Fleet Town news

Issue 2 Feb 2007

Seminar planned for next week

by Paul Doughty, Fleet Town Centre Manager

A seminar looking at the challenges facing town centres and the need for a cohesive management structure for Fleet Town Centre will be held on Thursday, 15th February 2007 in the Council Chambers at Hart District Council offices in Harlington Way.

The seminar will start at 6:00 pm and is expected to finish by 8:00 pm. The aim of the event is to reach consensus on the way forward for managing Fleet Town.

The evening seminar will feature brief presentations from Hart District Council, the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM), and the Fleet Town Centre Manager (FTCM).

These will be followed by a short question-and-answer session after which the seminar will break into several groups to discuss the proposals.

Toyubur Rahman, South East Regional Development Director of ATCM will talk about making town centres more competitive to meet the needs of consumers and businesses in the future as well as the potential for growth throughout the South East.

Paul Doughty, FTCM, will present a proposal for an improved management structure for the town.

This will include looking at the different needs of the town's key stakeholders including:

- Small retailers and SMEs,
- National retail outlets,
- Larger non-retail employers,
- Pubs, clubs and restaurants,
- Faith and ethnic groups,
- Local voluntary organisations, and
- Youth

The seminar will also outline proposals for future funding and seek to ensure that the highest standards of probity apply to the work of any future management team so that any proposals are properly executed and improved through effective feedback.

Places at the seminar are limited and all interested parties should confirm their interest in attending using the interactive form on this newsletter. Alternatively, please either email, telephone or print out and complete the form to register you wish to attend to Paul Doughty, Fleet Town Centre Manager.

All confirmed attendees will be informed by next Tuesday, 13th February. People that are unable to attend shoul let the Town Centre Manager know as soon as possible to allow someone else to attend instead.

Don't delay register today:

- **Complete the attached form - or**
- **Telephone - 01252 613475 - or**
- **Mobile - 0787 921 5563 - or**
- **Email - ftc.manager@hart.gov.uk**

Removal of needs test could hasten town centre decline

The Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM) believes that the abolition of the needs test proposed in the Barker Review of Land Use will accelerate the decline of town and city centres in England and Wales by undermining existing planning policies.

The majority of traditional town centres in the UK remain under threat.

The fragility of town centres in England has recently been reported. *Emerging Thinking,* from the Competition Commission inquiry into the grocery industry highlighted the continued plight of small retailers. While UK supermarket sales increased by 26% in real terms between 2000 and 2006, sales at specialist grocery stores only increased by 1% in the same period. Further, the number of specialist grocery stores declined by 7% in that period, a loss of more than 2500 stores.

The report, *High Street Britain,* notes that the impact of supermarkets is not just limited to grocery retailing since sales of non-grocery products by grocery retailers increased by an estimated 89% between 2000 and 2004. Such a rise will have a very adverse impact on many kinds of small retailing.

Town Centre Management, enhanced in a growing number of locations by the introduction of Business Improvement Districts, is having a significant impact on improving town and city centres. Increasingly what was once a largely operational role has now become a strategic one as well, developing vision, strategies and action plans on a partnership basis.

"The decline of town centres is directly contrary to the creation of strong and prosperous communities and to our responsibilities for sustainable development. The need test is an essential requirement of the town centre first policy and any change will threaten future development leading to the decline of many town and city centres", says Simon Quin, Chief Executive of ATCM.

The concern about the proposed abolition of the need test is also recognised by BCSC, the Civic Trust, Association of Convenience Stores, Action for Market Towns, Friends of the Earth, John Lewis Partnership, the Co-op and others.

And just what will Fleet look like in 20 years time?

Last week saw the deadline for the submission of comments on the Fleet Town Centre Urban Design complied by Atkins Consulting.

The study aims to provide urban design guidance for the development of Fleet Town centre that will be included in the Hart Local Development Scheme.

In particular the plan will provide the detail for development in the town over the next 20 years.

Hart District Council's stated vision for Fleet is to create a centre that is:

- A recognisable and distinctive place to live, work and shop with a diverse range of good quality shops, services, employment and cultural activities.
- A thriving place attractive to visitors who want to do more than just pass through on their way to somewhere else.
- A place where public spaces are attractive, safe and accessible to everyone.
- Well designed and where new development encourages a sense of civic pride.
- A prosperous area for local businesses which attracts new commercial investment.

There will now be a period of public consultation on the themes set out in the report from which a set of preferred options will be prepared and included in a planning document. The planning document will include a financial appraisal and sustainability appraisal of each option to help deliver tangible improvements to the town centre.

More consultation will then look at the views of local people and key stakeholders before a final planning document is considered by the Council.

But what shape will it take?

The report argues that the town centre and the surrounding area include attractions such as local parks, Fleet Pond, the Basingstoke Canal, the Harlington Centre, attractive shops and restaurants, and Ghurkha Square, when used for the market.

However, it notes that these attractions do not realise their potential because they are not immediately obvious to the passer-by, they do not include sufficient facilities to encourage people to 'stop-by' and there is a general lack of good directional signage.

The report also notes that there is an absence of a functional town square or focal point in the centre and few identifiable landmarks or distinctive features, with the possible exception of the war memorial in a corner of Ghurkha Square.

It concludes that addressing these issues would greatly improve the town centre and assist in providing Fleet with a more identifiable character and sense of place to live, work or invest in.

Yet the report stops short of suggesting that Albert Street should perhaps be redeveloped and identifies some areas as poor without saying much more about them.

In Fleet the impression of a traditional high street remains to distinguishe it from other towns but the high number of charity shops can present a negative image.

The report recognises that the high number of private businesses on the high street may also restrict large scale redevelopment.

It also notes that whilst it is important to encourage new investment in the town centre it is also important to support independent retailers if the distinctive market town 'feel' of the centre is to be maintained.

Fleet Town News is intended for distribution by email only.

To be included in future e-mailings please contact:

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Submit by Email | Print Form

Fleet Town Management Seminar - Thursday 15th February 2007

I would like to come to the Fleet Town Management Seminar. The seminar is being held in the Council Chambers at 6:00 pm on Thursday, 15th February 2007. I understand that only limited space is available and that only people whose application to attend has been confirmed before the event will be able to attend.

Contact details

Name

Company/ Business

Address

Contact numbers

Telephone

Mobile

Email

Type of business/enterprise

- ☐ Local retailer/SME
- ☐ National retailer
- ☐ Non-retail business
- ☐ Voluntary organisation
- ☐ Pub or restaurant
- ☐ Faith or ethnic organisation
- ☐ Interested indiviual
- ☐ Councillor

Complete and return the information on this form either electronically or as hard copy to:
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