

## Lisa Mortimer MRICS – Romsey Town and Tourism Co-ordinator

## Report to Romsey Town Council Building and Town Committee - Tuesday 17th August 2021

Item No	Subject	Report
1	General commentary	<p>Since my last report to your 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021 meeting, England is now into Step 4 on the roadmap out of lockdown, which commenced on July 19<sup>th</sup> and removed all final legal restrictions on social contact with all remaining businesses such as nightclubs being allowed to re-open.</p> <p>However the Government is still advocating caution. At step 4, while many of the legal restrictions that the Government has imposed through the pandemic will be lifted, cautious guidance will remain, making it clear this is not yet a return to normal. While cases have risen in the last couple of weeks, everybody needs to continue to act carefully and remain cautious. For instance, it is strongly “advised and recommended” that mask wearing should continue in indoor settings such as shops, personal care venues (hairdressers etc) and on public transport. Certainly from my visits to the town centre businesses over the last few weeks, this seems to be the case, with a large majority observing this guidance.</p> <p>A hybrid approach to working is being adopted by many firms and local authorities, with a 2/3 pattern ( 2 days in the office, 3 days WFH) of working becoming the norm. TVBC are proposing to adopt some kind of hybrid working policy.</p> <p>A booster vaccination programme is expected to commence in Autumn for the over 50's to augment protection against a predicted Winter surge of COVID cases.</p> <p>Retail Statistics</p> <p>The Office for National Statistics has reported the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retail sales volumes increased by 0.5% between May and June 2021, and were up 9.5% when compared with their pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic February 2020 levels.</li> <li>• The largest contribution to the monthly increase in June 2021 came from food stores where sales volumes rose by 4.2%, with anecdotal evidence suggesting these increased sales may be linked with the start of the Euro 2020 football championship.</li> <li>• Non-food stores reported a fall of 1.7% in sales volumes in June 2021 when compared with May 2021, driven by falls in household goods stores, such as furniture stores and clothing stores.</li> <li>• The volume of sales for the three months to June 2021 was 12.2% higher than in the previous three months, driven in large part by particularly strong sales in April when non-essential retailing re-opened; strong three-month growth was seen in non-food retailers and automotive fuel sales of 35.8% and 23.6% respectively.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proportion of retail sales conducted online remains substantially higher than before the pandemic, but in June most retail sectors reported a fall in their proportions of online sales as consumers returned to physical stores; the total proportion of sales online decreased to 26.7% in June 2021, down from 28.4% in May 2021.</li> </ul> <p>It remains to be seen whether this trend will continue or whether consumers will still be adopting a “hybrid” approach to their shopping needs, particularly for their non-grocery items. It is widely reported that there has been a behavioural shift in consumer shopping habits, with 2 out of 3 consumers still buying more online than before the pandemic. Latest analysis of consumer spending habits show that £1 in every £3 is now being spent online.</p>
2	<p><b>Around the Town Centre:</b></p>	<p>Local businesses and all retail venues are now fully open, with restaurants, pubs and coffee shops all able to serve an unlimited number of customers, both internally and externally.</p> <p>The Piazza continues to be a popular venue for people to meet and to enjoy alfresco coffee, meals and drinks. Traders seem to be complying with the terms in their pavement/tables and chairs licences, which state that on markets days and special events days, these events take precedence over the space. Costa seem to be the only ones which can be a little “awkward” in terms of moving their chairs and tables under these circumstances, but Michael White at TVBC Licensing is aware of this and is monitoring the situation.</p> <p>The closure of non-essential retail, personal care and hospitality venues has had a considerable financial impact on businesses in the Town, even with grant and additional loan payments.</p> <p>On 16<sup>th</sup> April The Government published its Welcome Back Fund Guidance, which makes £56m of ERDF funding (European Regional Development Fund) available to Local Councils to support the return to the High Streets safely. This might encompass adopting retail e-commerce platforms in order to augment retailer’s revenue potential. David Gleave, TVBC, is investigating this potential funding avenue, as it appears other Authorities may be using this source for this purpose.</p> <p><b>10 Market Place Romsey</b> Vary condition 13 of 20/02004/FULLS (Change of use of part of ground and first floors from retail and office to residential, external alterations and extensions to rear and redesign garden) - to allow ground floor commercial space to be used as either retail or office space – validated 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021</p> <p><b>17 Bell Street Romsey</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.instagram.com/forestandcoveromsey/">https://www.instagram.com/forestandcoveromsey/</a></p> <p>New shop which will feature art and crafts from local artists and also create an artists space and art classes. TVBC have awarded an independent retailer grant to this venture.</p>

		<p>Rent was quoted at £17,000 per annum (exclusive)</p> <p><b>Opening August 27th 2021.</b></p> <p><b>9 Latimer Street (Hayes Music) – To Let via Primmer Olds</b></p> <p><a href="https://primmeroldscrm.agencypilot.com/crm/store/documents/other/960382_noad9akiz7c53zu1.pdf">https://primmeroldscrm.agencypilot.com/crm/store/documents/other/960382_noad9akiz7c53zu1.pdf</a></p> <p>Quoting Rent £29,500 per annum via a new FRI lease</p> <p><b>White Horse Hotel</b> - On the market with Savills with an asking price of £4million</p> <p><a href="https://search.savills.com/property-detail/gb0457s25849">https://search.savills.com/property-detail/gb0457s25849</a></p> <p><b>7 and 9 The Hundred</b> - M &amp; Co have now vacated No 7 and have reduced their operations into No 9. Number 7 is now vacant.</p> <p><b>34. The Hundred</b> (Former Carphone Warehouse) still vacant. Application for a Lawful Development Certificate for a Proposed Use - use of ground floor of building as a restaurant has been withdrawn. To Let via Trinity Rose Surveyors for a new lease.</p> <p><a href="https://www.trinity-rose.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/rps_chr-COM210041-1.pdf">https://www.trinity-rose.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/rps_chr-COM210041-1.pdf</a></p> <p><b>78 – 80 The Hundred (Koh Tai)</b> -21/01695/FULLS   Change of use from restaurant to dwelling, removal of courtyard canopy roof and erection of fence.</p> <p>Vandalism still seems to be an ongoing problem in the Town Centre as well as an element of anti-social behavior.</p> <p>The Abbey has had a 3<sup>rd</sup> break in and are now looking to put CCTV cameras on the Former Magistrates Building, as the intruders seem to come in from the north side.</p> <p>I have forwarded the Abbey's request to the appropriate department at TVBC in order that this matter can be addressed in short order.</p>
		<p>In terms of footfall, latest figures show that Romsey is back to 2019 rates at 62%. There is a 5% shop vacancy rate in Romsey town centre, whereas Andover is nearer 14%. 12 % is the National average.</p> <p>Many retail pundits are heralding the death of the local high street, not so, it just has to be re-imagined. Shopping in the local high street is probably the most carbon-neutral way of buying goods and services and there has been a cultural shift during the pandemic to buying local and supporting local businesses.</p>
3	<b>Town Centre events and markets:</b>	<p><b>Romsey Makers Market</b></p> <p>The Sunday Romsey Maker's Market in the Piazza and The Cornmarket has proved to be popular with both residents and visitors alike.</p>

		<p>The 2 original founders, Kate and Kerri worked together until June 2021 when they both decided to divide the business up and run two markets each. Kerri has started New Forest Makers Markets and runs both Lymington and Lyndhurst makers markets, while Kate remains committed to Romsey, Stockbridge and Eastleigh.</p> <p><b>Romsey Market</b></p> <p>Mark Hall at Bradbeers has confirmed that the Romsey Market held on a Tuesday, Friday and Saturday still remains extremely popular with a growing waiting list. As well as the popular well established traders, new stall holders are also proving to attract new customers with a more diverse offering such as jewelry and handbags. Mark is committed to keeping the market fresh and vibrant.</p> <p><b>Romsey Antiques Market</b></p> <p>The first Romsey Antiques Market post lockdown took place on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July and by all accounts was a good success, albeit in a scaled down format. Further markets are planned for October and December (restrictions allowing).</p> <p><b>Health and Well Being Event</b></p> <p>A health and well- being event is planned for end of August at the Town Hall which is designed to help those people who feel nervous or anxious about getting out and about again. Around 30 residents have been invited by Unity and RTC with tea and cake to be served. Sim Dendy will be giving a motivational talk, as well as a few words from Lisa Mortimer.</p> <p>There will be some display stalls which will include organisations such as Tree of Life Café, Natural Wellbeing Centre, MIND and Wisdom House. Karen our Mayor will also be attending.</p> <p>Date: Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> August confirmed as date for first event. Time: 1.00p.m. – 3.00p.m.</p>
4	<p><b>Temporary closure of the Hundred &amp; other highway matters</b></p>	<p>The Hundred re-opened on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> August and the temporary road closure infrastructure removed, which has sparked a heated debate between those who would have liked to see the scheme made permanent and those who were relieved that the road was now open.</p> <p>The report went to HCC's Executive Member for Highways Operations meeting this Friday 29th about the Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 Programme, which included a recommendation in respect of the Hundred and the consultation results. For those who have not seen the report - The full report can be seen by using the following link:</p> <p><a href="https://www.hants.gov.uk/active-travel-fund-tranche-2-programme-2021-07-29-emete-decision-day">Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 Programme-2021-07-29-EMETE Decision Day (hants.gov.uk)</a></p> <p>The full results of the survey conducted by Hampshire County in respect of the closure of the Hundred is attached.</p>

		<p>I attach as an appendix my note which I prepared for officers of Test Valley BC detailing some further thoughts and observations in this matter, together with some background information on the possible use of retractable barriers and bollards.</p> <p>In my note, you will see that the use of retractable bollards and barriers is being phased out in Cambridge, which was the first major city to introduce them because of reliability and safety issues. They are being replaced by Automatic Number Plate Recognition Cameras. The third item that I have raised in my note is in respect of how the closure of the Hundred has presented delivery challenges for the Co-op in the Hundred and does serve to illustrate how there will be so many conflicting interests that will have to be overcome in respect of the Romsey South Regeneration project</p> <p>A lot of the other items on the HCC ETE agenda for Friday make pretty depressing reading especially the ETE Capital Programme Year End 2020/21 and Quarter 1 2021/22</p> <p>ETE Capital Programme Year end 2020/21 and Quarter 1 2021/22-2021-  <a href="#">ETE Capital Programme Year end 2020/21 and Quarter 1 2021/22-2021-07-29-EMETE Decision Day (hants.gov.uk)</a></p> <p>In the report the most telling section begins “Overall, the funding allocated to Hampshire County Council is £38.8 million, which represents a reduction of 24%, when compared to £51.1 million in the previous year.”</p> <p>The Report - Hampshire Highways – Service Update on the same agenda shows the extent of the huge problem that exists in tackling a significant maintenance and repair backlog.</p> <p><a href="#">Executive Member Decision Day Report Template (hants.gov.uk)</a></p> <p>It is noted that Cllr Mark Cooper is advocating a Romsey Town Centre walk about with Nick Adams-King and HCC Executive Member Russell Oppenheimer in September.</p> <p>No doubt the opening/closure of the Hundred will continue to be debated for many years to come, but should be seen as part of a strategic review aligned to the South of Romsey Regeneration Scheme and the new Romsey Town Centre Local Plan.</p> <p>As things settle down, it might be prudent to consider taking a survey of opinions from Traders in order to gauge the business community sentiment to input into any future plans for The Hundred, as the results of the consultation did not discern between residents and businesses.</p>
5	<b>Meetings Attended</b>	Attached is a schedule of meetings I have attended since my last report and planned meetings (so far).
6	<b>Potential on line trading platform for Romsey Businesses</b>	<p><b>An online business directory and a potential multi vendor app website</b></p> <p>Given the willingness of other local authorities to enter into joint IT ventures by being facilitators to try and keep the spend local, I am fearful that TVBC might missing out on an opportunity by continuing to</p>

**“Bricks and Clicks”**

deliberate. Many other local authorities are using Welcome Back funding to facilitate these digital projects. TVBC have not made any commitment to deploy these funds for digital initiatives in Romsey and are looking at a variety of other projects such as improvements to Stirling Walk and Romsey Smart Town Wi-Fi. I presented to the Romsey & District Society on 12<sup>th</sup> July in respect of the Romsey digital projects, which I believe was well received by the Committee.

In my July 27<sup>th</sup> report to Full Council on this subject, I had made the following recommendations:

- (1) Obtain cost illustrations for the creation of an online directory and an online multi -vendor site
- (2) Undertake market research to ascertain potential demand from local businesses in the south Test Valley District area to include Romsey and Stockbridge for either a directory or multi vendor app
- (3) Once the information from 1 and 2 is available, TVBC and Romsey Town Council to decide whether to facilitate an online directory or multi vendor app.
- (4) Decide whether to develop, host and maintain selected facility in house or outsource it

In my report, I had illustrated how a number of local authorities were procuring multi- vendor platforms. Examples included Winchester City Council with sub- pages for Bishops Waltham, Alresford and Wickham and Gillingham Town Council, using the proven ShopAppy platform. <https://shopappy.com/>

As a result of the Council resolutions on these matters I have invited the founders of ShopAppy to give a presentation to The Council on August 26<sup>th</sup> at 6pm. There will also be representation from The Romsey Chamber of Commerce and I am hoping officers at senior level from TVBC. Dave Tasker is away on leave, so I suggested that Graham Smith or James Moody might like to attend, as well as David Gleave.

For your information, I have prepared a draft next steps document, copy attached as an appendix to this report, in respect of a potential online directory, local loyalty reward card/app or multi seller site. Hopefully the document is self-explanatory and could act as a road map/framework for progression of this matter in line with the Romsey Town Council’s most recent resolutions.

I understand that Marianne Piggis is preparing a report in respect of a potential Town centre WiFi/Smart Town and setting out the options. It is hoped that I can input into this report, but am awaiting further details at the time of writing.

Certainly the Town Council want to work closely with Test Valley and Romsey Future, but the Town Council is very keen to be seen to be delivering tangible benefits to both residents, visitors and businesses, more especially as we can see with some envy what other local

		<p>communities and authorities are delivery by harnessing the power of technology. I certainly feel that we are not progressing things as fast as others are and could be missing out on opportunities and harnessing the power of technology.</p> <p>.</p>
7	<p><b>Work with the Romsey Future Tourism Group and Proposed Romsey Tourism &amp; Community Heritage App</b></p>	<p>Since our last meeting it is proposed that Tourism South East through the auspices of the Romsey Visitor Information Centre will take over the administration of the Visit Romsey website. A meeting is scheduled to discuss further on 16<sup>th</sup> August.</p> <p>Following the resolution from Romsey Town Council's Full Council meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> July in respect of the Tourism App for Romsey</p> <p>Next Steps are</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The establishment of a project team and lead</li> <li>2. Undertake market research to establish demand</li> <li>3. Scope the requirements</li> <li>4. Prepare an outline specification</li> <li>5. Obtain cost estimates</li> <li>6. Procure a contractor to build and maintain the App</li> </ol> <p>Funding will also have to be procured in order to develop the App. Once again some Welcome Back funding might be appropriate to deploy to this project.</p> <p>Obviously progress needs to be made in respect of the Tourism App but regrettably it will not be available for this summer/autumn, so we will need to work towards a spring launch next year.</p>
9	<p><b>Cruise Passenger &amp; Local Tourism</b></p>	<p>Once again progress on this initiative is aligned with the development of the Romsey Tourism App and so we will have to work on the cruise season for 2022, as we have left it too late for this season.</p> <p>Visit Hampshire will, I believe, be responding with thoughts on how best to promote to shore excursion companies that cover both cruise ports within Hampshire.</p> <p>I'll be keeping in touch with Andrew Bateman (HCC) about this and we have discussed an option to take things forward in the autumn when the cruise industry will be more firmly established within the restart programme.</p> <p>The operators and shore excursion companies are totally focussed on restart and the current season at the moment, which is understandable.</p>