

# **Market Place Focus Groups – Summary Report**

**Tuesday 26 & Thursday 28 March 2019**

## **Background**

On Tuesday 26 March and Thursday 28 March 2019, Devizes Town Council ran a series of focus groups to discuss the future use of the Market Place and some principles about how the area may be laid out.

The focus groups which were held on Tuesday 26 were externally facilitated by an experienced facilitator Simon Williams. The two groups were formed from town centre businesses and members of the community.

Focus Groups were:

- Local Businesses
- Local Residents
- Conservation (Trust for Devizes)
- Events & Tourism
- Local Wiltshire Councillors

A summary of each of the groups are set out below with the key issues raised during the discussion set out with bullet points.

## **The Town Centre Business Group comprised of 3 people.**

### Question 1 – Type of activities

- There must be a mechanism to encourage those attending events to visit other parts of the town.
- Farmers Market is not working, could there be an alternative market that promotes local produce.
- Car, bike and machinery shows
- Charity days
- Youth markets such as young enterprise events
- Bigger events kill trade (Nevertheless businesses are happy for them to go ahead)
- Businesses need to be involved in events
- Events need to connect across the town
- The market events need to link with local business
- Retailers need to take part in events with a presence

### Question 2 - Enhancement of community space

- Flexibility is the key to ensure that any layout does not restrict its use
- The space needs to have a purpose
- There needs to be trees and bushes in the area that will help absorb toxins from the air
- The spaces lead people towards the Shambles
- The space needs to be very well designed and be an attraction in its own right rather than a generic town open space
- The quality of the street furniture needs to be very high and designed for the space.
- The design needs to be contemporary rather than a pastiche of a bygone period
- The Council should employ an architect like Ken Shuttleworth, of world renown and the founder of the Make Group, but is believed to live locally.
- There needs to be a clear view of what the space represents.
- Need to have the “Balls” to do a good job.
- Local business need to be part of this journey for the Market Place as their buy in is essential to its success.
- Need to take the Victorian principle of the Market Place being the front room of the town so has to be a bit of a show case.
- The area needs to be greened up.

### Questions 3/4 - Market Place layout

There needs to be a set of principles that govern the layout.

- The community space needs the minimum not to be crowded but not to feel empty

- Any spaces must not feel sterile
- The sitting area needs to be pleasant to sit in
- The bus island needs to be retained
- Any project needs to be deliverable
- There needs to be a degree of flexibility as the use of the areas may change as they become more established

Question 5. Anything else that needs to be thought about

- The balance has be right between the two spaces
- Street furniture needs to be well designed but robust check out the CPNI website

<https://www.cpni.gov.uk/system/files/documents/40/20/Integrated%20Security%20Guide.pdf>

## **Local Residents Group comprised of 9 people.**

### Question 1 – Type of activities

- Difficult to determine as don't know what groups may want to put on
- Town Centre Manager needs to support groups
- Needs to be a regular programme of events so that it become familiar
- Local community groups should be able to use it to showcase their skills
- Volunteer event days
- Should complement National days such as Red Nose Days
- Could be a large screen for larger sporting events
- Seating for screenings
- Need to balance the impact of events on the disturbance it may cause to people living in the Market Place
- People need to interact with the space
- Why should this space be used for events when others aren't (Albion Place)
- Would there be an impact on the use of other areas and how will the Market Places connect with these areas
- Regular guided tours should leave from the Market Place

### Question 2 - Enhancement of community space

- It is not a piazza it is a traditional Market Place
- Can the way the space is used change between day and night
- The design needs to make people feel safe and be able to resist vandalism
- Lighting is key both in terms of architecture and for security
- Needs signage to point to other town locations
- Ability to explain the town's history and folklore such as the Ruth Pearce story
- Need to plan the aesthetics of the space and can there be a marriage between old and new
- Need to follow good practice of other towns. (Poundbury is a good example)
- Regent Street in Swindon has been redesigned with some bespoke modern street furniture which looks good. The seats are back to back so do so tend not to have just one person on them.
- "go for it make a statement"
- Should the space be flexible so that street furniture can be moved around to meet different needs
- The Brittox is a poor example of pedestrianisation
- Can we improve the Brittox
- We need places to park bikes but they need to be simple yet sturdy

## Questions 3/4 - Market Place layout

- Many at the meeting felt that the space between the Fountain and Market Cross with its trees made it an pleasant area for a community space
- The question was raised if it has to be the same area
- Should the community space be broken into more than one area
- The area needs to develop a pedestrian priority culture
- Safety for pedestrians has to be built into the design
- There needs to be easy emergency access
- More trees are needed to help define areas
- 1/3 community space 2/3 car parking
- Can we not keep it all as car park when there are no events

## Question 5. Anything else that needs to be thought about

- There needs to be a fall-back position if the plan does not work
- Can there be a short stay, 30 minutes parking option
- There should be visits to other towns to see both good and bad pedestrianisation schemes.

## **Conservation Group comprised of 2 people.**

### Question 1 – Type of activities

- Should be a meeting place
- Not just for events space
- Needs to encourage people to come back to the town
- Encourage including good busking
- Wider range of markets
- Integrate it with the Brittox so events and stalls go between the two areas
- No too many big events
- Charity event days
- Do not over regulate events

### Question 2 - Enhancement of community space

- Allow Cafes to spread into the space
- Use existing architecture to define shapes and forms for anything new
- Make more of the history
- Reverse the figure and ground principle in that currently the cars form the background.
- Do more with lighting
- Make more of the History

### Questions 3/4 - Market Place layout

- Make daytime and evening layouts different
- Cars need to be the backdrop and not the main focus
- Whatever is put in place needs to be moveable to ensure that the space has some flexibility
- There has to be period of “suck it and see”
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### Question 5. Anything else that needs to be thought about

- Whatever changes are made people need to feel safe
- Any alleyways need to be open and well lit
- Should be the start point for history trails
- The character of the area needs to drive the design
- Thought needs to be given to the use of the services road by delivery vehicles and blue badge holders

## Events and Tourism Group comprised of 11 people

### Question 1 – Type of activities

- Christmas Market
- Wool Market
- Temporary art displays
- Pop up food events
- Dog shows
- Car Displays
- School and young enterprise events
- Health and Wellbeing slot for screening etc.
- There needs to be a regular programme, well publicised
- Multi Day events leading into a weekend
- Most days should have something going on
- Business need to engage with events through publicity and theming
- Used for evening events

### Question 2 - Enhancement of community space

- Create some cover that can be easily erected such as horizontal sails
- Used the stone paved area to etch local history information
- Include the infrastructure to easily erect a screen for projecting films or sporting events
- The space needs to be flexible so it can be used as needed
- Deal with the dropped kerbs
- Create pop up areas for seating but need to be cleared for larger events.
- Need to have storage for items moved for larger events.
- Adequate lighting and power for evening events and an ability to turn lights off if area needs to be darker
- “In Ground” lighting installed

### Questions 3/4 - Market Place layout

- The Shambles needs to be drawn into the space
- Needs to link to other pedestrian areas
- Maintain better air quality in community space
- Space needs to look planned
- Develop more greenery
- Need to understand the space could change over time

### Question 5. Anything else that needs to be thought about

- Needs to be a pressed of evaluating the project
- Maintain good disabled access

## **Wiltshire Councillors Group comprised of 3 people**

### Question 1 – Type of activities

- Concerts
- Grow the Market & Greater Range
- Outdoor Antique events, get someone like Paul Martin to promote it
- Recreational sporting events such as boules
- Needs to be a regular programme

### Question 2 - Enhancement of community space

- Develop some cover such as an easily erected marquee to make the space less weather dependent
- Install ground anchors
- Seating and places for people to eat
- It must not be a bland space
- More trees (in planters)
- Space needs to be flexible
- If items are to be removed to open the space up, then the plan has to include where they are going to go
- Develop digital information points
- Reconnect the Market Place with its history

### Questions 3/4 - Market Place layout

- Area needs to connect with the rest of the town

## **Summary**

Whilst some groups had larger numbers than others all those taking part fully engaged in the process and there was some lively debate. From the notes above it is clear that there are areas of agreement and areas of disagreement and this summary will try to draw those together for each question.

### **Areas of agreement**

#### 1. Types of activities

Whilst there was quite a list of ideas, there was also a recurring theme that events and local businesses need to engage with one another. In terms of activities whilst there was some support for increasing the size of the existing Market, there was equally a feeling that events such as displays and sport, which have limited financial activity are equally important and indeed too many larger events would not be beneficial.

The space will also support social interaction as a place to meet and enjoy.

#### 2. Enhancement of community space

The key message from each of the groups on this subject was flexibility and the ability to ensure that however the space is laid out, it is not static so events are not encumbered by things like benches and tables. Equally the space need not look empty as some felt Salisbury did when there were no events.

The other important issue is the design and look of the street furniture, which needs to be of a high quality and reflect the history of the area, but probably more contemporary in look. What was not wanted was a bland off the shelf feel.

#### 3./4. Layout

Whilst there was more disagreement on this section, on balance most felt that the community space should be smaller than the car park as the flexibility of the space meant that it could be made larger if needed.

### **Area of disagreement**

#### 3./4. Layout

The principle divergence of opinion was around the locations of the community space and parking. Whilst the above plans show many permutations, they can be distilled in to two.

- Community area towards the fountain and the parking towards the Little Brittox: The reason for this was that this area with its trees naturally frames a community space, providing shade
- Community Area towards the Little Brittox and the parking towards the fountain; The reason for this is the community space will link with other pedestrian areas of the Little Brittox and Brittox and bring the Shambles into the space.

### **Next Step**

The Council will consider the issues raised, and based on these seek to draw up two or three master plans which will be subject to further consultation.

In developing the master plans, point raised at question 5 will be taken into account.