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DUNSTABLE
TOWN COUNCIL

Notice and Summons of a meeting of the Community Services Committee

David Ashlee Town Clerk and Chief Executive
Our Ref: DA/JS

Date: 28 August 2020

Dear Councillors

Could you please note that a remote meeting of the Community Services Committee will be held on **Monday 7 September 2020 at 7.00 pm** using Microsoft Teams

Members of the public and press who wish to attend the remote meeting are welcome to do so and should notify their intention to attend by emailing Ian.Reed@dunstable.gov.uk by **5pm on Friday 4 September**. Instructions on how to join will then be sent out in advance of the meeting

AGENDA

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN RESPECT OF RELEVANT ITEMS OF BUSINESS ON THE AGENDA: in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 Section 29(1). Council to receive and note.
- 2 Apologies for Absence
3. Minutes of the meetings of the Community Services Committee held on 2 March (previously circulated) and 18 May 2020(attached) (see page 3)
- 4 Events and Marketing – Information report (see page 4).
5. Grove Corner and Community Engagement – Information report (see page 6).
6. Priory House – information report (see page 9).
7. Dunstable Town Centre Services – information report (see page 13).

(Continued)

8. Reports from outside bodies:
South Beds Dial -a -Ride Management Committee - Cllr Martin
Dunstable Town Band -Cllr Martin

PART 2 of the Agenda

Move to exclude press and public in accordance with Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 sect 1.2 to discuss matters of confidentiality

9. High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) (see page 19)

Yours faithfully



David Ashlee
Town Clerk and Chief Executive

To: All Members of the Community Services Committee
Peter Hollick (Town Mayor), Gloria Martin (Deputy Town Mayor), Gloria Martin (Chairman), Cameron Restall, (Vice-Chairman), Sid Abbott, Wendy Bater, Lisa Bird, Gregory George, Pamela Ghent, John Gurney, Lee Roberts, Gladys Sanders and other Members of the Council for information.

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

HELD VIRTUALLY ON MICROSOFT TEAMS AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND POLICE CRIME PANELS (CORONAVIRUS) (FLEXIBILITY OF LOCAL AUTHORITY AND POLICE CRIME PANEL MEETINGS)(ENGLAND AND WALES) REGULATIONS 2020,

ON MONDAY 18 MAY 2020

Present: Councillor Peter Hollick, (Town Mayor); Councillor Gloria Martin (Deputy Town Mayor and Chairman); Cameron Restall (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Sid Abbott, Wendy Bater, Lisa Bird, Philip Crawley, Gregory George, Pamela Ghent, John Gurney, Lee Roberts and Gladys Sanders

In Attendance: Councillors Matthew Brennan, Mark Cant, Kenson Gurney and Johnson Tamara with David Ashlee (Town Clerk and Chief Executive)

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Alan Corkhill,

78 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: that Councillor Gloria Martin be appointed Chairman of this Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year 2020/2021.

79 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: that Councillor Cameron Restall be appointed Vice-Chairman of this Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year 2020/2021.

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2020

EVENTS AND MARKETING

Purpose of Report: For information only

1. EVENTS PROGRAMME 2020 REVIEW

1.1 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the following planned 2020 events have been cancelled:

- St George's Day
- Around the World
- Classic Motor Rally (being re-arranged)
- Sunday Band Concerts
- Dunstable Live
- Priory Pictures
- Party in the Park
- Proms in the Park
- Fireworks

Despite efforts made to reschedule these events following Government guidelines and restrictions imposed this has unfortunately not been possible.

The decision to cancel Fireworks is coupled with the building of the additional artificial turf pitch (ATP) at Creasey Park which will stretch into November.

2. FUTURE EVENTS – Planning and Development

2.1 CLASSIC MOTOR RALLY

This event will take place in Priory Gardens on Saturday 26 September from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm. Currently, this event is in the early stages of the planning process and being planned in line with current Government guidelines. The event will however benefit from the following features:

- Static display of 75 motor vehicles with a 2m gap between each vehicle
- A one-way system around the display allowing for social distancing monitored and supervised by stewards during the event
- Accessible toilets on site
- Small children's activities
- Catering units
- A singer performing

The event will be promoted via posters, Facebook and the DTC website

3. **Social Media**

3.1 **Facebook likes**

Facebook Page	2015 Figures	2016 Figures	2017 Figures	2018 Figures	2019 Figures	2020 Figures
DTC	1,666	2,258	3,955	5,477	6,904	7,282
CPCFC	119	200	306	394	554	606
Grove Corner	191	336	418	441	524	537
Town Ranger	-	-	486	748	939	989
Bennett's Splash & Cafe	-	-	-	-	1,666	1,797

Twitter followers

Twitter Page	2015 Figures	2016 Figures	2017 Figures	2018 Figures	2019 Figures	2020 Figures
DTC	1,154	1,507	1,816	2,106	2,272	2,321
Town Centre	1,138	1,483	1,776	1,976	2,087	2,098
Priory House	281	322	364	433	475	479
Events	1,317	1,568	1,795	1,952	2,059	2,055
CPCFC	457	514	570	653	684	688

Both tables show a positive increase year on year of likes and followers of the Town Council on both Facebook and Twitter. As a result, the Town Council's social media activities are reaching more people and continue to grow.

4. **TALK OF THE TOWN**

- 4.1 Due to Covid-19 the printed April publication was cancelled however a virtual edition was produced in June and promoted via Facebook and the DTC website. The format of the next publication is currently being reviewed.

5. **AUTHOR**

- 5.1 Gina Thanky - Events Officer Email - gina.thanky@dunstable.gov.uk

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL**COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE****MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2020****GROVE CORNER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Purpose of Report: For information only

1. GROVE CORNER FIGURES

- 1.1 Grove Corners last session before closure due to COVID-19 received 32 visits from young people with 6 new sign ups since the last report. Numbers are recorded through a head count by officers and staff.
- 1.2 Grove Corner youth club has been closed since Monday 16 March in line with COVID 19 Government guidance.
- 1.3 Junior youth club numbers before the lockdown were averaging 20 young people attending the Friday evening sessions.
- 1.3 The transition group had been working well with an average of 7 staying each week
- 1.4 Grove Corner now has 537 Facebook 'Likes' and Grove Corner's Instagram now has 222 followers.

2. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- 2.1 Officers have contacted all members of junior youth club to check in on their wellbeing and get feedback on returning to Grove Corner. A few parents and young people reported feeling more comfortable returning in September or early October.
- 2.2 Dunstable Town Council were successful in a grant application to the Police and Crime Commissioners, Violence & Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) funding. The Council were awarded £5,250. The grant application focussed on gaming and how this could be used as a tool to engage with young people, attract them into the safe environment of Grove Corner, where they are then exposed to informal education. The grant will part fund installing 12 new gaming computers and associated equipment (Grove Corner currently has 6 computers available for use). The grant will also go towards rebranding within Grove Corner and installing the additional infrastructure to accommodate the extra computers. Officers are in the process of receiving 3 quotes to carry the project forward.
- 2.3 Officers are in communication with Esports, an industry expert, receiving advice and guidance and discussing future plans to hold gaming competitions out of Grove Corner. Officers are also speaking with young people regarding the gaming equipment and building their enthusiasm. This information has proved useful and officers will take this further.

- 2.4 The entertainment system at Grove Corner has been upgraded and a new system is now in place. This will be accessible for groups hiring the building and young people for a variety of activities and engagement, such as video presentations and playing personal music collections.
- 2.5 Officers continue to plan and develop ideas for multiple programmes for youth provision at Grove Corner. This will be progressed when the new Youth and Community Manager, Gill Peck, starts the new role at the end of September.

3. DAY TIME HIRE

- 3.1 There have been no daytime room hire at Grove Corner due to Covid-19 since Monday 16 March up to Monday 3 August. Officers have spoken to all groups about returning to use the Centre with relevant safety measures in place.
- 3.2 Minds2gether have now returned to Grove Corner and will be running sessions every Friday 10.00 am to 1.00 pm at limited capacity. This group is a mental health social group.
- 3.3 Sight Concern who normally would hire the building every Tuesday 12.00 noon to 3.00 pm have provisionally planned to return to Grove Corner in October for a visually impaired social group.
- 3.4 YAWN Life who run a special needs support group on a Monday and Thursday 10.00 am to 1.00 pm are provisionally planning to return in September, date to be confirmed.
- 3.5 NCS Hear 2 Listen are a new community interest group who are currently hiring Grove Corner for several dates throughout August. Hear 2 listen give young people opportunities to increase the emotional wellbeing of young people, supporting them in overcoming barriers that prevent them living healthy and fulfilling lives.
- 3.6 NOAH Enterprise will be hiring Grove Corner from September through to December running two courses. The first course, due to start in September, is an IT skills course which will be twice a week over the course of 8 weeks. The second course, due to start in November, is a creative confidence course which will be once a week for 6 weeks.

4.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 Covid-19 Community Outreach - Since the Covid-19 lockdown, Dunstable Town Council has played a key and very active role in supporting the local community
- 4.1.1 Central Bedfordshire Council Referral & Befriending Scheme - Officers supported CBC Community Hub and online Referral/Befriending scheme by making daily phone calls to those requiring support. These referral calls have now reduced, however, over the course of the pandemic DTC officers made approximately 650 calls.

- 4.1.2 From these daily calls, DTC Officers would coordinate further support either via the Dunstable Good Neighbours Scheme, provide supporting information on the NHS food parcel scheme, citizens advice information and refer vulnerable residents for support where required.
- 4.1.3 A by-product of these calls was residents required a weekly befriending / check-up call and these are still continuing to be made by officers. Currently DTC officers have made approximately 850 phone calls over the past 17 weeks.
- 4.1.4 DTC officers have supported vulnerable residents or those needing support with emergency food supplies, prescriptions pick-ups, utility card top ups or a general door knocking check-up. In total Officers have made approximately 60 calls to aid, and this is still continuing.
- 4.1.5 CBC Door Knocking Scheme - DTC offered its assistance to CBC to assist them with a door knocking scheme where CBC have not been able to communicate with a known shielding resident. DTC officers and council members visited 66 residential homes for a status check on the resident with all feedback collated and sent back to CBC.
- 4.2 Older Peoples Services - Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the two Older Peoples Lunch Clubs were postponed. These are planned to re-start in September in line with current guidance associated risk assessments.
 - 4.2.1 Since lockdown, and to date, the Older Peoples Officer's have made twice weekly phone calls to all lunch club members, 66 plus 22 new club members due to start the new Saracens Head lunch. These are befriending / check up calls on all our lunch club members and in total officers have made approximately 3,000 phone calls.
- 4.3 All summer activities have been cancelled for 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers did work in partnership with both Dunstable Children Centre's to offer a 'Craft Along Live' Facebook event on Wednesday 19 August. The event was very successful with 677 people engaging.
- 4.4 Officers have also worked alongside the Town Centre Services Officer to provide a 'Dunstable Through the Ages Trail' during the market event on Saturday 29 August. The trail will include historical questions and facts partly linking in with the High Street Heritage Action Zone programme.

5. AUTHORS

- 5.1 Jack Adams-Rimmer – Neighbourhood Development Officer
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- 5.2 Joanne Hough– Community Services Assistant
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DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL
COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2020

PRIORY HOUSE

Purpose of Report: For Information only.

1. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 1.1 Staff and customers have responded well to the new measures put in place following our re-opening after lockdown. Customers have commented, saying how well organised it is and that they feel very safe visiting Priory House.
- 1.2 A quantity of PPE has been obtained for staff and they have all been issued with their own personal face masks and face visors. The team are continuing to ensure all surfaces in all areas are sanitised throughout the day.
- 1.3 There are two vacancies in the tea rooms, a recruitment drive will begin shortly.
- 1.4 Alex Catlin, part-time shop assistant has handed in his notice of resignation and his last day is Saturday 29 August, recruiting for this position is underway

2. TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE AND RETAIL OUTLET

- 2.1 The TIC and Gift Shop re-opened on Monday 15 June following Government guidelines, social distancing and a risk assessment which resulted in;
 - A one way system in the shop with floor markings at 2m intervals.
 - Only 3 customers allowed in the shop at any one time.
 - No access to the public beyond the shutter.
 - No public toilet availability.
 - Sanitising station at the door
 - Screens around the till with only one person behind.
 - A second member of staff monitoring the shop floor wearing all relevant PPE.
 - All staff issued with personal hand sanitiser and touch screen stylus on lanyards.
- 2.2 Custom has built up gradually and is now picking up more due to relevant stock being sourced.
- 2.3 Face masks are proving very popular and a second delivery has been received.
- 2.4 Christmas stock has been sourced and purchased for the Gift Shop.
- 2.5 Showcase Shelving for August, September and October is full and places for November and December are now limited.

3. THE JACOBAN ROOM

- 3.1 Wedding Ceremonies in the Jacobean Room -

AGENDA ITEM 6

- The first one was Friday 7 August and went very well.
- The Registrars complimented the measures in place and are happy to continue with weddings at Priory House

3.2 There are three further wedding ceremonies booked for this year, 24 August, 5 September and 12 September with the possibility of another in October.

3.3 There are 11 confirmed bookings for 2021, these being transferred from 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic with 2 cancellations.

3.4 Wedding enquires are coming in weekly for bookings next year and a promotion drive is being organised to market these.

4. EVENTS

4.1 Preparations are underway for the postponed Classic Motor Rally to now take place on Saturday 26 September 2020. Staff at Priory House are working closely with the Events team in assisting with organising and will assist on the day.

5. PRIORY HOUSE TEA ROOMS

5.1 The Tea Rooms re-opened on Monday 6 July after the lockdown and restrictions lifted.

5.2 A huge effort was made to ensure that all Government guidance, social distancing measures and associated risk assessments took place.

5.3 The risk assessment for the Tea Rooms resulted in;

- Screens around the till area, which can accommodate two people working back to back if required.
- All staff issued with personal sanitiser and touch screen stylus on a lanyard together with other relevant PPE
- Re-modelling the seating plan, resulting in 20 covers inside and 30 outside.
- A limited menu which is regularly being assessed and updated by the Catering Manager.
- A one way system in and out of the building with 2m floor markings in place throughout.
- A Floor Manager supporting the customers and taking the necessary track and trace information for the NHS.
- Use of the ground floor all accessible toilet for Tea Room customers only with the basement facilities out of bounds to the public.
- Currently no ad hoc access to the toilets for the general public.
- Disposable cutlery, plates, cups and condiments to minimise cross contamination. As these are not allowed to be recycled, under the Covid regulations for contaminated waste, every effort has been made to ensure the products sourced are eco-friendly and biodegradable.

5.4 In light of not being able to accommodate Afternoon Teas the Catering Manager is putting in place a takeaway Afternoon Teas Hamper, starting from Wednesday 23 September. The hamper will include all the delicious items usually offered together with loose leaf tea bags and soft drinks.

- This will enable us to exchange any Afternoon Tea Vouchers which are still

AGENDA ITEM 6

outstanding, currently 47, and accommodate any new enquiries.

- This offer will include the Gluten Free, Dairy Free, Vegetarian and Vegan alternatives.

5.3 The 'Eat out to Help Out' promotion has proved very popular and is currently running until Monday 31 August. This does seem to have had an impact on our trade towards the end of the week with customers preferring to visit us on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday.

6. FINANCE

6.1 Priory House Tea Rooms takings comparison ex VAT as at 20 August 2020.

Date	2019/2020	2020/2021	Variation 2020/2021	% Difference
TOTAL FOR 1ST QUARTER	£32,136.29	£0.00	-£32,136.29	100
1st wk Jul	£2,626.23	£391.09	-£2,235.14	85
2nd wk Jul	£2,703.61	£1,128.97	-£1,574.64	58
3rd wk Jul	£2,651.71	£1,852.93	-£798.78	30
4th wk Jul	£2,702.99	£1,971.25	-£731.74	27
5th wk Jul	£2,965.71	£2,348.97	-£616.74	20
TOTAL	£13,650.25	£7,693.21	-£5,957.04	43
1st wk Aug	£2,760.45	£2,267.11	-£493.34	18
2nd wk Aug	£2,696.32	£1,939.95	-£756.37	28

Year to date £51,243.31 £11,900.27 -£31,343.04 77%

- 6.2 Since the Tea Rooms opened on 6 July trade and income has steadily increased. The adoption of the Governments 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme has certainly aided trade Monday to Wednesday, but Thursdays and Fridays have been significantly quieter.
- 6.3 There was no trade in the first quarter due to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.
- 6.4 Although income is steadily increasing, year to date the Tea Rooms is still -£31,343 (77%) adrift compared to the same period last year.
- 6.5 Priory House shop takings comparison ex VAT as at 20 August 2020.

AGENDA ITEM 6

	Week	2019/20	2020/2021	Variation 2020/2021	% Difference
APRIL		£492.70	£0.00	-£492.70	100
MAY		£756.68	£0.00	-£756.68	100
JUNE	10	£124.11		-£124.11	100
	11	£172.42	£77.33	-£95.09	55
	12	£76.47	£53.45	-£23.02	30
	13	£147.03	£13.74	-£133.29	90
		£520.03	£144.51	-£375.52	72
TOTAL FOR 1ST QTR		£1,769.41	£144.51	-£1,624.89	92
JULY	14	£243.71	£86.95	-£156.76	65
	15	£146.15	£121.44	-£24.71	17
	16	£147.41	£114.91	-£32.50	22
	17	£114.02	£128.16	£14.14	13
		£651.29	£451.46	-£199.84	30
AUGUST	18	£287.67	£174.43	-£113.24	40
Year to date		£3,957.75	£770.45	-£3,187.30	80

- 6.6 The Gift Shop & Tourist Information Centre re-opened on 15 June 2020. There was no trade from April to this date due to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.
- 6.7 Since re-opening trade and income has been varied, although the last 3 weeks in July, income was between 13% and 22% of that compared to the same time last year.
- 6.8 Year to date compared to the same time last year the shop is 80% down on income.

7. AUTHORS

7.1 James Slack Head of Community Services; james.slack@dunstable.gov.uk

Helen Walker-Sygrove, Priory House Manager; helen.sygrove@dunstable.gov.uk

Jackie Carrington, Duty Manager; jackie.carrington@dunstable.gov.uk

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2020

DUNSTABLE TOWN CENTRE SERVICES

Purpose of Report:	For information only
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1 MARKETS

1.1 Themed Market

Themed Markets which were rebranded Middle Row Markets have helped to increase the bookings in 2020. Middle Row Markets re started on the 13 June after the lockdown break. The table below shows bookings from June to September. From July the markets have been complimented with small attractions on The Square in the form of classic cars, buskers and street entertainers. The Town Centre Service Officer is looking at purchasing more gazebos for the Christmas markets to increase the maximum 25 stalls.

13 June	13 booked
11 July	21 booked
8 August	20 booked
12 September	15 booked so far

1.2 Farmers and Craft

Farmers and Craft Markets started on 20 June 2020.

20 June	12 booked
18 July	25 booked (full)
15 August	25 booked (full)
19 September	15 booked so far

2 ASHTON SQUARE TOILETS

- 2.1 Ashton Square toilets re opened 6 July 2020 with COVID19 restrictions and risk assessment in place. The toilet opening times have been reduced to allow for a deep clean each morning, 9.30 am to 5.30 pm
- 2.2 Recycle bins have been added to the Ashton Square toilets.

3 TOWN CENTRE

3.1 Christmas Lights

The new lights on the Priory House Christmas tree had very positive feedback from the public. Lamps and Tubes no longer supply a real Christmas tree due to cost and environmental impact, The Town Centre Services Officer is now looking at low carbon footprint Christmas Trees and exploring alternative options such as artificial and using trees already in place for 2021.

It is planned to increase lighting on The Square via already situated trees and to again light up the Clock Tower. Additional lighting will complement the increased popularity The Square now brings with its events programme and markets.

Lamps and Tubes, the Town Councils lighting contractor, have confirmed that the main high street and town decorations are coming to the end of their life cycle. The small tree that sits on Grove House is looking poor and overshadowed by the new lights in Priory House. A more fitting tree to decorate would be the large Christmas tree which is growing to the rear of Grove House which would present dramatic impact on the town lighting. Quotes have been gained for this which match those to the lighting the Priory House tree.

A review of the Christmas lighting needs to take place to look at areas where illumination can be improved, the current condition of the lights and bulbs and whether new LED lighting could to assist in the Town Council Corporate Plan commitment to becoming carbon neutral. Also, any new lighting may need new and strategically placed power sources.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the planned Christmas Lights Working Group could not meet. It is suggested that this is revisited in early 2021.

3.2 Events on the Square

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic all events that had been planned for 2020 have been cancelled. Christmas Magic is still planned for the 12 & 13 December with a Ferris wheel, carousel, street entertainment and stalls

The small scale entertainment on The Square during market days in July, August have made a positive impact on Middle Row Markets.

The planned Ashton Square Day on 29 August had been remodelled to Ashton Square Day/Market due to Covid-19 restrictions. Now the day will feature market stalls, street entertainers with a small treasure hunt that has been organised in partnership with Central Bedfordshire Council and Dunstable Town Council Youth & Community Team. Twenty stalls have been booked onto the market which include 5 local shops in the area.

3.3 Partnership Working

- 3.3.1 On 29 August partnership working between, DTC's Town Centre, Youth & Community and Priory House services will deliver a Town Centre Treasure Hunt. A market stall in Middle Row will be set up as part of Ashton Square Day Market with a treasure map, clues and prizes once completed. Priory House Tea Room will be promoted as a pit stop refreshment break.
- 3.3.2 During lockdown the Town Centre Services Officer joined The Pride of Dunstable networking group and formed new connections with businesses within the town. This connection has improved relations between the Town Council and local businesses

4. TOWN CENTRE VACANCY RATES

- 4.1 The vacancy rates to the end of July 2020 are provided below. The count will be undertaken again at the start October 2020.
- 4.2 The town centre area used for the survey includes properties in High Street North up to Regent Street, High Street South to Friars Walk (excluding Thames Industrial Estate), Church Street up to and including Aldi and West Street up to the Police Station/St Mary's Gate.
- 4.3 Eleanor's Cross, Ashton Square, Albion Street, The Quadrant and Grove Park (including Asda) have been included but rates can be calculated with or without these properties.

These figures have been shared with Central Bedfordshire Council officers

No. Units	No. Vacant Units	% Vacant Units	Previous %
253	35 vacant	13.83%	9.49% from end of Jan 20.

The following figures relate to the High Street (including Grove Park, Albion Street, Eleanor's Cross and Ashton Square but excluding the Quadrant Shopping Centre.

No. Units	No. Vacant Units	% Vacant Units	Previous %
210	30 vacant	14.28%	10.00% last count end of Jan 20.

The following figures relate to the Quadrant Shopping Centre only.

No. Units	No. Vacant Units	% Vacant Units	Previous %
43	5	9.30%	6.98 % Count from Jan 20

Units in Grove park area and Asda

No. Units	No. Vacant Units	% Vacant Units	Previous %
6	1	16.6%	16.6% count from Jan 20

Please be aware that some shops have not opened simply due to Covid 19, but are counted as open as they will open when able.

4.2 Shop Front Improvement Scheme

4.2.1 The scheme has been extended and therefore applications are still being received from shops and business for the £500 grant match funding. There has been a total of 16 applications, 12 have completed the works to their shop fronts. The Town Centre Services Officer will continue to push the shops to take advantage of the offer extended into 2020.

5.0 Town Centre Benchmarking Survey

5.1 Dunstable Town Council employed the services of The People and Places Insight Limited to conduct a Town Centre Benchmarking survey developed to address the real issues of how to understand measure, evaluate and ultimately improve town centres.

The benchmarking system is divided into two sections:

- National Large Towns; consisting of those localities with more than 250 units
- National Small Towns; consisting of those localities with less than 250 units

Dunstable consists of 273 units and is thus classed as a Large Town.

The national figure is the average for all the towns which participated in benchmarking from July 2017 to January 2019.

A summary of results from the survey is detailed below.

Retail Offer

- 49% of the occupied ground floor commercial units are A1 shops (such as shops, retail warehouses, hairdressers, travel, post office, sandwich bars) and 13% financial and professional services, which is similar to the national large towns averages.

AGENDA ITEM 7

- 73% of the A1 shops mainly sell comparison goods (low-cost, everyday items), which is lower than the large Towns averages, (84%), and a 4% reduction on the 2017 evaluation.
- 55% of the A1 shops in Dunstable are unique to the town centre, lower than the national small towns average (61%) and higher than the national large towns figure (52%).
- 39% of the A1 shops have a nationwide presence, identical to the national large towns average.

Vacancy Rates

- 12% of the ground floor commercial units were vacant at the time of the audit, which is the lower than the previous evaluations. (15% in 2017 and 17% in 2015)

Car Parking

- 99% of all provision is in off-road car parks.
- Overall, on a busy day in Dunstable, 40% of all car parking provision was vacant, higher than the large towns average, (32%), and similar to the 2017 figure.
- On a quiet day, 39% of all car parking was unoccupied, higher than the national figures and the 2017 (37%) and 2015 (30%) Dunstable figures.

Town Centre Use

- 40% of town centre users visited Dunstable for convenience shopping.
- 72% of the town centre users normally stay in Dunstable for less than 2 hours, lower than the 2017 (77%) and 2015 (80%) evaluations.

Culture and History

- Cultural activities/ events at Grove House/ Priory Gardens were classed as positive aspect (47%) of Dunstable by town centre users.
- 62% of town centre users stated that the High Street South, Middle Row and Church Street area was historically important.
- 85% of town centre users were aware of the history/ heritage of Dunstable.

Local and Regular Customers

- the largest percentage of businesses (75%) rated potential local customers as a positive aspect of trading in Dunstable town centre.
- 68% of town centre users visited Dunstable at least once a week.
- 95% of the returned post codes were from shoppers who live in Dunstable or within a 30-minute drive.

Increased Customer Spend

- 34% of town centre users normally spend over £20.00 on a visit to Dunstable, higher than the 2017 (28%) and 2015 (29%) evaluations, but 6% lower than the national large towns average.

Actions for Improvement

The presence of a variety of shops in a town centre is important to its ability to remain competitive and continue to attract customers. A balance of both comparison and convenience retail units is therefore ideal in terms of encouraging visitors / potential customers. This is the conclusion from People and Places, although DTC have little authority in the letting of retail units, we are able to support the following actions

- **68% of Town Centre Users indicated that the High Street South, Middle Row and Church Street needed repair, a notable difference within the area on buildings.** The High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) scheme will look to address this area and the Town Centre Services Officer will be working closely with the HAZ Programme Manager.
- **Half of Business respondents and 51% of Town Centre Users reported that over the last 2 years Dunstable town centre had become a worse place to shop.** Middle Row markets stall numbers have increased over the last few months which has made a positive impact in the area. The Town Centre Services Officer will attempt to maintain the high number of stalls in the area by continuing with small attractions in The Square. Dunstable Town Council have no influence on the shops that want to come to Dunstable, but Town Centre Service Officer will continue to support all shops.
- **over two-thirds (67%) of town centre users rated car parking as a negative aspect of Dunstable, higher than both previous evaluations and the national small (43%) and large towns (40%) averages.** Dunstable Town Council have no authority in this area, however will continue to work with and influence CBC on this matter.
- **70% of those who lived in or near the town centre did not feel that there was a sense of community.** The Town Centre Service Officer and the events team are working towards a set of planned events within the Town Centre involving multiple partners such as SLL, Central Bedfordshire Council, Grove Theatre, Quadrant, and local businesses within the town. The HAZ Programme Manager will also address the community engagement aspect of the scheme.

AUTHOR

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