

REPORT TO EVENTS AND TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE  
**TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

**Report Reference** E-22-08  
**Meeting Date** 6<sup>th</sup> February 2023  
**Agenda Item** 7  
**Prepared by** Town Centre Manager

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## 1.0 SNAPSHOT OF KNUTSFORD TOWN CENTRE

Since returning to the role in late November 2022 the Town Centre Manager has been busy visiting new and established businesses to re-introduce herself and start a publicity campaign for the town covering 2023.

A 'Knutsford One' meeting was held on January 18<sup>th</sup> which had huge attendance and showed the energy and commitment to Knutsford from both national and independent retailers. An overview of the meeting is below:

### CONCERNS RAISED BY BUSINESSES

Businesses raised the following key concerns:

- Rising energy costs - especially in the hospitality industry, are a major concern and the impact of this on all businesses cannot be underestimated. One small hospitality venue has seen costs rise from circa £300-£400 per month to over £3,000 per month and in their words, 'unless we start charging £40 for a sandwich we will close'
- Cost of Living crisis - impacting residents and visitors disposable income and spend
- Recent business closures - affecting footfall and attractiveness of the town centre
- Pavement and highway maintenance
- Train strikes

### INITIATIVES AND IDEAS

Despite the above, there is a lot of energy and enthusiasm from businesses and a willingness to collaborate with the Council to promote the town centre. The TCM is currently setting up 'working groups' with the businesses to deliver the ideas generated to support the town centre. The list below is not exhaustive, but ideas discussed were:

#### Community Focused Initiatives

- Take A Seat - a national initiative with town centre venues offering a 'seat' to the elderly and those who need it when shopping in town. This includes non-hospitality businesses.
- Tea and Tech - matching young people, perhaps Duke of Edinburgh students, with older people to meet in a café to help them with 'tech' – e.g. WhatsApp, Zoom etc.

- Breastfeeding Charter - working with businesses, again not just hospitality, to provide safe, private and non-judgemental spaces, allowing mothers to breastfeed.

### **Business Initiatives**

- PTA points - (working title) encourage families to shop local with participating shops giving cashback to PTAs quarterly depending on the amount spent in the shop. This is a small fightback to Amazon Smile which gives schools money back according to how much they spend. However, it is an extremely small amount – approximately £5 per £1,000 spent.

### **Collaborative Footfall Events**

The following events are in the calendar with working groups of businesses established to support. These events aim to give an additional reason to visit the town centre and enter the shops.

- Flash Fashion Knutsford (May 20<sup>th</sup>) - a collaboration between fashion and beauty shops, with a fashion show, promotions, raffles and goodie bags.
- Knutsford At Home (September 16<sup>th</sup>) - similar to the above but with home and interior shops with a talk by Sam Youd former head gardener of Tatton Park.

Working groups are to be set up to discuss the viability of the following ideas too, which will be action if viable:

- Hop to the Shops - a spring shopping promotion including a 'tenner fest'
- Shoptober - a month long shopping promotion including a fashion show in a central location and possibly other shops showcasing their products. Another 'tenner fest' will also be included in this.
- FamilyFest - a collaboration between the family friendly businesses (clothes, exercise, ice cream and sweets)
- Late Night Shopping - despite the disappointing event last held in December 2019 the retailers felt this should be given another chance.

The retailers are very keen to celebrate the Coronation and would like the screening on the Moor to be reconsidered along with the town centre bunting. The TCM mentioned other, low cost ways, of celebrating were a 'Fit for a King' community fitness initiative and a 'Knitted in Knutsford' yarn bombing campaign (royal knitted figures placed in random places in the town).

## **2.0 VACANCY RATES**

The current vacancy rate is currently 5.7% and this includes units currently 'under offer.' However, in the light of the current energy and cost of living crisis there is no room for complacency.

Four businesses have closed within the last month (Copper 29, Apus Peak, Not a Box and Petite Pomme) and the TCM is aware of at least the businesses which are currently considering their future in the town centre.

More positively, The Smokehouse and Cellar are moving into premises on Regent Street (where Tatton House Bar and Grill was). Daniella Draper jewellery is now the Beauty Club and Millana Fashion will be opening in the unit next to Pulse of Perfumery.

The TCM has approached CEC with regards to the latest footfall figures.

### **3.0 CHRISTMAS**

The TCM promoted the independent shops throughout the Christmas period with a series of 24 advent videos. The Town Mayor 'fronted' the Christmas Eve one and there was a good response from businesses, considering the TCM had only re-joined the Town Council.

Feedback from the businesses was mixed regarding the Christmas Markets with hospitality having a fantastic weekend (this includes King Street) whilst Knutsford Market Hall was quiet and some retailers on King Street and Toft Road were quiet too. The TCM has addressed this issue directly with the shops and the Market Hall and an idea is currently being explored for an event on King Street on December 9<sup>th</sup> to encourage footfall to shops. The outline idea is for a road closure the length of King Street to allow street performers, flash mob choirs, chestnut sellers etc encouraging footfall on King Street; this arose from recognising the benefit of the Christmas Market footfall being primarily to businesses on Princess Street. Recognising this is larger scale than the other activities, a proposal for this will be brought to a future committee meeting.

The number of residents taking part in Santa in the Shop was low and the TCM is considering other options for a Christmas trail for 2023.

### **4.0 BUSINESS SKILL WORKSHOPS**

The TCM has been working in partnership with local businesses to coordinate a series of workshops. The series of workshop takes place from January to April and covers:

- Instagram by Kate Rowland, Bella Marketing and Design
- Leadership Planning & Control by Kevin Jardine, Retail Excellence Partnership
- Customer Service by Peter Murray, Pulse of Perfumery
- Canva by Helen Rogers, Knutsford Admin
- Window Display & Visual Merchandising by Sue Cottingham, Living-UK

The TCM will be developing the series further to include, TikTok, Facebook advertising and SEO/Google analytics. The supporting businesses are giving their time to support their fellow traders. Interest has been slow with projected attendance around eight per workshop so far.

### **5.0 SHOPPING CHAMPIONS**

The TCM has launched a series of videos on the theme of 'Vocal about Local.' Residents have been asked to choose their three favourite shops with the TCM videoing them at each shop and posting a short video on to social media. So far the series is proving to be popular with both residents (and two councillors) volunteering to be filmed and with viewings – one has been viewed 1.7k times so far. The TCM is hoping to recruit business owners to share their own favourites too and welcomes committee members taking part.

### **6.0 TOWN CENTRE MAP**

The TCM has sold all slots on the new town centre paper visitor maps with adverts due in by February 3<sup>rd</sup>. The TCM is aiming for a publication date of end of March.

## **7.0 TASTE KNUTSFORD**

The TCM is aiming to organise an 'influencer' tour in March to promote the tours. Tatton Perk are a new recruit to the tour and The Courthouse Cheshire are returning with a brunch offer.

So far, 2 people are recruited on the February 17<sup>th</sup> tour and 10 on the February 18<sup>th</sup> tour. The TCM will be discussing Taste Knutsford and its future promotion with the new Communications Officer.

## **8.0 MAKERS MARKET**

The TCM has had a meeting with town centre residents living on Regent Street regarding the Makers Market parking arrangements. They have advised the current arrangement (parking at the Council Offices) is not sustainable. The TCM has approached Fisher German regarding the bollards at the King Street end of Regent Street and whether these can be lowered during the Makers Market weekend.

The TCM has also requested an updated risk assessment from the organisers of the Makers Market.

## **9.0 KNUTSFORD VOUCHER**

The TCM is currently working on a 'point of sale' merchandise to be given to all those who accept the voucher. This is to be placed by the till and will include brief instructions to staff with regards to redemption procedures. By the till placement is aimed to improve take up of the voucher as it will also refer shoppers to the Council website to order the voucher.