



Hungerford Chamber of Commerce Minutes of Meeting held on Thursday 6th April 2017 at the Three Swans, Hungerford

Present:- Christina Finlay (Chair), David Small (Secretary), Nigel Perrin (Treasurer), Frances Small (Membership Secretary), Derek Loft (Committee), Martin Crane (Mayor of Hungerford) Ian Sloan (guest speaker) and 12 members of the Chamber

1. **Introductions** – CF welcomed all in attendance at the meeting and conducted the usual introductions.
2. **Chair's address** – CF reviewed the events of the past few months including the business survey and its conclusions, the establishment and first meeting of a marketing committee and the proposal to draw up and adopt a 3-year plan to make the Chamber central to the life of the town with a target of 90% of its businesses as members. Detailed planning will be the responsibility of the executive committee, to include a new Facebook page, regular website updating and a planned programme for future meetings with guest speakers.
3. **Treasurer's report** – NP reported that the Chamber has £973.85 in the Treasurer's account and approximately £4,800 in the Extravaganza account. Subscription income has started to come in, about 7 renewals so far and more expected in the next few weeks. It was agreed to pay a fee invoice from the Chamber's interim treasurer in the sum of £100 for around 10 hours' work.
4. **Membership** – FS said that she had only just taken over the role as Membership Secretary and although she had received the Membership Pack from NP she had yet to receive contact details for recruitment purposes. She said that three new enquiries had been received and these will be followed up. NP confirmed that last year's total of members was around 90. The decision made at the AGM in March to give new start-up businesses a 50% discounted sub in their first year was noted and will be implemented.
5. **Mayor's Report** – Martin Crane spoke of his attendance at a recent meeting to progress the establishment of the 'Great West Way' tourist initiative, which Dani Winslet also attended on behalf of the Town and Manor. 200 delegates attended and £250,000 worth of funding is already in place for the first phase of the project, which will seek to promote a 'corridor' from London to Bristol as a destination for tourists and new businesses. MC also mentioned the Hungerford Trade Fair which the Town Council is planning to hold in September, either at the John of Gaunt school or the Corn Exchange.
6. **Membership Subscriptions** – DL led a discussion on this topic following on from the decision at the AGM to provide a 50% reduction for start-up businesses. He proposed a 20% discount for lapsed members who rejoin and a new Honorary Membership category for those who have retired from business but who wish to remain involved in the life and activities of the Chamber. Those present at the meeting expressed supportive views but it was also emphasised by Ben Blake and Martin Bakker that their interest in rejoining was more to do with the recent restoration of previous activity levels than a modest reduction in the membership subscription. It was also suggested that the 50% first-year reduction should be made available for all new members and not just new start-up businesses, and that Honorary Membership status need not be limited to those who had retired from business and should be available to anyone whose active participation in the life of the Chamber would be useful. As regards the reduced first-year sub Simon Evans said that the Alresford Chamber of which he is the current Chairman applies a similar procedure. Martin Crane also suggested the production and distribution of car window stickers.

After much discussion it was proposed

- to adopt a 50% sub reduction for all incoming new members – proposed by DL, seconded by NP, all in favour
- to adopt a 20% reduction for all previously-lapsed members who rejoin – proposed by DL, seconded by Penny Morgan, all in favour

- to adopt an Honorary Membership category to enable members to be recruited from outside the business community, including but not limited to persons who have retired from business – proposed by DS, seconded by Fiona Hobson, all in favour.

7. Victorian Extravaganza – NP said that last year's event was the biggest and best yet but that the January meeting of the Extravaganza Committee had decided that the format of the event needed to change, especially as the committee member responsible for arranging the fairground attractions had retired. It was therefore proposed to adopt a new 'Christmas Extravaganza' approach, dropping the Victorian association, with a new committee to be formed that would be independent of the Chamber and therefore not as dependent on it for organisational and financial support. Supportive views were expressed by those present at the meeting, with Anthony Buckwell commenting that in his opinion organising the Extravaganza each year has taken up too much of the Chamber's time and resources, leading to its decline in other and more important respects. As regards future organisation and a new committee, Tyrell Bossom suggested that the formation of a new Charity should be considered and DS suggested that an ideal new vehicle would be Town Team Hungerford – as to which NP confirmed that this is already being considered by TTH and will be discussed at its next Directors' meeting on 26th April. It was agreed therefore to await the outcome of this meeting and to discuss the matter again at the Chamber's next meeting in May.

8. Town Planning - DS, who is also a member of the Town Council and its Environment and Planning Committee, addressed the meeting about three current and significant development proposals at the Garden Art site (commercial), Station Yard and Salisbury Road (both residential). The Town Council had agreed to support the first two applications but was strongly opposing the third, which will involve the construction of 100 new homes on an AONB site south of the town. Different views were expressed by those in attendance at the meeting, with concern about the consequences of the Salisbury Road development on traffic congestion in the town centre and also about the impact on the AONB and also the town's Primary School and Surgery which are already overstretched. The general consensus was however that the proposed new houses will be good for the town and its commercial community, with site suitability being of secondary importance, and that the Garden Art licensing application is to be welcomed also for the same reason.

9. Guest Speaker - Ian Sloan FRICS of Bankier Sloan, Chartered Surveyors of Banbury addressed the meeting and circulated a written briefing document about Business Rates and recent changes in rateable value figures and Small Business Rates Relief. He said that the new RV figures are 95% correct as regards property rental values and that the SBRR eligibility limits have been increased to levels at which most smaller businesses will fall within them. Transitional relief will also be available for businesses which face increases in their BR liability. He stressed the importance of claiming SBRR relief however as it isn't made available automatically. It will apply in future to all business properties whose RV is less than £12k per annum, with tapering relief then available for RVs of up to £15K. This information is not however notified on Council websites however so the Chamber has a useful job to do in notifying its members. NP gave a vote of thanks to IS for his attendance and the very important information which he had provided.

10. Any Other Business – NP appealed for volunteers to make up a Chamber of Commerce team for the annual Town Quiz being hosted by the Friends of St. Lawrence's Church at the Croft Hall on Friday 28th April (Forbes Stephenson said that he and his wife Carol will take part).

11. Date of next meeting – Thursday 4th May, venue to be confirmed, either the Bear Hotel or the Herongate Leisure Centre commencing at 7 pm.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

Christina Finlay

Chair