

Town Centre Report



There have been two main areas of interest for the society in the town centre during the past year:

- The Town Centre Strategic Partnership, and
- The Plaques Scheme along the historic spine with an exciting new initiative relating to tree ring dating of timber framed buildings.

As reported last year the partnership was established taking forward a proposal in the neighbourhood development plan. Its purpose is to bring together all the main interests in the town to find an agreed vision and a set of priorities for ensuring that the town flourishes and becomes safer and more engaging for residents and visitors. It is much about presenting to government and to investors a strong sense of a town that knows what it wants and is unified in seeking to achieve it. So far it has concerned itself with the Bridge Street / High Street improvement scheme on which a public consultation has been held recently with 1000 responses. A second bid to government for funding will be going forward in the next few weeks.

The Partnership has recently turned to creating an investment workshop bringing together the experience of business and local government in seeking out new possibilities for investment in the town. Though it's too early to speculate on the outcome of this initiative it is certainly an important move to try to break some of the traditional restrictions on getting investment into the town.

The Plaques Scheme

It's been an active year for this scheme. Last year we reported that the General Committee had committed up to £4,000 from reserves to complete what is essentially the first stage of the scheme, originally envisaged as some 20 to 25 ceramic pavement plaques celebrating the key buildings along the Historic Spine, all of which contribute to the town's heritage as expressed through its historic buildings. Six further plaques have been agreed and designed; they are now with the mason and should be in place before the end of the year. They are located at:

- Holy Trinity Church
- The Dower House
- The Alms Houses
- The Old Vicarage (within the King Edwards School and adjoining with Guild Chapel)
- The Shakespeare Hotel
- Harvard House

This Society has contributed one half of the cost for three of the plaques with the remaining three financed by the owners. The Society will meet the costs of laying all of them. Together we will pay £2,700 to complete this stage of the scheme.

Finally, due to the great initiative and efforts of Dr Bob Bearman, a significant grant has been obtained for a scheme of tree ring dating (or dendrochronology) on key timber-framed buildings. It is a very significant project that will occupy us for the next three or four years.

John Scampion

Deputy Chairman and Society Representative on the Town Centre Strategic Partnership