

# Fleet Town news

Issue 4 November 2007

## Not quite so bright this Christmas

Fleet's Christmas display this year will have fewer illuminations than last year following the decision not to redeploy some of the last year's illuminations. The likelihood of this happening was previously published in Fleet Town News last March.

The display is supplied by Blachere Limited under a three-year contract - this is the second year - at a cost of £8,000 per year wholly funded by Hart District Council. That agreement covers the hire and deployment of a number of motifs on lamp posts and illuminations in various trees.

Last year the display also comprised a

number of lights that belonged to Hart District Council.

These included the motifs at Fleet Toys and the Christmas trees located on top of Somerfields. Under the agreement, Blachere is responsible for storing these lights but have no responsibility for maintaining them and the lights developed a number of faults last year.

Subsequently, Blachere has reported that these lights are no longer economically viable since the cost of overhauling them exceeds the cost of buying new lights.

As a result these lights will now not be displayed reducing the overall display to just the lights supplied and maintained by

Blachere.

The condemned lights are stored by Blachere at their Gloucester warehouse until the end of this year in the event that anyone wishes to test the lights for structural or electrical integrity.

Fleet's Town Centre Manager and Blachere met some weeks ago to discuss alternatives and a proposal to illuminate additional trees at a cost of £567 per tree was sent to Hart District Council but so far no additional funds have been identified.

A different supplier quoted a minimum of £1,250 simply to install the lights and a similar amount to remove the lights once the festive season is over.

## Town eyesore faces redevelopment

The former Southern Electric retail centre in town has been sold and will probably be redeveloped as a restaurant by its new owners, Salisbury Capital.

The site has been disused for a number of years and has only been used recently as a showcase for Fleet Carnival posters.

Previously a national pizza chain had considered developing the unit and successfully applied for A3 - restaurant usage - but the plan was quietly dropped. Until recently the agents, CB Richard Ellis, had been seeking tenants but were instructed to sell the freehold earlier this year.

Speaking to the Fleet Town Centre Manager, Salisbury Capital's Geoff Rosen commented that they would probably not start developing the site for about a further five months.

## PETA proposes survey of retailer training needs

The training organisation PETA is proposing a survey of Fleet's retailers early in the New Year to better understand their training requirements. The suggestion follows the successful implementation of four training seminars in Winchester that were designed around retailer feedback.

Originally Lou Lewis, PETA's area manager, had suggested undertaking training before Christmas so as to benefit from subsidies available only

until the end of December.

However, this idea was abandoned after meeting the Fleet Town Centre Manager as the Winchester experience

had shown that the timing of any event is crucial to the release of staff for training, particularly from targeted smaller outlets.

The programme developed in Winchester

is based on four modules each of which lasts for a day with one event each week over a period of four weeks. Participating retailers pay the full amount for each course but can then receive a training grant of up to 70% of the cost on successful completion of a module.

Training can be very beneficial to retailers but they often face challenges both in recognising the potential benefits and in the practical release of staff.



## The Shop goes elsewhere

The possibility of bringing a Channel 5 production to Fleet has faded following the sale of the former Southern Electric showrooms.

Fleet's Town Centre Manager had proposed the site but delays in contacting the new owners to ascertain their plans meant other sites were short-listed first.

The show would have run for for some three months and attracted visitors to the town.



ShopWatch logo created by Paul Doughty

## ShopWatch scheme nears implementation

The Fleet ShopWatch scheme announced earlier in the year is close to implementation. PC Paul Franks, the local beat officer for Fleet, along with Paul Doughty, Fleet Town Centre Manager have held a series of meetings with communications suppliers to look at different options based on cost and reliability.

The next step is to have a presentation to interested retailers before rolling out the scheme.

ShopWatch aims to help retailers to share information about incidences of petty theft enabling them to take more effective preventative action. Notes PC Franks, "Many retailers are often unaware of how they can share information and reduce the impact of crime.

Petty theft is a growing problem in many areas of the country which can be exacerbated by some large national retailing chains refusing to take action in the belief that the so-called shrinkage is acceptable.

Doughty commented, "Fleet has very low crime and this scheme will help to ensure that continues to be the case."

## Fleet Business Partnership modifies constitution

The Fleet Business Partnership (FBP) has modified its constitution and recognised the Town Manager's aim of forming a core management team representing all stakeholders.

Paul Doughty, Fleet Town Centre Manager says, "This is an important step in moving towards an organisation that represents all of Fleet's stakeholders."

The FBP was formed just over a year ago following an enthusiastic meeting of many of the town's retailers and aims to improve community spirit through new and innovative events and promotions.

## Town Manager speaks at October Cabinet meeting

Paul Doughty, Fleet's Town Centre Manager gave a presentation to Fleet District Council's Cabinet early in October at which he outlined the challenges facing Fleet and proposed a possible way forward.

The presentation highlighted the number of towns in the region that were considering, or undergoing, ambitious development plans and stressed the need for Fleet to have its own development strategy if it was to continue to attract shoppers and businesses to Fleet.

Doughty also discussed the need to implement an integrated marketing plan based on four key, town-branded community events along various

markets, including two Hampshire Farmer's Food fairs during the year.

One of the key issues in implementing any new strategy for the town remains the lack of a core management team effectively representing all stakeholders.

A management structure comprising two representatives from each of seven different stakeholder groups has been proposed.

Doughty feels that this would allow all stakeholders an equal opportunity to become proactively involved in the town's development although some retailers believe that apathy will prevent the management structure from being formed.

## Town Manager works closely with Carnival

The Town Manager is working closely with the organisers of Fleet Carnival as one of next year's town-branded events although he has declined an invitation to formally join their committee.

So far this year he has attended the Carnival AGM and the initial committee meeting.

## Food Festival dates set

Hampshire Farmers Markets will be the centrepiece of two Food Festivals being held in Fleet next year. The first is planned for Bank Holiday Monday, 26<sup>th</sup> May and the second will be held on Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> December. The Food Festivals will feature a large mobile kitchen and chefs from local restaurants will be invited to cook their favourite dishes using locally produced food.

Two continental markets have also been booked for next year and a further three are currently under consideration. Some continental markets that visited Fleet last year have yet to confirm their availability for 2008.

## Fleet wins blind approval

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association wants to include Fleet in its survey of the best UK towns for blind and partially-sighted people. Helen Aluko-olokun, the Association's Access Policy Officer told the Town Manager during a recent visit that they had received excellent reports about Fleet.

Both Hampshire County Council – as the project managers for Fleet Road – and the Fleet Access Group have been asked to provide additional information on the project for the case study.

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