

When apathy counts

A recent exercise in obtaining feedback for the future development of Fleet has shown that apathy appears to be a major factor in deciding the way forward with only 160 people responding to the Fleet Town Centre Urban Design Study.

Of these 104 were students from Court Moor School meaning that only 56 non-school students out an estimated population of 30,000 were sufficiently motivated by the study to respond.

The report - commonly referred to as the Atkins report - followed an anal-

ysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Fleet Town. The aim of the report and the feedback was to help Hart District Council in formulating a planning framework for the town's development.

There were several themes in the report including:

- Culture, Community, and Public
- Sustainable Transport and Movement
- Shops and Offices, and
- New Developments

Atkins has carefully analysed the feedback and presented the results in a

25 page report. But is it a representative view?

By comparing the demographic breakdown of the people commenting on the report with the population of Hart District a number of interesting aspects emerge. Unfortunately, it is impossible to compare the demographics of the respondents with the population of Fleet as this is not available directly from the Census but can only be estimated.

Some 24 per cent of the population of Hart is aged between 36 and 50 and yet only 5 per cent of these replied to the sur-

vey. Similarly those aged between 17 and 25 represent 10 per cent of Hart's population and yet none of them replied; under 17 year olds represent 22 per cent of Hart's population but 64 per cent of the respondents.

This means that the analysis is heavily weighted towards the views of one group and makes it challenging to develop any meaningful plan. There is also the possibility that the group at Court Moor could have undertaken their response as a collective exercise which might further skew the analysis.

Proposed management structure presented

A possible future management structure for Fleet was presented by the Town Centre Manager, Paul Doughty, at a seminar held last month in Hart District Council Chambers.

Doughty's presentation highlighted the need to develop an inclusive group that could effectively represent the opinions of all Fleet's stakeholders. By focusing on a number of different groups of stakeholders, each with similar views and with equal representation, Doughty believes that a strong management team can be implemented.

For example, the needs and views of large national retailing chain stores are quite different from those of local retailers and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Similarly, Doughty believes that groups such as non-retail businesses - not traditionally

represented - should be part of any town management structure while the vibrant pubs and restaurant sector should be encouraged rather than criticised as a developing part of Fleet's economy.

Another key part of Doughty's

presentation was the need to provide a management structure with financial responsibility and accountability. Hart District Council currently provides funding for the part-time town centre manager and additional funds will be needed to market the town.

The meeting, which was attended by some 45 local retailers, Councillors, and Council officers, was chaired by Geoff Bonner, the council's Chief Executive.

Attendees also heard Toyubur Rahman, South East Regional Development Manager of the Association of Town Centre Management speak on the importance of town management. Rahman showed a number of alternative structures that were being used by other towns.

There was a lively and positive question and answer session following the presentations.



Possible stakeholder groups as presented in Fleet management seminar. Each group would have an equal number of representatives on the management team.

Living streets or dying towns

The need to make streets the central part of a community was stressed at a presentation attended by Cllr Denis Gotel, the Cabinet member with responsibility for Fleet, and the Fleet Town Centre Manager, Paul Doughty earlier this month.

Healthy

The presentation, by Simon Barnett of Living Streets, stressed the importance of walking

from both the health and the community perspectives.

Barnett noted that urban design had focused on treating people like sheep by penning them in and like moles by forcing them underground.

Sensible options

Neither approach made walking a sensible option and did nothing to improve communities.

Although focused on London the campaign provides a number of examples where

improvements have been made by considering the impact on people's lives. In some areas of London for example, guard rails have been completely removed.

Graffiti

Noted Barnett, "We wanted to create shopping areas not have two shopping streets".

In some cases improvements involve taking a different perspective. For example, graffiti artists in some areas have been

encouraged to decorate dull roadside furniture, such as electrical and telephone junction boxes. This channels their skills and gives them ownership while creating a brighter feel.

Diagonal

Road crossings and lines-of-desire - the naturally preferred route for pedestrians - has led to developments such as diagonal crossings at major road junctions rather than the previous staggered approach.

When Christmas comes

People in Fleet need to be giving some thought to the Christmas lights display this coming year if it is to be improved.

Currently Blachere Lighting provides the lighting display as part of a negotiated three-year agreement with Hart District Council.

The lights provided comprise a number of motifs for lamp standards in Fleet Road with additional displays using existing stock that belongs to Hart.

Blachere Lighting stores and maintains its own stock but the contract requires Blachere to only store the lights belonging to Hart District Council.

The majority of these are in poor condition and most have electrical faults or broken displays; they are beyond economical repair.

Christmas lighting forms a central aspect of the town's appearance and there were a number of complaints about last year's display.

However, without additional funding the display this coming year is likely to be limited to the contracted display only with the stock belonging to Hart sent for recycling.



Marketing markets

Fleet will host French and Continental markets this year but there will not be any Hampshire Farmers Markets as these had to be confirmed by last August.

The French market has visited Fleet previously and will next call on Sunday, 8 April, when they will be situated in Gurkha Square. Following this they will return on Sunday, 22 July.

The Continental market which will visit Fleet on 24 June is a similar but new venture and aims to provide a wider variety of continental produce from Holland, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Poland, Turkey and Spain.

Fleet's fervent football fans

Last Saturday saw the Sponsor's Appreciation Match at Fleet Football Club as Fleet Town beat Ryman League opponents, Kingstonian. A crowd of 224 people - including an estimated 45 Kingstonian supporters - enjoyed the match.

After the game many of the fans crowded into the clubhouse for victory celebrations followed by England's final match of the Six Nations; although that match failed to inspire as much as Fleet's victory.

But the Ryman League team is only one aspect of the club's activities. It fields a number of other teams and caters for some 450

youths through its Colts. The majority of these - some 350 - are boys, which means there are 100 girls enjoying the physical exercise and training with the club. In addition it is an inclusive club with a friendly atmosphere.

Fleet Football Club has a strong family-orientated ethos but faces several challenges. Although its address is Calthorpe Park it is hidden behind trees so that it can only be accessed from Crookham Road rather than from Reading Road North. Considering that the Atkins report looked at Calthorpe Park as one of Fleet's gateway attractions it seems sad that the club is effectively excluded from the rest of the park;

visually the club should add to the park's appeal.

The club's car park has restricted parking making it difficult on match days especially. The ground has a marked slope and it has limited training facilities. There is a possibility that the club could move its location but as it stands it is a jewel in Fleet that could benefit from additional support.

Fleet Town News is distributed by email only.

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