

## **The future of Burnham Town Centre**

Retail trade in town centres has come under pressure with the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in an increase in online sales. Burnham is fortunate in that it has a higher than average proportion of independent shops which tend to be more resilient to the threat from online shopping but, even so, the Town Council needs to consider ways in which we can support the viability of our retail offer. Recent footfall data shows a return to near 2019 levels but footfall does not necessarily equate to spend. The decision of the F & R Committee to rely on the Geo-Sense system in future will provide information on a number of items which are not currently collected e.g. dwell time and repeat visitors and should help us plan better going forward.

One factor that militates against the attractiveness of a town centre is the conflict – perceived or real – between pedestrians and vehicles. The active travel measures introduced last summer did not find universal favour but we need to remember that these were brought in at extremely short notice and with a specific aim in mind to re-open the High Street. A year on and as we hopefully emerge from the pandemic, there is an opportunity to have a wider debate around the future of our town centres and Burnham in particular. A greater understanding of what both local residents, retailers, businesses, and the thousands of tourist that support the local economy would like to see is fundamental. Equally retailers and businesses are needing to adapt both to new challenges and to embrace new opportunities for spill out activities such as cafes, street stalls etc that provide experiences that online shopping does not. There is also the climate change agenda that is seeing a shift away from car dominated spaces.

It is now 5 years since any research was carried out on Burnham Town Centre as part of the development of the Neighbourhood Plan. This was a house-based survey so did not capture any views of visitors. It would seem sensible therefore for the Town Council to commission some new research that includes wider ranging public consultation with residents, businesses, retailers, and tourist visitors as to the future of Burnham High Street and surrounding shopping streets. What would people like to see, what would make them visit more often or spend more in the Town Centre? What are the current barriers stopping them doing this? If something could be progressed relatively quickly the tourist season could be captured e.g. in August. Engagement should be both locally in the town centre but also with, for example, the large caravan parks so that we can understand any barriers or reasons why people do not visit the High Street. The time is right to look at the future of the High Street as we move to recovery as it seems clear that standing still is not an option if it is to maintain relevance and flourish.

Funding for such research could come for a variety of sources. There are a number of Earmarked reserves that could be used – 315, Burnham regeneration £1000; 316 Burnham CIL £4349; 346 Tesco S106 £3160 (after allowing for remainder of the footfall monitor contract). In addition our General reserves stand at £298,105 and the recommended minimum is £169,249. It is important that we commission a professional company with experience of carrying out such research so it may be that we need to suspend the standing orders on procurement if we wish to carry out the research this year.

### **Proposal 1.**

**The Town Council commission research as outlined above and sets aside such funds as are necessary to achieve this.**

Once we have received the research findings, it will be necessary for us to consider them and share them with Sedgemoor DC (or its successor) in order to plan the next stages – what do we want to do and how can it be achieved and funded? Working with SDC's Economic Development team will be essential – both for their expertise and also because Government funding streams are aimed at Principal Councils, not Town or Parish ones. This could be a suitable task for our regeneration partnership. However it is progressed it will take a significant time before any changes can be implemented. Meanwhile there are two actions that could be considered which would have a shorter lead-in time and which require nothing more than signage. If supported, they would need to be forwarded to the County Council for consideration for Traffic Regulation orders which, of course, are only confirmed after a process of advertisement and consultation.

## **Proposal 2. Make the High Street from College Street to Abingdon Street “access only”.**

Doing this would not affect traffic with a legitimate need to enter the High St e.g. shoppers, delivery vehicles, residents accessing Cottage Row or South St, users of the Masonic Hall. What it would prevent is through traffic using the High St. With Oxford St and the Esplanade running parallel there is no need for through traffic to drive down the High St. Although some may ignore the signage (and it would be difficult to monitor), it should result in some reduction of traffic – to the benefit of both shops and shoppers.

## **Proposal 3. Introduce a 20 mph zone in Burnham town centre.**

At many times this is, in effect, in place as it is difficult to exceed this speed in the town centre. Nevertheless, formalising it by a legal limit would be of benefit and would make pedestrians, cyclists and mobility scooter users feel safer.

There are two broad options for this.

a) drawing the zone tightly around the High Street and Victoria St.

This would mean only including those two spine streets and the streets which access them i.e. Vicarage St., Regent St., Princess St., Chapel St., George St., College St., John St., John St. South., Cross St., Adam St., Cottage Row and South St.

This would cover the main shopping areas, but excludes Abingdon St., Pier St. and the Esplanade - which has a number of premises attractive to visitors and where speeding does occur.

b) drawing the zone more widely around the town centre.

This could be done by including the area bounded by The Esplanade, Pier St and Abingdon St., Oxford St. (including Jaycroft Road and Ham Lane) and Seaview Road. It would be appropriate to exclude Manor Road and Berrow Road (and roads off) from this as they are the main route to Berrow and Brean and do not contain any shops.

This would include all the shops, restaurants and leisure facilities in the town centre and would also reduce the speed of traffic along Oxford St., Pier St. and the Esplanade.

## **Corporate Plan references**

### **3. Economic Development and Tourism.**

- 3.1 Support and benefit local business
- 3.3. Support the promotion of Burnham and Highbridge
- 3.4. Actively support and encourage local tourism

### **4. Healthy and safe environment**

- 4.4 Work with a range of partners to ensure the town centres and open spaces remain safe places.

## **Recommendations.**

1. To consider whether to support any of these three proposals and, if so, to take the necessary actions to implement it/them.
2. If supporting proposal 3 – to decide on which option.