



Soham Town Forum, P.O. Box 21, The Pavilion,
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Minutes of the Meeting held on 1st July 2004

Attendance

Robert Peacock (STF Chairman)	R L Shoult (Resident)
Donna Martin (STF Vice Chairman)	Robert Barnes (SACT)
John Powley (County Councillor)	Anne Tuite (Town Councillor)
George Ginn (Town Councillor)	Colin Palmer (Resident)
Julian Owen (Resource Team - Rural Action East)	Shirley Blake (East Cambs District Council)
Sue Gascoyne (Resource Team - Rural Action East)	James Talbot (East Cambs District Council)
Geoff Griggs (Soham Staploe Rotary Club)	Chris Scurrah (Soham On-Line)
Adrian Dodman (Resident)	Peter Beer (Town Councillor)
Theresa Langford (Resident)	Peggy Gibbon (Town Councillor)
Mark Kathre (Resident)	Alison Callaby (East Cambs District Council)

Apologies for Absence

Rosemary Aitchinson
Peter Diver

Healthcheck Update

James Talbot reported that 1127 responses had been recorded on the healthcheck questionnaire database and out of 4,000 homes and a population circa 10,000 he felt it was a good return response rate and thanked those Forum Members who had promoted the scheme. All agreed that this was an excellent result.

The next stage would be to write up the healthcheck findings and analyse the feedback. Cllr Powley highlighted that some of the suggestions would refer to organisations such as the Town, District and County Councils and that it would be prudent to enter into the Action Plan 'who does what'. There were also opportunities to feed into the local strategic partnership and link to their action plan.

The next Forum meeting will focus on the Healthcheck findings and agree next steps.

At this stage in the meeting Julian Owen carried out the draw for the Laptop incentive offered as part of the Healthcheck – the winner was Victoria Rowe of

Clay Street Soham – she has subsequently been presented with her prize by Robert Peacock the Forum Chairman.

Resource Team Feedback

Julian Owen and Sue Gascoyne attended the meeting to feedback on the Resource team findings. The Resource team is funded by the East of England Development Agency and is made up of people involved in similar work elsewhere, they provide their general impressions based on a short 'fact finding' visit.

In general they reported that there was a good level of support from members and a 'passion for the place' – which drove people to attend each month and offered their congratulations for sustaining this commitment. One of the initial observations that the Resource Team made was that they were wondering where the Forum would go from here given that it had now established a long track record and had received some excellent support from the District Council. They went on to highlight that they felt in front of them was the challenge of making the healthcheck useful to them, in that the documents findings needed to be able to take the Forum somewhere.

It was acknowledged that the Forum was set up as exactly that – an open meeting where members and the community could come along and say their piece. There may be a need to refocus the groups activity to ensure that changes proposed as recommendations to the healthcheck findings will be taken forward. Unless groups are sure as to how this will happen there is often a vacuum – or indeed a shopping list but no mechanism in place to take it forward.

There is a need to be sure that the action plan is appropriately phrased – in order that it can influence other agencies agendas. Particular challenge to turn information into key issues. Under the broad range of headings i.e. social, community, environment etc – there will be a need to address what are the key issues and the Forum were encouraged to work closely with James. If necessary we should not be reluctant to ask people again for their views and the Resource Team felt it appropriate to ask a creative question, such as 'What type of town do you want Soham to be?'

The Resource team also felt that the Forum should think hard about the two levels of operation, i.e. a forum for discussion with a smaller core group to co-ordinate activities. There will be an opportunity as part of the healthcheck to refocus the Forum Business Plan.

Julian Owen also flagged up that input into the City of Ely Perspective by the District Council was being reduced and that the Forum should think about gearing up for the servicing role, i.e. minutes/agendas etc to be taken on locally. An option put forward by Sue Gascoyne was that of a 'revolving volunteer'.

Other Feedback:

The website is very much admired, and it was suggested that it would be of benefit to the profile of the Forum to mirror this in the production of a simple newsletter to highlight their key areas of activity. There is a need to prioritise the Forum activities and reach all the Soham audience – rather than just the faithful.

As highlighted by the Resource Team on their visit events such as the Carnival and festival should be used to reach a wider audience. The Forum reported back that the Forum, Town and District Council promoted a joint stand at the Carnival. Opportunities for further promoting the healthcheck at the Pumpkin Festival were highlighted.

Chris Scurrah identified that the group had been exploring the production of a newsletter alongside the Parish magazine and website.

The Forum needs to encourage new volunteers. One suggestion made was that a leaflet was produced which provided a summary of the initial healthcheck findings which could be seen as the first forum newsletter and could invite those interested in certain themes to get involved in specific action groups or the wider forum. One example of such approach was the Ramsey leaflet, copy attached, which might prompt community engagement. It was highlighted that there may be willing volunteers outside the Forum who are not sure as to how they can contribute. In addition it may be that they do not have unlimited time or commitment to become a 'long-term' volunteer, but may wish to engage on a time-limited basis – these people need to be reached. The forum needs to drip feed information into the press and offer a taster of what can be achieved as a result of the process.

James reported that a specific question was raised in the questionnaire as to whether people would like to become involved in the Forum and the healthcheck and that positive responses, of which there were several, would be followed up.

It was also felt that a series of Focus Group events was held to develop key issues to ensure that the Forum has ownership of the action plan. It was also felt that there were opportunities for 'fun' awareness raising activities – one suggestion from Alison was that we organise a 'treasure trail' around the smaller 'millennium trail route to promote the Public Art project.

There was some debate within the group about the desire to retain the 'open forum' status of the group and that the open meeting every six weeks was a valuable opportunity to the community to discuss important issues and therefore it was much appreciated. The issue of an executive group was also highlighted and it was noted that the Forum did not feel that this had worked effectively in the

past. The only role that an 'executive' had that worked well was in the formulation of the business plan.

Next Steps:

It was agreed that the next forum meeting would highlight the Forums perceived 'vision' for the town, following a report by James in respect of the initial healthcheck findings which would be further refined through focus groups in respect of key issues following on from the Forum meeting. The vision would also be promoted at the Pumpkin Fair. The Forum was however keen that this promotion was seen as gaining endorsement of the vision rather than 'asking the community more questions'.

Any Other Business:

Donna Martin reported that she would be standing down from the position of vice chair of the Forum given other commitments and it was agreed that Peter Beer would be nominated for this role. The Chairman thanked Donna for her extensive contributions to the work of the Forum.

In addition Donna read out a pre-prepared statement outlining her desire to disband the existing design group, given limited attendance by members and the more limited ongoing support available from the District Council. Alison suggested that it may be prudent to postpone any decision to disband the group until the healthcheck findings emerged as this may provide the impetus to refresh the group and its activities. That said, Donna remained of the opinion that the group should be disbanded as only 2 people had recently turned up to meetings. Councillor Powley took the opportunity to thank Donna for fulfilling these important roles within the Forum and the group endorsed this.

Donna went on to encourage members to go ahead with the planned 'Town Walkabout', scheduled for the 4th August 2004.

Date of Next Meeting: the next meeting has been rescheduled for the 2nd September to enable James to attend and report back on the initial findings, a sample of the healthcheck questionnaire responses would also be collated and this would be circulated prior to the meeting.