

High Street Innovation Funding

Executive Portfolio Holders: Cllr Peter Gubbins, Area South and Yeovil Vision
Cllr Angie Singleton, Area West and Market Towns

Assistant Directors: Kim Close & Helen Rutter, Communities

Service Managers: Kim Close, Area Development Manager (South)
Andrew Gillespie, Area Development Manager (West)

Lead Officers: As above

Contact Details: Yeovil Vision:
Kim.close@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462708
Market Towns Investment Group (MTIG)
Andrew.gillespie@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01460 260426

Purpose of the Report

To provide members with an update report, as requested on 2 July 2013, about the use of the High Street Innovation Funding (HSIF) allocated to the Yeovil Vision and the Market Towns Investment Group (MTIG). The report is given in two sections, the first part is for Yeovil Vision and the second part for MTIG.

Actions Required

That members note and comment on the report.

YEOVIL VISION

Background

On 2 July 2013, a progress report was presented to the Scrutiny Committee giving details of the projects in Yeovil which were allocated funding from the High Street Innovation Fund Yeovil Vision allocation of £33,333.

The Committee requested this progress report be made after a further 12 months.

Report

Using the arrangements previously reported, applications for project funding were assessed and funding allocated.

The Yeovil Town Team Loyalty Card

It is important to note that the HSFI funding allocation to the Yeovil Town Team for the Loyalty Card has been used as a “funding safety net” which has given the group confidence to be bold in terms of the range of projects it has undertaken and funded. The Yeovil Town Team is funded entirely from voluntary contributions from local businesses and other organisations such as SSDC which gives £3k per annum, Yeovil Town Council and Yeovil Without Parish Council. Projects that the Yeovil Town Team has undertaken and funded include:

- The Annual Christmas Light Switch on Event
- The Annual Food Festival
- The Annual Fashion Event
- The Introduction of the Yeovil Town App
- The development of Social Media to promote the Town Centre
- The employment of a Marketing Intern to help promote the town centre
- Regular newsletters for traders in the town centre
- Provides funding of £2k per annum for Community Safety Initiatives
- Provides £3k funding per annum to improve the Street Scene in Yeovil Town Centre.

There are currently 23 participating retailers using the Yeovil Loyalty Card scheme offering a range of deals.

A recent survey of users revealed that over 50% of the participating retailers find that they are being regularly asked about Loyalty card offers which shows that awareness of the scheme is building. In addition over 30% felt that the scheme had benefited their business. The registration of loyalty cards was abandoned because we introduced an app based loyalty card for shoppers to download. Traders were also asked to give suggestions to improve the scheme and these will be fed into a re-launch over the Christmas period.

Arts Project

The original proposal for an Arts project was achieved by drawing on alternative sources of funding, leaving the opportunity for a further arts project within the town centre.

Retail Incubation Project

A significant amount of research has been undertaken to establish the components of a successful Retail Incubation Scheme for Yeovil. We have looked at schemes from around the country. This has resulted in the following proposal being approved by the Yeovil Vision Board.

Elements of a package of Retail Business support will include:

- An Information pack on how to set up or relocate a retail business within Yeovil, including information of vacant shops, useful contacts etc.
- financial assistance in the form of grants
- Assistance with NNDR similar to a scheme run in Area East which covers new businesses only, up to 2 years and up to 50% of actual payment due as long as the new business doesn't compete with an existing outlet
- a mentoring package from experts in retail,
- marketing expertise and grants,
- Legal advice on issues like registering a brand,
- business and financial planning,
- Retail space could be provided within a town centre or shopping environment on a flexible basis and in many cases free of charge for a defined period of time. This could be provided in partnership with local landlords on a "Meanwhile" basis.

- a scheme to encourage the use of Market trading as a stepping stone to setting up a full retail business in Yeovil
- a Shop Front Improvement Scheme – similar to the scheme run in Area East which includes:
 - Eligible costs are shop front improvement to visually enhance town centre or village
 - New & existing retail – shops, restaurants and service businesses
 - Up to 50% towards project costs, up to £1,500

Links with organisations such as the ATCM, the Skills Academy for Retail, Federation of Small Businesses and Chamber of Commerce would also be valuable. The scheme will be supported and promoted by the Yeovil Town Team and the Yeovil Chamber of Trade and it is hoped that legal and professional advice will be provided by local businesses on a pro bono basis.

Of the £33,333 allocation a total of £25k has been allocated leaving a further £8,333 for future allocations. The remaining £8,333 has is likely to be used to promote a “Love Yeovil” campaign featuring the new Love Yeovil and Love Yeovil Markets Logos. The project brief and costings are currently being developed.

Project	Status	Total Project Cost	HSIF %	Grant Allocated
Yeovil Town Loyalty Card	On going – the scheme has been very successful in attracting external funding and support in kind. Offers are Free the Yeovil Town Team has invested a significant amount into the scheme with the publicity being provided largely free of charge by the Western Gazette. The £10k Portas Town Team award has also been used to support this project.	£40,000	25%	£10,000
Arts Project: Culture on Our High Street	Alternative funding was identified to run the “Pretty Vacant” Arts project in Yeovil. The funding remains allocated for an arts project for Yeovil and the Yeovil Vision Board are considering options.	£25,000	At least 25%	£5,000
Retail Incubation Project	Due to be implemented in January 2015	£10,000	Estimated 50%	£10,000

Monitoring and evaluating the Outcomes

The Yeovil Vision Board will continue to monitor the projects to ensure that they meet the objectives of the fund and continue to bring benefit to Yeovil Town Centre.

MARKET TOWNS INVESTMENT GROUP (MTIG)

Background

On 2 July 2013, a comprehensive report was given to the Scrutiny Committee with details of the arrangements put in place to work up and deliver innovative projects to improve local high streets, making use of the £66,670 funding allocated.

The Committee requested this progress report be made after a further 12 months.

Report

Using the arrangements previously reported, applications for project funding were assessed and funding allocated. In some cases, when it was agreed that original project proposals were not deliverable, new proposals were invited.

As a result of the MTIG "Portas" Programme initiative, 9 viable projects were allocated varying amounts of funding and of those 1 put forward by the Wincanton "town team" went ahead with alternative sources of funding, 7 took up the offer and the schemes are now complete and the remaining scheme will be delivered this year.

The MTIG "Portas" programme is funded through a combination of the £66,670 HSIF allocation and an existing SSDC capital allocation, should that be needed. As the following table shows, grants of £78,424 have been made so far, contributing 44% of project costs. A further potential grant of £13,622 will be made on completion of the Ilminster Town Centre enhancement project. This means that the HSIF has already been fully utilised.

Market Town Area	Details	Status	Total Project Cost	MTIG %	Grant paid
Chard	Chard Business Start Up - (Empty Shop)	Completed	£20,000	78%	£14,795.00
Chard	Town Centre Tree Replacement	Completed	£11,912	92%	£11,912
Crewkerne	Theatre in Shops	Completed	£8,000	75%	£6,000.00
Ilminster	Onward and Upward - TC enhancements	Revised scheme delayed start, grant offer made, scheme not yet started	£13,622	0%	0
Langport	Langport Market Development	Completed	£30,000	67%	£23,208.00

Market Town Area	Details	Status	Total Project Cost	MTIG %	Grant paid
Martock	Precinct Improvement Project - Community Retail Space inc. Market	Completed	£30,000	28%	£8,835.33
Castle Cary	Millbrook Gardens Car Park Extension	Completed	£65,000	19%	£12,500.00
Somerton	Somerton Town Centre Car Park Improvements	Completed	£10,000	50%	£1,173.99
Wincanton	Wincanton Market	Other funding found. A pilot Sunday market was established last Autumn, this resumes this weekend and will run monthly on '3rd Sunday' until November. (The December date has yet to be confirmed).	£15,000	0%	£0.00
Totals			£203,534	44%	£78,424

Monitoring and evaluating the Outcomes

MTIG exists to enable people to shape their towns according to their developing community plans. These plans are as comprehensive as possible.

All applicants for MTIG funding usually work with someone from their SSDC Area Team and agree to complete a monitoring form when their project is complete.

Monitoring and evaluating outputs is relatively straightforward. We are able to list the number of market stalls enabled, the number of trees replaced or the number of new parking places created. Monitoring and evaluating outcomes, which may be realised over a much longer time period, is much more difficult especially as government guidance and reduced SSDC resource favour a "light touch" regime.

In each place, the opportunities to improve the High Street's "marketing mix" are different for reasons of geography, history, capacity, interests etc. All this takes place in a dynamic environment.

For this reason, the specific contribution each individual scheme is able to make cannot always be readily identified, nor the total contributions of all schemes summarised.

The evaluation reports of the Crewkerne based Theatre in Shops Project and the Chard Pop-Up Shop project attached to this report cover some of these issues.

However, even at this early stage it is possible to note clear signs of success. The Theatre in Shops project, the new or improved markets have all created observable new footfall and vitality, the enhanced car parks have enabled more visits and demonstrated practical investment in the important public realm. The Pop Up Shop in Chard was there for a year, as planned, and led to improvements in the appearance of a run down part of town and the incubation of new businesses, some of which are now renting formerly empty shops.

Where appropriate, MTIG Portas programme projects were able to attract strong and positive local and national media coverage that endorse these initial findings.

theguardian

Monday 12 May 2014

Can Britain's food markets make a comeback?

Though squeezed by supermarkets and high street homogeny, new initiatives are helping revitalise food stalls across the UK “....In Somerset, the newly revamped Langport market is set to launch, on 30 May, after £20,000 worth of investment from the council and the Market Town Investment Group – the funding devised by high street campaigner Mary Portas. The market area has been made more accessible and it'll sell local fruit, vegetables, jam and cheese.

Peter Roberts, chairman of Langport Area Business Group explains: "We're not selling grotty end of range products: we're selling decent local produce. We want this to be a place where locals can shop affordably and where you get a specialised, helpful service.....

"For the full article, go to;

<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/may/12/can-britain-food-markets-make-comeback>

Evaluation Reports

Trading Local – Theatre in Shops Crewkerne

ABCD (A Better Crewkerne and District) commissioned Bristol based theatre company Show of Strength to deliver the Trading Local project in Crewkerne. “Trading local brings together writers, actors, shops, shoppers and volunteers for a glorious celebration of independent shops”. The theatre company puts live theatre onto the shop floor by using professional actors to perform 5 minute monologues written by local people.

The main aims of the project were to:

- Increase footfall in to the town centre on performance day

- Raise awareness of the range of independent shops there are in Crewkerne amongst people who do not regularly spend time in the town centre.
- Connect with the Crewkerne residents who have an interest in the arts.

The latter aim was in response to previous ABCD consultations, which have shown there is a strong interest in the arts from a significant number of people in the town. Those people have stated that they want more arts activities and events in the town, and ideally a dedicated arts venue for them.

ABCD wanted to use the event to attract and engage with the Crewkerne art lovers and establish whether any of those that participated, especially in the workshops, would be interested in getting involved with a legacy project, helping to organise future arts activities in the town.

The project was split into 2 phases:

1. Writing workshops
2. Performance day

Phase 1 – Writing workshops

There were 6 free theatre writing workshops aimed at anyone living in and around Crewkerne. Shelia Hannon, Show of Strengths Executive Producer, herself an experienced theatre writer, carried out the workshops, where participants were taught what constitutes a good 5 minute monologue and how to develop a character. Workshops were delivered over a 3 week period in February and March 2014 and were held in a variety of venues around the town.

- Bilbys coffee shop on Thursday 27 February 2-4pm
- Wadham School Hall on a Thursday 27 February 7-9pm
- Crewkerne library Tuesday 4th March 10am to 12 noon.
- George Hotel on a Tuesday 4th March 7 – 9pm
- Town Hall Council Chamber on a Saturday 15th March 10am to 12 noon
- George Hotel on Saturday 15th March 2-4pm

Different times of the day and week were chosen to ensure that there was at least one time that was convenient for the people who wanted to attend. Workshops were held in a variety of venues to spread them around the town giving some local businesses the opportunity to benefit from hosting a session. In addition it was recognised that some people might not feel comfortable walking into a pub on their own, or may not want to purchase food or drink so public buildings were also included. The majority of the workshops were well attended. The only one that had a low attendance was the Saturday morning one in the town hall.

Altogether 42 different people attended the workshops, which were set up as drop in sessions, so people did not have to book and they could attend as many or as few as they liked. Some people attended more than one workshop, where they gained useful information, which enabled them to draft a monologue that they brought along to a subsequent workshop to gain further advice and feedback. Some of those people that attended more than one workshop also appreciated the social side and this was very apparent with the workshops carried out in the café and pub where people stayed on afterwards to chat and have further drinks.

Workshop participants had plenty of time to complete their scripts, which had to be submitted by 9am on Monday 31st March via email to Shelia Hannon, who made the decision as to which scripts were suitable for production.

Phase 2 – Performance day

12 short plays were chosen to be performed. On the day each play was performed 4 times, giving people plenty of opportunity to watch a play in between shopping, having lunch or other activities.

To spread the performances around, where possible some of the plays were performed in 2 locations. For example 'It's all vintage now' was performed in both Harts vintage shop and the Brainwave charity shop.

One play was scheduled to be performed outside the 2 main supermarkets (Lidl and Waitrose), this was done to attract passing customers and encourage them to follow the performances and see what other shops the town has to offer.

As the plays were performed in shops and public spaces across the town, with 3 performances happening simultaneously, it is difficult to say exactly how many people it attracted. However on average there were between 18 – 25 members of the public watching a performance at any one time. The minimum number of people watching was 12, but for some performances there were 40 people in the audience. Altogether there were 48 performances throughout the day.

Finance

The cost of commissioning Show of Strength was £9000 and that covered the following:

- 1) The Theatre Producers time to:
 - ❖ Organise and deliver 6 creative writing workshops
 - ❖ Read, edit and revise the scripts that were performed.
 - ❖ Visit shops in the town and find suitable venues for performances
 - ❖ Audition actors
 - ❖ Carry out rehearsals including 1 full day of dress rehearsals, the day before performance
 - ❖ Organise publicity and promotional materials
 - ❖ Promote the event via the internet, e-newsletters and social media
- 2) 6 actors employed for rehearsals and the performance day.
- 3) 1000 printed fliers for the workshops
- 4) 2000 printed programmes promoting the event

ABCD used some of their own funds and applied for grants to cover the rest, the £9000 was obtained in the following way:

- £6000 from the High Street Innovation Fund via SSDC Market Town Investment Group
- £1500 from Crewkerne Town Council
- £1000 from ABCD
- £500 from Waitrose

In addition ABCD had to provide the venues for the workshops, a dressing room, a sandwich lunch for the actors on performance day and stewards to accompany each actor on the day.

The SSDC Neighbourhood Development Officer was able to secure all the venues involved in the workshops free of charge. Waitrose donated sandwiches, fruit, crisps and bottled water for 18 people (this included volunteer stewards). Crewkerne Heritage Centre & Museum donated the use of their meeting room to be used as a dressing room for both the dress rehearsal and the performance day. 12 people volunteered to be stewards for half a day each and they each received a free sandwich lunch for their help.

Publicity

A wide range of communication channels were used throughout the project to try and get the message out to as many people as possible.

- Local press - from the early stages of the project the local press was kept informed and the Western Gazette and the Crewkerne Weekender ran a number of stories about the project from January 2014 through to covering the performance day itself. The performance day generated some very good publicity in both the Crewkerne Weekender and the Western Gazette (see attached).
- E-newsletters and websites were utilised. Show of Strength has an e newsletter that is distributed to 5500 people; four editions of that newsletter were sent out with details of the Crewkerne event. This was useful as that newsletter reaches people based in Bristol, Bath and other parts of Somerset and on the day a large group of people from Bath came down specifically to watch the shows. That group spent the day in Crewkerne and spent money in shops, pubs and cafes.
- Social media - Crewkerne Local Information made regular postings on their Facebook page. When they posted up the programme schedule they had 75 people open it in the space of an afternoon. Show of Strength were also posting on Facebook and made regular use of Twitter in the days leading up to the event.
- BBC Somerset Sound had a live interview with one of the Crewkerne writers on the morning of the performance day, and regularly mentioned the event as part of their news bulletins throughout the morning.
- Leaflets were used to advertise both the workshops and the performance day. Leaflets for the workshops were distributed via Local Information Centres, some of the shops, cafes and pubs and many were also posted through Crewkerne's doors. The leaflets for the performance day were distributed via Local Information Centres in Chard, Crewkerne & Ilminster. Leaflets were also placed in local shops, cafes and pubs in and around Crewkerne including the surrounding villages of Hinton St George, Merriot, South Perrot, Thorncombe, Winsham and Mosterton. Leaflets were distributed at both the Farmers market and the weekly Wednesday market in Crewkerne. Approximately 100 leaflets were handed out to people passing by on dress rehearsal day, when people were stopping to watch to see what was happening.

Feedback from businesses involved in the day

The SSDC Neighbourhood Development Officer visited all the businesses involved in the project a few days after the event to gain their feedback. All the retailers were positive and said they had enjoyed the performances. All the retailers involved said their shop had been very busy during the performance. However, many of the audience did just go in and watch a play and then left to watch the next one, so did not necessarily buy items there and then.

Typical comments from retailers were:

- 'Brilliant really enjoyed it' (Sassies Boutique)
- 'I thought the actress was very brave to stand in the shop, with so many people standing so close and to give such a good performance' (Deli Manager).
- 'Loved the performance (Butchers)
- 'A number of ladies have said they'll come back to have their haircut' (Hairdresser)
- 'Great for the whole town' (Charity Shop)
- 'We were packed for each show and a number of people stayed behind afterwards to ask questions and take away a leaflet' (Stitch Solutions)

Although all the traders were positive and had no regrets about being involved there were a couple of comments that would be helpful if planning to do something similar in the future:

The Hardware store hosted 4 performances; they said on reflection they would have preferred 2 because the limited space in their shop meant that during the performance it made it difficult for their regular customers to get the items they had come in for. However, because the performances were just 5 minutes long, those customers that had not wanted to watch the play had been able to quickly return.

Another retailer felt that performances should be programmed further apart so that the audience did not just rush off from one performance to another. They felt it would give people more time to stay and shop. Although it should be noted all the performances were repeated several times so that people did not have to rush off to watch another performance, as there was plenty of time to see them all and shop, have coffee and generally make a day of it and there were people that did that.

Feedback from audience

On the day there was a sense of excitement around the town and you could see that the audiences were enjoying themselves. There were a real mix of people of all ages, some popped in and just watched a couple of shows, others seemed to make a day of it and were stopping off for drinks and lunch as well as looking round the shops and watching plays.

- 'The standard of writing is high and the standard of acting is high, I love the fact that the stories all have a connection to the town' (Crewkerne resident)
- 'It has brought people out, the town is buzzing' (Crewkerne resident)
- I live in Crewkerne and have never been in here before, but I'm definitely coming back (female in Sassie's boutique).
- This is the best thing that has ever happened to Crewkerne (Crewkerne resident)
- I've had a great day, thoroughly enjoyed myself. I've watched all the performances and stopped off for some lunch (Chard resident).

Since the day ABCD has received feedback from a number of people either by email, or verbally telling them how much they enjoyed the day. Below are some of the email responses:

*I was thrilled to see the impact that Show of Strength's **Trading Local** initiative had in Crewkerne last weekend. It really seemed to capture people's imaginations and draw them into the centre of town in a compelling way to shop and socialise. Congratulations to everyone involved in helping to make it happen. In my capacity to support theatre development across Somerset, I welcome opportunities where the arts can encourage people to share their stories and build their confidence. And as a Crewkerne resident, I appreciated seeing great theatre, written by local people, being performed in unexpected places around town. This kind of initiative not only generates fantastic entertainment, it also supports the local economy and helps to make our community stronger. (Mark Helyar Take Art)*

Show of Strength has been a truly inspirational project for Crewkerne, from the initial writing workshops back in March to the culmination of performances in the shops last Saturday. For me as a participant it has been amazing. As the writing workshops gathered momentum so did the confidence of the writers. I was thrilled that my piece was selected and even more excited to see it performed on Saturday. As a resident it was great to feel the buzz in town on Saturday, to see groups of people following performance schedules discovering and exploring shops all over town and enjoy live Theatre by professional actors was really encouraging. As a shop assistant it is good to know that there was a measurable increase in takings on Saturday. The publicity that the Theatre

Company generated covered a far reaching area and that together with coverage by Radio Somerset can only have raised the profile of the town. A very big thank you to Crewkerne Town Council, in particular Angie Singleton, to Zoe Harris at South Somerset District Council, to ABCD and to Sheila Hannon and the Show of Strength Theatre Company for bringing this project to Crewkerne. (Meg Rose – workshop participant)

I am emailing a belated thank you for the plays staged in Crewkerne on Saturday 31 May. I went to Crewkerne with four family members and saw five of the plays. I enjoyed all of them and thought that they all helped portray the advantages of shopping local. We bought meat in Barrett Bros Family Butchers, clothes in Sassie, had coffee in It's All Vintage Now, some items in No5 the Deli and just enjoyed Lavender's fragrance in Naturalife. Afraid we did not see them all as we had to return to Ilminster for an engagement in the afternoon. (John Goodall, Ilminster resident).

Many, many thanks to one and all of your team for putting together such a worthwhile project in Crewkerne today. The hard work and professionalism resulted in a memorable day for the town. Your 'cast' were extremely talented and obviously well led by their Director & Producer. The various friends I've spoken with today (yes ... both of them!) were delighted with the concept and delivery of the project and look forward to some positive spin off in the town in the coming weeks and months. Thank you Sheila for giving me the opportunity to contribute (Edwin Weller – Workshop participant).

Key points

Keep retailers informed throughout. It is important to let all retailers know about the project at its inception so they are clear of its aims and how it could affect them. This makes it easier when approaching shops at a later date to ask if they would be willing to take part and have their shop used for a performance, if they have been identified as suitable premises. Once the venues have been chosen for the plays, again make sure those retailers are kept informed of progress and what they can expect on the day.

Use local businesses as venues for workshops. The workshops held in the café, pub and the library had greater attendance than the school and the town hall. The businesses that allowed use of their premises benefited from the additional trade in sales of drinks and food. I worked with the business owners to schedule the workshops at times that would normally be quiet periods for them, so the workshop would not interfere with their regular customers. The George Hotel also benefited from the evening workshop where approximately 50% of the attendees chose to stay on after the workshop to chat and have more drinks.

Use local actors. When ABCD started working with Show of Strength they requested that as many of the actors as possible should be resident in Somerset. Altogether 6 actors performed and 3 of those live in Somerset (it had been 4 but one actor had to drop out at the last moment and a Bristol based actor stepped in to replace him). On performance day the three Somerset based actors brought their families with them. During the day those families spent money in Crewkerne's shops as well as buying lunch and coffee.

You can never do enough communicating, despite all the efforts to ensure we had wide publicity there were still people that complained that they knew nothing about it. At least if you do communicate widely using a variety of methods, you can demonstrate how widespread efforts have been to promote the event.

Did the project meet its aims?

The project did meet its aims.

Aim 1: To increase footfall in the town centre on the day.

It is impossible to give exact figures on footfall in the town as there is no benchmark figure for comparison. Also the nature of the event makes it difficult to assess how many people were in Crewkerne purely for the event and how many would have visited anyway. However, it can be said that on the day the town was busy and there was a real buzz of excitement around. Crewkerne traditionally becomes very quiet on a Saturday afternoon and many shops close around 2pm as a consequence. On this particular Saturday the afternoon was certainly busier than it would usually be and some of the shops that were performance venues and would normally shut early, stayed open later. When I spoke to the retailers after the event, those that had hosted performances and had extended their opening hours to accommodate the event had no regrets. All said they were happy that they had stayed open and felt that they had benefitted from being involved. Anecdotal feedback received after the day from Phoenix Books (a shop that was not involved in the project) was that their takings were higher than usual for a Saturday, which also suggests more people were in town.

Aim 2: to raise awareness of the shops in Crewkerne

The project was able to promote the shops not only to those people who attended the event, but also through media coverage to a much wider audience. There were people amongst the audience who live locally that were made aware of shops they did not know about before. Many of the retailers said they had seen new people in their shop and the butcher heard a number of people comment that they had not realised Crewkerne had a butchers. Only time will tell whether those people will return to the shops and use them in the future. However, Stitch Solutions, which was a relatively new business when the performance took place, has since reported that she has been inundated with work since the play was performed at her shop.

People who did not attend the event were informed through the media publicity of the performance day. The Crewkerne Weekender gave 2.5 pages of coverage to the event including 7 photos of individual shops, with their owner and the actor performing at their premises. The accompanying article gave detail of all the shops involved. Likewise the Western Gazette gave 2 half pages of coverage of the actual event which included photos and again provided information on the shops that took part on the day.

BBC Somerset Sound covered the event and included an item on the type of shops involved in the project, making listeners across Somerset aware of the good range of quality shops that Crewkerne has to offer.

The amount of positive publicity Crewkerne shops received via the media coverage of the project would have cost thousands in advertising for the same amount of column inches and airtime.

Aim 3: Connect with the Crewkerne residents who have an interest in the arts.

The project set out to connect with the art loving residents of Crewkerne, with the hope that one or more of those people would be enthused enough to want to get involved in future arts events. One of the participants who wrote a piece that was subsequently performed has volunteered to get involved in helping to put on future arts events in Crewkerne. A direct consequence of the project is that ABCD have now developed a good working relationship with Take Art, which they hope to build upon. A meeting has already taken place with key people including the SSDC Arts officer and Take Art to explore some potential ideas which could result in a similar event utilising performance poets taking place in the town in 2015.

Zoë Harris, SSDC Neighbourhood Development Officer (West), August 2014

Chard POP Up Shop Programme August 2013 – August 2014

Summary

The Pop Up shop was a one year MTIG funded programme managed by Chard Town Team in association with Pop Up Britain and BiP Devon. As is often the case with long term projects, some aspects exceeded expectations and others components had to be adapted to meet changing circumstances.

Overall the project can be considered a success. 23 serious enquiries resulted in 11 entrepreneurs taking tenancies over the twelve month period. This resulted in 4 tenants moving into 3 empty retail units in Chard, 2 tenants having formed a partnership. One entrepreneur has now been trading successfully for a year and is about to move into larger premises on the High Street.

Other tenants chose different business models ranging from retailing at County shows to organising craft fairs. All agreed that the key to the success of the project was the free professional business development advice provided by Petra Davis of BiP Devon, which gave them the confidence to persevere.

The Pop Up Programme

A partnership agreement reached with Pop Up Britain in July 2013, led to Chard Town Team's successful application for MTIG funding for the first Pop Up programme in the South West. As the objective was to provide business incubation rather than a simple discounted retail space, BiP Devon became the third partner in the programme. The target opening date was agreed for August 2013.

The location chosen for the shop was in the Stringfellow Gallery Holyrood Street, an area identified by the Chard regeneration scheme as in particular need of attention and support.

Fitting out the shop was dependent on the Chard Town Team Chairman and the Neighbourhood Development Officer (NDO) committing many days of hard work to bring the unit to the required standard.

An advertising campaign began as soon as the project team was finalised. Potential tenants were also signposted from Pop Up Britain in London. Regular advertising for potential tenants was to continue for the duration of the programme.

All applications were assessed by the Pop Up Chard programme panel. The panel consisted of Town Team members and the NDO. The principal rule was to avoid unfair commercial advantage over existing traders in the town.

As a partner organisation BiP Devon and Petra Davies proved exceptionally useful and in the end key to the success of the programme. Conversely Pop Up Britain became increasingly remote as the programme proceeded, although they did occasionally signpost potential tenants.

Enquiries came from a wide variety of backgrounds and age groups, from jewellery to soap manufacturers. Of the 23 enquiries that proceeded to completed application forms, 11 moved to tenancies and 10 withdrew. Reasons for not proceeding were principally a change in personal circumstances although some believed their business model would not be economically viable - and one was under the impression that Chard was a suburb of London.

How the shop worked

The shop was managed by the Chairman and other members of the Town Team with support from the Neighbourhood Development Officer. They liaised with the tenants to provide a daily point of contact for any questions or problems. The NDO ensured leases were signed, housekeeping rules were understood and keys were distributed and returned.

The shop worked to a staffing timetable agreed between the tenants on a weekly basis, to ensure at least one tenant was on site at any one time. No tenants were allowed to delegate their turn in the shop to friends or relatives. This arrangement allowed tenants with other commitments such as childcare to continue to trade.

Press releases were made throughout the year profiling the enterprises that passed through the programme.

What went well?

The initial target was to transfer one tenant from the Pop Up Shop into an empty retail unit in Chard. In the event four tenants have moved into three retail units with other traders employing different business models. Given that the programme was an experiment to test market demand, another principal success was continual occupancy throughout the year.

A positive and supportive working environment created by the original tenants, continued long after they had moved on, and certainly gave some subsequent tenants far more confidence in their business models than may have otherwise been the case.

The free business development advice proved to be the essential factor in the success of the package. All tenants agreed that the advice gave them the confidence to persevere.

Throughout the year regular press releases also helped to establish the Town Team as an effective organisation for delivering regeneration projects in Chard.

The selection process proved robust. 2 applications from the original 23 were declined by the Pop Up panel as direct competition for existing traders.

Following business development advice, the final 2 tenants of the Pop Up programme decided to form a partnership and then required an affordable retail unit. The NDO facilitated a link with Sam Beech the leaseholder of a vacant retail unit formerly trading as Harriman's in Holyrood Street. The tenants were offered a very competitive agreement by Sam, and have now moved their joint enterprise into the shop.

A final success for the programme has been the development of closer links with BiP Devon and their intention to continue to offer free business development advice in Chard via the Town Team, after the Pop Up programme has drawn to a close.

What did not go as planned?

The project took considerably more time and effort than anticipated to launch and manage which put an undue strain on the resources of the Chair of the Town Team and the NDO.

Agreement to replace a dangerous shop-front shutter was only achieved by a last minute compromise to divide the replacement shutter cost between landlord and Town Team, which was a significant and unforeseen addition to the Pop Up project costs.

This was a new venture for Pop up Britain. As a partner organisation they proved to be too remote to establish a more dynamic partnership. Once they had provided an initial list of potential tenants their input rapidly faded.

In the event, the NDO took principal responsibility for overseeing the day to day running of the programme ranging from tenants queries and problems to organising press releases. A great deal of time and effort was also taken up with applicants who did not proceed to a tenancy, but still required support and advice. This included attending the shop at weekends to show potential tenants around.

Business Rates

A lengthy discussion was held with Revenues and Benefits to determine if the Pop Up Shop would be eligible for small business rate relief. Eventually the conclusion was reached that 100% rate relief would apply, backdated to the start of the project.

Conclusion

The project set against its original objectives far exceeded expectations. 11 entrepreneurs trialled their ideas in the marketplace and new shops were opened in Holyrood Street and the High Street. However the level of staffing needed to run the programme was also far in excess of what was projected.

The Town Team believed this was a worthwhile experiment to ascertain if a Start Up business model could work in Chard. They concluded that whilst there was sufficient demand to maintain continuous occupancy for the duration of the programme, the level of demand could not justify a continuation of the programme following the year of MTIG support.

The legacy of the programme is positive. They are now new traders in Chard and empty retail units have been brought back into use. Chard will also benefit from ongoing free business development advice to be provided by BiP Devon via the Chard Town Team.

Paul Philpott, SSDC Neighbourhood Development Officer (West), September 2014
