

Winchester Town Forum 9 November 2022

Report by City Centre informal group

Mural

Molly Hawkins' new mural in St Maurice's Covert was opened on 28 July. Molly is renowned for her large-scale public artworks, featuring bright, vivid colours, patterns, and bold, energetic designs. Her design for the covert has fused together her contemporary style with different aspects of Winchester's local heritage. It also serves as a signpost for visitors, reflecting that the covert is a useful shortcut between the High Street and the cathedral.

The mural comes towards the end of a long-term City Council project to improve the St Maurice's covert, with new paving, lighting and seating. The final piece will be the installation of a memorial plaque naming the 51 men of St Maurice's parish who died in 1914-19.

Street markets

The Council and BID commissioned an external review by The Retail Group to assess the economic value of street markets in the district, and identify opportunities for development. The consultants' report (March 2022) confirms that the markets in Winchester expand the choice of goods available and attract more customers to the city. They find clear evidence that the markets bring extra business to local shops, rather than providing unfair competition (as has been claimed). They also note that the market employs about 150 people, and provides opportunities for young people to enter employment and even start their own business.

Suggested improvements include stronger promotion and signage; filling some gaps in the range of goods available; encouraging more local/regional producers; and increasing trading space or days. The City Centre group notes that there is limited opportunity to expand the market space - some of the High Street is too narrow - and an attractive long term option might be to develop the lower High Street at the Guildhall as a market square.

Night time economy

The Council and Town Forum support the development of Winchester's important night time economy, but the city centre is also many people's home, and we need to get the balance right. Nearby residents were concerned when Vodka Club's application for extended opening hours was approved by the Licensing Committee recently. We hope that the conditions applied by the Committee will help to ensure the right balance. They include closing the club to new entrants at 02:00 and security patrols in the neighbourhood after closing time. Ward councillors recognise that there have been real problems, and will continue to work with the community. Serious incidents must of course always be reported to the police.

Anti-social behaviour

We reported back in July that, working with BID, the Council had allocated additional resources and priority to removing graffiti. The teams have done a great job, but the problem has not gone away, and recently there have been several more serious acts of vandalism and related crime, often at car parks around (and beyond) the city centre. This is frustrating and unacceptable. Beyond keeping on top of graffiti, the Council is liaising very closely with the Police, building on the joined-up work that has significantly improved

the environment around Kings Walk. The Police are using Criminal Behaviour Orders 'to restrict the activities of persistent offenders by excluding them from the city centre' and also issued a Dispersal Order in the last week of October. They report that 'there have been some significant arrests ... of persistent offenders that have led to short-term custodial sentences', and are seeking additional resources for more cameras and ASB patrols. Adults can be prosecuted, but the Police believe a small number of children (14-16) are responsible for much of the problem. We suspect this spike is partly a social consequence of Covid, as lockdown restricted some teenager's social development. So as well as cracking down, the Council (and Police) are working to support the organisations and facilities which support Winchester's youngsters (and their families), and the most marginalised in our community.

Virtual Anglo-Saxons

Opening on 12 November, *878AD* is a new interactive attraction at the Brooks Centre, with video projection, Saxon artefacts and live performance, plus an augmented reality adventure around the city. *878AD* is a partnership between Ubisoft (*Assassin's Creed Valhalla*), Hampshire Cultural Trust, the City and County Councils and Arts Council England. It will attract younger visitors to Winchester, raise awareness of our rich history, and wave a flag for our modern creative skills. A ticket allows unlimited repeat visits for a year. 878AD.co.uk.

Playground renewal

As part of the Town Forum's ongoing playground refurbishment programme, the popular playground in Abbey Gardens is currently closed pending the installation of new equipment. Users (and their grown-ups) were consulted last summer, and the most popular requests were for a slide and multiplay equipment (plus bins, benches and picnic tables). The new playground should be open in April next year.