

Town Centre Report



The Society's interest in the town centre revolves around two themes – the plaques scheme, for which there is a full report elsewhere on this agenda, and the work of the Town Centre Strategic partnership on which I reported last year.

Since last year's AGM, the partnership has concentrated on three principal projects:

1. The Bridge Street/High Street scheme for greater pedestrian priority in the town centre was put forward in the second round of bidding for levelling-up funding. It was essentially the same scheme as that submitted in the previous year, enthusiastically supported by the partnership and substantially endorsed in extensive public consultation carried out last year.
2. They are considering a constitutional change by agreeing in principle to the setting up of a Transformation Board to concentrate on promoting the town, its key priorities and seeking funding from available sources. The essence of the proposal is that the new board would become the executive body with the existing partnership representing community interests and working in an advisory capacity. This is a significant proposal very much in its early stages and potentially far reaching. It needs research particularly to get a sense of the experience of other towns who have gone that way. There is a good deal of work still to do to achieve a structure which will meet the needs and circumstances of Stratford and I will keep the Society fully posted.
3. To date the vision and the key strategies set out in the Neighbourhood Development Plan have driven the work of the partnership. Whilst many provisions in that plan are still relevant and important for the town, inevitably as circumstances change we need to move forward. With that in mind, they have been working extensively on creating a new vision and a set of strategies to guide them for the next 5 to 10 years. Work has reached a stage where a full consultation can begin, and I will ensure that the Society is kept in the picture.

There are two further initiatives to report. The partnership has worked with a local artist on a scheme to decorate a series of bollards in the town centre. It is essentially experimental and may lead to more complete coverage in the future.

A website for the partnership is currently being created, which will at last give it some visibility, and an opportunity for dialogue with the community.

Finally, the chair of the partnership changed in August. It is now held by Sara Aspley, the chief executive of the Town Trust, who took over from Geraldine Collinge of the RSC. I continue to represent the Society as vice chairman.

John Scampion

Addendum: though not technically part of this report which covers the year ending December 2022, I can advise the AGM that in January this year the Bridge Street/High Street scheme bid was turned down by government for a second year. It is uncertain, perhaps unlikely, that any further bid will be made for levelling-up funds. I believe we need to press to achieve alternative ways of funding this important project.