

ANNUAL REPORT

2014/2015

Highcliffe Centre Partnership

April 2015



INTRODUCTION

The Highcliffe Centre Partnership (HCP) was formed in March 2014. The agreed objective was that the Partnership would work together to improve the Highcliffe Shopping Centre in the Lymington Road for the benefit of residents, visitors, local traders and local commercial businesses (offices, estate agents etc).

Since March the Partnership has met monthly and its activities have grown. Notes of the meetings have been published on the www.highcliffedorset.co.uk website together with more detailed reports.

Members of the Partnership have been drawn from a number of organisations and interested residents; Appendix A sets out a list of those who, have been and, are currently, members.

Forming a partnership was one of the key actions stemming from documents such as “100 Ways to Improve the High Street” [1] and the Mary Portas recommendations reported in [2]. These studies were reviewed in a document published in December 2013 [3] and summarised in a further paper [4] which listed a number of recommendations. Progress against these recommendations is summarised in Appendix B. The views of residents [5] expressed in the consultation with the public in the Summer of 2014 have been taken into account (Annex C) in the activities of the partnership.

The objective of this report is to review what has been achieved over the past year and to record ideas which have not yet been actioned or followed up for a variety of reasons.

REVIVING HIGHCLIFFE

Gateway Sign and Logo

The need for new Gateway Signs was recognised by the Partnership. The basic designs were designed by Josephine Flood and Kirsty Threadgill of the Solent Group (courtesy of Richard Porter). Funding for the two signs was provided by a Highcliffe resident. The western sign was unveiled in February by the Mayor of Christchurch in the presence of members of the partnership and the designers. The basic design is being used by traders as a marketing logo as well to promote the shopping centre. The logo is used on HCP reports and by the Highcliffe-on-Sea Traders' Association (HOSTA).

Highcliffe Revival Food Festival

Responses to the consultation suggested that holding events would generate interest and increase footfall; Highcliffe's Christmas Carnival had been very successful. HCP approached Hoburne and they agreed that the Courtyard area could be used on a Saturday for events under certain conditions.

It was suggested that Highcliffe should stage events linked with ones being held in Christchurch Town Centre. Mrs Mary Reader was invited to become a member of the Partnership to advise on staging a food festival event in Highcliffe. Following discussions with the Christchurch Food Festival Organisers it was agreed in principle that the event would take place on Saturday 16th May. A small

committee was set up to examine the feasibility in more detail. As a result of their deliberations an Organising Committee was formed which is planning the detail of the event; the event is being sponsored by local businesses with a contribution from CBC through its funding of the Christchurch Food Festival. HCP monitors progress at its meetings and partners contribute support as necessary. For example County Councillor Lesley Dedman supported the closure of the Lymington Road and contributed funding from her DCC Community Budget. Cllr Claire Bath arranged the CBC funding.

APPEARANCE OF THE SHOPPING CENTRE

At various times during the year streetcare audits have been carried out by the Partners and in particular by HELP (Highcliffe Environmental Litter Pickers). The responses from the residents' survey also stress the importance of the appearance of the shopping centre and the impact of the following:

- Weeds and litter
- Clutter
- Floral Displays and trees
- Street furniture
- Shop fronts
- Pavements

Through its partners HCP has sought to improve the appearance of the shopping centre.

Weeds and Litter

Keeping the pavements tidy is DCC's responsibility whereas the forecourts are private and the responsibility of the owners to maintain. Regular street audits have been carried out during the year (in particular by the HELP Team). Maintenance of both the public and private areas has been poor at times and in particular the clearance of weeds. Some owners have not maintained their forecourts at all. This has been raised with DCC and the local owners. HELP has been active in clearing weeds and litter and has received some support from CBC.

Clutter

"A" Boards. Whilst advertising material such as "A" boards are permitted on the private forecourts they can cause obstruction on the public pavements and DCC has a byelaw limiting their location and size. The Partnership has commented that some boards do cause obstruction to free movement.

Private Forecourts. Traders can display goods on their private forecourts but some displays are untidy and adversely affect the appearance of the shopping centre. HOSTA has drawn attention to these sites with their owners

Floral Displays and Trees

Floral Displays. CBC maintain displays on a few flower towers and the hanging baskets on the lamp-posts. The brackets on some lamp-posts are too high and SEC has agreed to set these at a more reasonable height. With encouragement from HOSTA more traders have put up hanging baskets on their shop frontages. Other planters are the responsibility of the owners. HELP has again been active in maintaining planters and beds in the private areas.

Trees. HCP suggested that trees should be planted in the Lymington Road to provide a softer landscape. Advice on the type of tree was provided by the CBC Tree Officer and on suitable planting schemes and furniture; funding was available. Since the public pavements were narrow they were not suitable sites for planting. Many shops had private forecourts but when the suggestion was made at HOSTA meetings there was no interest.

Street furniture

Finger Posts. The Sea Corner post fingers were damaged beyond repair and preparatory work [6] was carried out to specify the requirements for a replacement and tenders were obtained. A source of funding was not immediately forthcoming. However, in due course, County Councillors Lesley Dedman and Colin Jamieson agreed to fund the renovation of the Sea Corner post (and the three other Highcliffe posts) from their Community Budgets. DCC agreed to project manage the task which is in progress.

Notice Boards. Early discussions centred on the provision of leaflets but notice boards were preferred. Suitable boards were costed and the potential to have a combined board with the Castle at the cliff top has been agreed in principle. Rationalisation involving the Sports and Social Club boards has been considered. A positive agreed policy now needs to guide the way ahead

Bollards. DCC has agreed that the bollards can be painted and HELP has been encouraging local schools to compete in the design and colour schemes for the renovation.

Shop fronts

Competitions. Highcliffe Carnival ran a competition for the best-dressed window display and it has been suggested that competitions are run in the summer

Empty Premises. The three ex-bank premises have become eyesores and their Head Offices have been requested to do something about their appearance; there has been no response. It has been suggested that mock shop frontages could be used or the empty windows used to display children's artwork which would encourage footfall.

Decoration The decoration of some frontages has been poor and has looked run-down; HELP has offered to assist traders.

Wortley Road Car Park

The car park forms an important gateway to the shopping area so its appearance is important. Care audits through the year have shown that it is often untidy and looks uncared for: these observations have been passed to CBC. Although the hedges along the boundaries have been cut well the borders have been let go and there are weeds and overgrown vegetation; there are accumulations of leaves. Metal furniture is rusty and needs treatment. The recycling bins have now been all gathered together in the centre of the car park and the number of plastic bottle bins reduced from two to one. Moving the plastic bottle bin has improved the sight lines on entry into the car park. The attention of Co-op's management has been drawn to the poor state of decoration of the rear of their premises.

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Bypass. In the Highcliffe and District Local Plan published in 1989 [7] there was a plan for a bypass to run north of the Shopping centre from St Marks' cemetery to the Milestone Roundabout. Later this proposal was dropped. Over the years the Lymington Road has become more and more busy and congested. A recent survey [8] indicated that the peak hourly flow eastwards was 630 and 610 westwards. HGV movements peaked at 33 per hour eastwards and 21 per hour westwards.

A detailed assessment [9] of the possible ways of dealing with problem, were considered by HCP. The preferred short term solution was the greater use of the A35 and Ringwood Road. However, this proposal was not supported by the County Councillor on the advice of DCC Officers.

Reduction in Speed Limit. Traffic speed in the shopping centre can vary from in excess of the current 30mph speed limit to just a few miles per hour when congestion has taken place. This makes it difficult for pedestrians to judge crossing the road at places other than the formal crossings. Cyclists also find travelling in the road difficult and some resort to cycling illegally on the pavement. The core strategy [10] proposed traffic calming and the reduction of the speed limit from 30 to 20mph would be consistent with this proposal; it could be beneficial in smoothing the flow of traffic and reducing congestion. A petition containing some 334 signatures was raised to seek CBC support. This was given and the case [11] is being referred by CBC to DCC for consideration. Reducing the speed limit in the shopping area could result in traffic making more use of the "rat runs". If this occurs the 20mph limit may need to be applied to those residential roads affected.

Parking

On-Street Parking. A case was made to the CBC Traffic Regulation Task and Finish Group to increase the duration of free parking in the Lymington Road and Wortley Road from half-an-hour to one hour. HCP considered that the increase would encourage shoppers to stay longer and the decrease in number of movements would reduce congestion. This was supported by the DCC Highways Officer and the County Councillor. This was rejected by the Group because it could reduce CBC's car parking income.

Wortley Road Car Park

Christchurch Borough Council (CBC) agreed to waive the parking charges during the period 3rd December to 31st March 2014 between 1pm and 3pm. The aim was to assist the traders by encouraging more foot-fall. The concession appears [12] to have cost the Council a total of £543.20.

Most users of the car park stay for less than two hours. During FY2012/2013 there was a marked change in the use of the car park by those previously purchasing "less than 3 hours" and "less than 4 hours" tickets. A number of possible reasons have been identified but it is not possible to select one particular reason.

The Pavement

The block pavement is in poor condition in a number of areas. There are uneven sections which result in puddles after it rains. Requests from local and county councillors for the pavement to be improved have not been successful since DCC state they have no funds to finance the project. Where repairs have been necessary for safety reasons they have been carried out. DCC have stated that if

extensive remedial work were to be done at a later date the pavoirs would not be replaced and that tarmac resurfacing would be employed.

Public Transport

Morebus announced changes from 4 January 2015 in the services which travel through the shopping centre. It was proposed to reduce the X1 and X2 services and to cancel the Sunday service. Briefs were provided to local ward and county councillors and to the Leader of CBC. It was suggested that Yellow Buses should be asked if they would run their 111 service on a Sunday. Later on 10th March, following public consultation, it was reported that Morebus would re-introduce the Sunday service in the summer; a response from Yellow buses is awaited.

VISION OF THE FUTURE

Links with the Castle There was early agreement with the Highcliffe Castle manager that there should be closer links between the Castle and the Shopping Centre. For example the theme of events to be held at the castle might be reflected in window displays in the Centre. A new edition of the "VillageTrail" map would be prepared.

Neighbourhood Plan HCP discussed the production of a Neighbourhood Plan for Highcliffe and carried out a scoping study to establish what would be required. It was decided that it would be a long-term objective to be considered after the first year during which progress in other areas would be more profitable. A key feature of Neighbourhood Planning is consultation with the public. A questionnaire was developed and issued in the summer to survey shopping habits, which would also act as a pilot for a wider survey.

Development of the Shopping Centre. During the year there have been planning applications for minor developments and "changes of use" of some premises. It might be expected that more major development may come forward.

CONCLUSIONS

The Partnership has shown the benefit of different groups working together with a common aim. Particular achievements of the partners are:

- HELP has made significant improvements to the look of the shopping centre.
- The Gateway signs are in place and the logo is being used to promote Highcliffe
- The responses to the Residents' Survey provided a good deal of useful information

Other projects in which Partners are engaged are well advanced and should be completed in the next few months;

- Holding The Highcliffe Revival Food Festival:
- Renovation of the Sea Corner Fingerpost
- Putting the case for a 20mph limit to DCC

Although some projects such as the proposals for traffic management and on-street parking were not supported, a great deal of detailed preparatory work was carried out and recorded which can be held for future reference.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The outcome of the Food Festival should be reviewed to ensure that any lessons are taken into account in the planning of future events.

2. The following actions (Annex B), which were not completed in the first year, should be taken forward:

- Providing information at the gateway sites and in the shopping centre;
- Considering a policy for the future development of the shopping centre and commenting on proposed developments;
- Considering the reintroduction of a market;

3. The following actions derived from responses to the public consultation (Appendix C) should be taken forward:

- Establishing a meeting area with seating and shelters;
- Encouraging improvements to the south side of the secondary shopping core;
- Depending on the outcome of the proposed speed reduction, seek to improve on-street parking in the shopping centre:
- Considering the introduction of new pedestrian crossings;
- Reviewing the parking charges for Wortley Road Car Park.

4. Further consideration should be given to the closer co-operation with Highcliffe Castle.

REFERENCES

1. "100 Ways to Help the High Street" http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/economy/-/journal_content/56/10180/3511217/ARTICLE
2. "The Portas Review", Mary Portas, December 2011
3. "Review of Highcliffe Shopping Centre", M W Mawbey, December 2013
4. "Review of Highcliffe Shopping Centre – A Summary", M W Mawbey, December 2013
5. "Highcliffe District Shopping Centre: Residents' Survey 2014", September 2014
6. "Sea Corner Finger Post Project: Specification and Quotes", HCP, September 2014, (Not for Publication).
7. "Highcliffe and District Local Plan", CBC October 1989
8. Navitus Bay Wind Park, Technical Appendix, Volume C, Onshore, Chapter 14 – Traffic and Transportation, Appendix 14.1, Document 6.2.3.14.1, April 2014.
9. "Traffic In The Lymington Road Primary Shopping Core", M W Mawbey, January 2014
10. "Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan, Part 1 – Core Strategy", April 2014
11. "A Case for a 20mph Limit Through Highcliffe Shopping Centre", Highcliffe Centre Partnership, January 2015.
12. "Wortley Road Car Park - Analysis of Income" HCP, December 2014

APPENDIX A

MEMBERSHIP OF HIGHCLIFFE CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

MEMBER		ORGANISATION & POSITION	JOINED	RESIGNED
Claire	Bath	CBC Cllr, Portfolio Holder for the Economy	3/14	
Tracey	Beasley	HELP Leader	10/14	
Keith	Corsby	Highcliffe Sports & Social Club (HSSC)	1/15	
Lesley	Dedman	DCC Cty. Cllr, Mudeford & Highcliffe Division	3/14	
Jane	Fereday	HOSTA Treasurer	4/14	1/15
Richard	Fereday	HOSTA Chairman	3/14	2/15
Richard	Fereday	Highcliffe Revival Committee Chairman	2/15	
David	Hopkins	CBC, Highcliffe Castle Manager	5/14	9/14
Helen	Kennedy	HELP Organiser	12/14	
Helen	Kennedy	HOSTA Chairman	2/15	
John	Lofts	CBC Cllr, Highcliffe Ward	3/14	
John	Mather	Highcliffe Residents' Association CIC ,Chairman	3/14	5/14
Malcolm	Mawbey	Resident	3/14	
Myra	Mawbey	CBC, Cllr, Highcliffe Ward	3/14	5/15
Connie	Pearce	Leader of H.E.L.P.	4/14	9/14
Richard	Porter	Local Resident & Businessman	5/14	
Mary	Reader	Adviser on Highcliffe Revival Food Festival	12/14	
Ian	Stevenson	Resident	7/14	
Adrian	Thorne	Local Offices Representative	4/14	
Steve	White	Resident (Editor of highcliffe.dorset.co.uk)	3/14	
Eric	Wood	Highcliffe Community Association Chairman	3/14	11/14

Connie Pearce, David Hopkins and John Mather resigned because of other commitments: later, John Mather resigned as Chairman of HRACIC. Eric Wood resigned when he ceased to be chairman of HCA. Nick James (Economic Development Manager C&ED) attended the July meeting to outline his role. PCSO Mark Lane discussed police matters at the September meeting.

APPENDIX B

PROGRESS IN ACTIONING RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED BY HCP

1. *Create a Partnership:-* The partnership met for the first time on 6th March 2014
2. *Provide information at the two bus stop Gateways, Wortley Road, Cliff Top and Highcliffe Castle Car Park;* Agreed in principle
3. *Improve vehicle signage and repair the cast iron finger posts:-*in progress
4. *In the summer if a parking ticket for Highcliffe Castle or Cliff Top has not expired it would be valid for the remaining time at Wortley Road Car Park:-* Christchurch Borough Council ruled out this proposal as being too difficult to operate.
5. *When the shuttle bus runs between Cliff Top and the Castle travellers will have the option to be dropped in the shopping centre;-* This has been agreed with the Manager of Highcliffe Castle and there is a further possibility of a land train which is being considered.
6. *Produce a master-plan and design guide for the shopping centre*
7. *Create coherent facias to cover the design of shop frontages, shop signs and their illumination.*

No progress has been made. Reference will be made to the Town Centre policy design guide.
8. *Review and improve pedestrian signage.*

Arrangements were made to remove the Cobb's sign. Renovation of the Sea Corner fingerpost is in progress.
9. *Carry out regular street care audits.* Actioned
10. *Repair the block paving:-* requests made to DCC.
11. *Request Tesco to repair metal seats:-* seat has been repaired
12. *Maintain the seat at Sea Corner:-* action with CBC
13. *Enforce CBC's "A" board policy and seek to reduce the clutter on private forecourts:-* requests have been made.
14. *Promote window dressing of empty shops:-* Not supported
15. *Initiate window display competitions.* Organised by Highcliffe Carnival in December.

16. *Carry out first impressions exercise.* Actioned
17. *Improve floral displays in public realm and encourage traders to do the same.* Actioned
18. *Review and enhance Town Trail leaflet and distribute at Gateway sites.* Agreed in principle.
19. *Consider the possibility of reviving the market on the Hoburne car park.*
20. *Make greater use of the Highcliffe Community website or develop a new one.* Actioned
21. *Consider adopting an Empty Property Scheme:-* no progress
22. *See if HRACIC would be interested in a community run shop:-* Outstanding action
23. *Incorporate the PACT functions in the responsibilities of the Highcliffe Centre Partnership:-* PCSO has attended HCP but at present HCP's remit is limited to the High Street.
24. *Identify a CBC Officer to be a Highcliffe Centre Manager:-* no progress
25. *Improve Highcliffe Recreation Ground:-* No progress
26. *Review the "Meeting the Need Analysis" with more recent census data;* not actioned
27. *Consider whether a trader specialising in craft and hobby supplies should be encouraged to open a shop in Highcliffe.*
28. *Consider whether a quality restaurant with outside dining should be encouraged in the secondary core.*
29. *Consider the long-term future for the Christchurch Day Centre:* No progress, will be considered in "Vision for the Future".
30. *Develop long-term plans to deal with the increasing volume of traffic and congestion on the A337 through Highcliffe:-* Assessment published but conclusions not accepted by County Councillor on advice from DCC Highways Officer.

APPENDIX C

RESIDENTS' SURVEY

1. The Highcliffe District Shopping Centre; Residents' Survey Report was published in September 2014. It contained an analysis of nearly 670 responses to a questionnaire seeking detail of residents' shopping habits and their views on the shopping centre.
2. The headline conclusions which confirm previous assumptions are as follows:
 - The closeness of the out-of-town supermarkets with a widening range of goods and with free parking offer strong competition to local traders;
 - Most users of the centre only stay for less than an hour;
 - Footfall and stay-times need to be increased;
 - Traffic and particularly HGVs deter shoppers from coming to and staying in the Centre.

PROGRESS IN DELIVERING IMPROVEMENTS PROPOSED BY THE PUBLIC

Facilities

- Establish a focal meeting area away from the noise and fumes with seating and shelters;
- Introduce more seating and shelters. (Limited public space)
- Develop a seating area on the forecourt outside the Methodist Church (church has plans to develop forecourt);
- Stage events in the centre (Highcliffe Revival Festival being planned)
- Repair the pavements DCC will repair isolated areas but only where safety is involved)
- Remove advertising clutter from the public pavements (Needs DCC to enforce by-law)

Appearance and Safety

- More planters and flowers (Actions being taken by HOSTA members and HELP)
- Lower the hanging baskets to make the flowers more visible (SEC have agreed to lower brackets but have not yet actioned the proposal)
- Introduce trees (Not supported by forecourt-owners)
- Clear weeds from forecourts (Actioned by owners assisted by HELP)
- Reduce the clutter on the forecourts – particularly outside house clearance shops;
- Encourage improvements to the shops on the south side of Lymington Road to the east of Sea Corner;
- Improve the frontage of the sports and social club (Actions being taken by HSSC)
- Improve the shop fronts where paintwork is in poor condition (HELP has offered assistance)
- Clean the signposts and restore the Sea Corner fingerpost. (Actions being progressed to replace the Sea Corner fingerpost.)

Responses from residents support the view that they are concerned about the level of traffic and in particular the HGVs. Some were in favour of widening where the pavement was narrow because of the fear of being hit by wing mirrors. At times there was significant congestion and at other vehicles travelled faster than the speed limit. A number of suggestions were to resolve the perceived problems; these were:

Traffic Management

- Pedestrianise the Shopping Centre (not practicable without a bypass)
- Provide a Bypass (Options have been assessed and preferred solution rejected by DCC)
- HGV Ban (Options have been assessed and preferred solution rejected by DCC)
- Restrict HGV Delivery Times (No loading/unloading between 10am and 3 pm).
- One way system (Not considered practicable)
- Remove all on-street parking
- Remove some on-street parking
- Increase free parking times (An application was made to CBC which was refused)
- Improve on-street parking
- Introduce Cycle Ways (not practicable through the shopping centre)
- Stop cycling on the pavement (Support received from police; proposed speed reduction could encourage more cycling on the road)
- Introduce new pedestrian crossings
- Increase crossing times (Crossing times at the Sea Corner lights are determined by the presence of pedestrians on the crossing)
- Audible warnings on Sea Corner Traffic Signals (Rejected by DCC)
- Enforce speed limit
- Lower speed limit (Petition raised to lower limit to 20mph and submitted to DCC with CBC support)
- Widen the access to Wortley Road Car Park from the Lymington Road (not practicable)

Parking in Wortley Road Car Park

- Free parking (Loss of income from parking charges due to has been assessed)
- Reduce Parking Charges
- Introduce a parking clock system (CBC have ruled out introducing this system)
- Widen the access to Wortley Road Car Park from the Lymington Road (not practicable)