



Meeting
Tuesday 5th March 2024
6pm, Old Mill Board Room

Minutes

Present: Ian Ames White, Jonathan Orchard, Nicola McLean, Guy Timson, Robert Powell, Lorna Gray and Baz Hynes from Wells Food Festival, Rob Bevan from Protec.

Apologies: Mike McGrath, Louis Agabani

1. Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.
2. Treasurer's report
Nothing of note to report - a couple of small bills to pay - printing costs and networking meeting costs.
3. Chairman's report by Mike Tucker Vice Chair
The February networking breakfast went well. Tessa Munt gave a very informative talk about the state of Somerset Council's finances. Social housing and social care were identified as particular issues.
4. Tom Wood of St Andrews Press was proposed as Membership secretary as, although not at the meeting, he had expressed an interest at the Community Day. It was proposed for Tom to get involved and use Membership Mojo which Jonthan Orchard can help with. Mike proposed, Ian seconded.
We need to set up an effective system for renewing memberships and contacting new members. Jon chases members but not on a regular basis - needs someone to use it effectively - most members are on standing order.
5. Any other business
Robert Powell introduced Rob Bevan of Protec in Wells who runs a very effective WhatsApp group for the shops in Wells - it is a well used group which has fostered a community spirit within the businesses of Wells. It would be good to encourage members of the group to join the Chamber as it is an effective mouthpiece that the authorities listen to.

Rob has been involved in retailing for 40 years and fitting alarms and security for 41 years. He reported that crime in Wells is "horrendous". And a lot of it is not reported via the WhatsApp group. He reported that there had been an axe attack on the Studley's jewellers window - at 8.45am - and the perpetrator robbed some jewellery. The thief was spooked by an ambulance on 15th of last month and the same guy drills out locks on one of the shutters on Studley's window. He reported that his staff are feeling intimidated. Cars have been damaged and windows broken. Shoplifting is rife. Currently retailers share images and video on the WhatsApp group of shoplifters and so on. The police do respond to 999 calls, but we don't have a full time police presence in Wells. Three trailers and a quad bike were stolen in one day and £10K worth of kit was also stolen. City CCTV is not going to be monitored as a Somerset Council cut back. It was proposed that the Chamber send a letter to Somerset Council to request if local people can monitor the CCTV.

More policing for Wells has been promised but not delivered so far.

Mike Tucker proposed that we invite the police to a Chamber meeting and to have said meeting in the city centre so more people can attend.

Guy Timson suggested asking the police to make the crime registration form easier to fill in as currently it takes a long time and is putting people off. Therefore many crimes go unreported.

Ian Ames-White reported that Martock has engaged a private security firm who turn up in the town at different times and on different evenings.

Any Other Business

Wells Food Festival is in its 12th year 2024, it started with 35 stall holders and has 200 now with a waiting list of 100. It attracts 16,000 people to Wells. Prices are low for a stall compared to other events. Many stalls sell out of their products. More visitors from further afield. 70% sponsorship and 30% stall holders. Most stalls come from Somerset. Talking about closing the High Street and going down the street with stalls - loath to use Cathedral Green because of the mess made of the grass. Advice was asked from the Chamber members as to practicality of this idea it was suggested that the fire service might object and to ask their advice. £50 cheapest stall - £90 not including electricity. The festival can't go to two days because of the market.

Robert Powell asked how can the Chamber help? Car parking is an issue and the local car parking is at capacity.