (EAT) was a charitable organisation which shared the same ambitions as ACT: to contribute to the social and economic regeneration of the town and wider area. Over £35M had been invested in the Kynren site. All proceeds raised were to be re-invested into Kynren.

EAT's aim was to create a world class performance which would attract visitors regionally, nationally and internationally. In its first year around 100,000 tickets had been sold for Kynren. 23% of attendees were from outside the area.

The visitor experience team had all attended World Host training to ensure that visitors received excellent customer service.

Kynren was to develop and grow for 2017. 300 additional volunteers had been recruited. A 'Camp Kynren' event had been held to welcome new volunteers and start team building. The technical team had already started creating props and costumes.

Steve Boyde had been appointed as artistic director. The show would build on the first years success. 2000 years of history would not change, but new elements would be added. Rehearsals would begin in March 2017.

Traffic management plans were being revised to ease congestion. It was anticipated that the new regime would allow visitors more dwell time in the town centre.

Shows would begin on 1st July 2017 with 136,000 visitors expected during the season.

In summary, Kynren had added a must see visitor attraction to Bishop Auckland's offer. There had been a major investment in the town which had created employment opportunities, and opportunities for training and personal growth through volunteering. The show had already brought tourism to Bishop Auckland which had increased spend in the town.

It was anticipated that Auckland Castle Trust projects and Eleven Arches Trust would change the fortunes of Bishop Auckland and the surrounding area.

Questions

A number of questions were raised regarding the impact of the projects on the town centre, which like most towns had suffered during the recent recession.

It was explained that the projects would see £100M invested in the town, which would attract visitors, increase footfall, present business opportunities together with employment and

training opportunities for local people. The vision was for the economic and social benefit of Bishop Auckland and surrounding communities.

Specific questions were raised on the following:-

Catering offer at Kynren. It was explained that it had been intended to provide opportunities on the Kynren site for local suppliers. However in the first year of operation the emphasis was to ensure the success of the offer on site. This could only be achieved through a large operator. It was however planned to use more local suppliers in 2017 with a better mix of local food and beverages.

It was also noted that ACT was focusing their supply chain locally wherever possible, but then looking for suppliers regionally before seeking nationwide.

Would the Eleven Arches site used outside the Kynren season? It was explained that the site had been stripped down to protect the technical equipment from the worst of the winter weather. The site had also returned to a construction site as further developments took place.

With respect to the venue being used for other events it was noted that the focus would initially be on developing Kynren, delivering a quality show and building a recognisable brand and reputation.

Parking on Market Place/Newgate Street. A query was raised with regard to the number of cars parked on the Market Place and north end of Newgate Street. It was noted that Durham County Council was looking to amend the parking order to enable better enforcement.

Could the DLI museum be housed at Kynren site? It was noted that this was outside the remit of the Eleven Arches Trust.

Quality of Market Provision. It was noted that the market provision had declined in recent years as peoples shopping habits changed and due to the availability of clothing from supermarkets and low-cost stores.

It was suggested that speciality markets may be successful.

It was noted that Durham County Council were looking at plans to improve the market.

Out of Town Shopping Centre, Tindale Crescent. It was commented that the out of town shopping centre had replaced the town centre.

It was noted that out of over 260 retail premises in the town centre 40 were not in use. This equated to around 15% vacancy rate, which was in line with town centres nationally. The town centre had been affected by the recent recession as had other town centres and shopping centres.

Durham County Council (DCC) was working hard to make improvements to encourage retailers to the town centre via targeted business improvement grants, shop wraps and generally improving the town centre environment.

DCC owned only 2 retail units in the town centre and therefore did not have direct influence or control of the high street. It was however working closely with owners and agents, where possible, to encourage them to bring their units back into use. It was noted that not all owners/agents were working with the Council.

Two businessmen, present at the meeting, who were investing in the town commented on the assistance and support they had received from Durham County Council and others to help them establish businesses in the town. They had enquired with other council's in the region seeking support to set up businesses, but had decided to locate in Bishop Auckland due to the support on offer and also because of the regeneration initiatives taking place in

the town. They felt that Bishop Auckland had a bright future and were keen to make their investment in the town.

Castles Bar. It was queried why Jonathan Ruffer had closed Castles Bar and made staff redundant.

It was explained that Auckland Castle Trust had been approached by the owners of the bar offering to sell the building because the business was to stop trading. ACT agreed to purchase the premises. It was emphasised that the closure of the bar was a business decision of the owner and not as a consequence of ACT purchasing the building.

4. Update on Core Team Projects

Key areas of Core Team projects were highlighted including:-

Community Toilet Scheme

Noted that seven businesses had signed up to the community toilet scheme to offer the public who were not necessarily customers use of their toilet facilities. The principle was that people using facilities would more often than not make a purchase either at the time or on a future visit.

Those taking part were Asda, Fifties Tea Room, Newgate Centre, No 42 (The Pod), Time for you Tea (Four Clocks), The Town Hall and Zair's Cafe

Targeted business Improvements

This was a town centre scheme to improve shop fronts and certain internal works. Funding was available for the next 2 financial years. Resources were however limited and therefore funds would be targeted to achieve the most benefit. Business owners would also need to contribute towards the cost of improvements.

The scheme was to be advertised in the near future.

North Bandgate Car Park – Phase II

Phase II of the project would provide an additional 110 parking space. This would be achieved via a partnership with DCC providing the infrastructure and ACT managing the car park on a daily basis.

A planning application was to be submitted in the next few weeks.

Bishop Auckland and Coundon in Bloom

Information was given on the recently launched 'In Bloom' initiative which was aimed at encouraging civic pride in the town.

A fundraiser was to be held in Fifteas Tearoom on 19th February.

5. Events Programme

Clive Auld (Chair of the Events Committee) outlined the programme of activities taking place during the year.

Banners would again be installed in Newgate Street with the help of sponsorship from local businesses.

6. Next Meetings:-

Thursday, 15th June 2017 at 6.00 p.m. (AGM)